

Başat Kulesi
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CONSTRUCTING TEMPORAL OTHERNESS:
WESTERN TRAVELERS AND TIMEKEEPING IN THE BALKANS
(16th – 19th C.)

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Abstract: The Western and Central European travelers visiting the Balkan Peninsula from the 16th until the 19th century provide very important sources for the history of time in the region. Their time-sensitive and “outsider” position enables them to offer valuable information pertaining to time-keeping practices in the region, the “spread” of clock towers and the diffusion of watches, or the pace and geography of the use of the European timekeeping system. However, alongside their informative function, the writings of the European travelers contribute crucially to the construction of the region’s temporal “otherness” vis-à-vis “civilized” Europe. They create and convey to their ever expanding reader public a multitude of visual and acoustic representations which underpin and re-enact “the non-simultaneity” of the region and its culture. The purpose of the paper is to highlight, through the use of several examples drawn out from a large body of data, the main time related topics present in Western travelogues about the Balkans and inquire into the discursive processes and mechanisms employed in the construction of the region’s temporal “otherness”.

Keywords: Time, Timekeeping, Balkans, Ottoman Empire, Travelers

If we accept that time is an important dimension of the political economy of relations between individuals, classes and states, the exercise of power in these relations entails that the claim of the subaltern party to control its time has to be subverted and its timekeeping systems, practices and perceptions have to be challenged, altered or suppressed. The imposition of clock time in the workplace or the still largely unexplored story of the spread of Western Clock and Calendar Time throughout the globe through “rational adoption” or colonial imposition are outstanding examples of such processes¹. Similar

¹ E. P. Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism*, *Past and Present* 38, December 1967, p. 56–97; G. Nanni, *The Colonization of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire (Studies in Imperialism)*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012; V. Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950*. Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2015.

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Saat Kulesi:
182639

PUBLIC CLOCKS AND PUBLIC TIME IN NORTHERN GREECE, FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY¹

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Abstract: *The invention of precise time keeping machines in Central and Western Europe revolutionized the way time was perceived and systematized. Daily actions, earlier relatively estimated, were eventually, henceforth, precisely defined and organized. Later, public clocks were installed in the Ottoman cities, gradually changing the perception of time in a variety of ways. The sprawl of installation reached a peak during the late 19th century. During the 20th century, cheaper personal watches led to the decrease of public clocks on clock towers, which however continued to be installed in smaller cities and villages, due mainly to symbolic reasons. Public clocks, although seldom installed lately, continue to be an option as decoration of monuments in the public space.*

Keywords: *Timekeeping, Clock Towers, Ottoman Time, Clock, Public Space*

Introduction

Today's Northern Greece consists of Thessaly and the Greek parts of Macedonia and Thrace. All these areas share in common their long adherence in the Ottoman Empire and a similar, yet not identical, composition of populations. The technical limits of the research on which this paper is based and the organised bibliography on the adjacent countries, led to the geographic context of Northern Greece, despite that it does not coincide with any Ottoman region, that is a region of the state in control during most of the time of the research.

¹ This article is based on a research project conducted between the years 2013 – 2015 at the Institute of Mediterranean Studies/ FORTH (Rethymno) under the supervision of Ass. Prof. Andreas Lyberatos, which investigated various aspects of the history of timekeeping and public clocks in Greece and focuses on the results for Northern Greece.

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192633

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182639

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408