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The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn

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Empire is back like never before. Having faded from the world map in the middle of the twentieth century, empires have burst onto the scholarly map since at least the dawn of the twenty-first. A profusion of works from C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* to Niall Ferguson's *Empire*, and even Hardt and Negri's meditation on American empire have served many purposes in debates about history and, no less, contemporary politics.[1] While one such purpose in this turn to empire is to justify (Ferguson) or critique (Hardt and Negri) American political ambitions and misadventures in the post-Cold War world, another seems to be to use past pre-national imperial projects as a way of exploring the possibilities for an emergent post-national order.[2] A major effect of this renewed usability of empire is that the very concept of empire has shifted in valence, from the rather negative one associated with colonialism and imperialism in the twentieth century (think V. I. Lenin,

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[1] C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonia Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[2] For a recent critical take on "what not to do if one is serious about understanding empire," see the following review of both Ferguson's and Hardt and Negri's works: Alexander J. Motyl, "Is Everything Empire? Is Empire Everything?" *Comparative Politics* 38 (2006): 229–49. The quote is from page 246.

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Frantz Fanon, and post-colonial studies *in toto*) to one in which it serves as an antidote to all that is unsatisfying about the nation-state form that superseded empire across the globe in the course of the twentieth century.[3] In empires past we are free to imagine a different kind of political belonging, off the grid of the national, neoliberal state that was often the ideal but rarely a reality in the twentieth century. In early modern empires in particular, the diversity, flexibility, and indeterminacy of imperial subjecthood can be counterposed to the homogenizing, micro-managing modern nation-state and the reductionist, Manichean, and violent histories that have been generated in its service.

While part of the impetus to study the pasts of empires has surely to do with the exigencies of the present, much ink has been spilled over empires in "world history"—another concept that has taken off anew in recent decades, this time as an attempt to depart from the Hegelian template—that make no explicit reference to the present.[4] Indeed, empire has now become an object of study in its own right and need not be justified further before one embarks on research into a specific time or place. Empire has become, in other words, a normative category of scholarly inquiry, and, as with most normative categories, it is now largely unquestioned. The quintessential empires looking back over "world history" remain of course the Chinese, Roman, and, in the modern age, the British, and those seeking the characteristics common to states such as these—states that billed themselves as empires at one point or another—have understandably gravitated toward the question of comparative empires.[5]

But the fact that the study of comparative empires is implicitly part of a world-historical framework means that the question of outcomes for specific empires comes to define each one in that larger framework. No doubt in the shadow of Gibbon's monumental Enlightenment-era *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (originally published between 1772 and 1789) there is still an assumption on the part of many who study empires that particular empires are worthy of consideration to the extent that they contributed to "world history" (which in this case connotes a newer rendition of Human Civilization).[6] Not coincidentally, Gibbon's history of the Roman Empire was written as his own British Empire was striving to hold

[3] For a more in-depth historical discussion of this change in the uses and understandings of empire, see Dominic Lieven's chapter "Empire: A Word and Its Meanings," in *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 3–26.

[4] For the most recent work on the role of empires in world history since antiquity, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). In this regard, see also John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire Since 1405* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

[5] On the importance of Rome and China for the more general study of empire, see Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 23–59; Lieven, *Empire*, 27–86.

[6] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 8 vols. (London: John Murray, 1903–1914). For an analysis of various uses and understandings of the notion of

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onto the American colonies and expand into India, both projects justified, in part, by the perceived superiority of British civilization.[7] In short, the empires that count are those that yielded the greatest outcomes—of military might, political power, and, by extension, artistic and technological innovation. Such a framework presents a problem, of course, for empires that were not the Chinese, Roman, or British, since most of these other empires look like losers to varying extents.

Enter the Ottoman Empire, which was, depending on one's framework for empires, at once the most spectacular loser and the greatest winner in world history. On the one hand, the Ottoman Empire (1300–1922) started to "lose" the game of world-historical outcomes in the late sixteenth century and went steadily downhill until the late eighteenth century, when it went more steeply downhill in new kinds of ways for more than a century, before going out with a cataclysmic bang of violence in the course and aftermath of World War I. On the other hand, as historians and social scientists have begun to point out more recently, the Ottomans were the longest-lived dynasty in Eurasia, surviving through what we now call the medieval and early modern eras and continuing well into the modern period. In terms of political survival, the Ottoman dynasty was a great winner of Eurasian and, by extension, world history. Add to this the geographic location and expanse of Ottoman realms: smack in the middle of Eurasia, covering the same general area (and sometimes more) as the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire; including the littorals of the eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Red Sea, and at times Caspian Sea; from the Nile to the Danube and the Euphrates. In many ways the heir to Roman/Byzantine and Chinese/Mongol traditions of empire, neighbor-rival of the Habsburgs, Romanovs, and Safavids (to name just a few), and eventual object of British and French domination, the Ottoman Empire, it seems quite obvious, should have a central place in the comparative study of empires.

And yet the Ottoman Empire has consistently spelled trouble for students of comparative empires, as have comparative empires for students of Ottoman history. Part of this trouble surely has to do with the hybrid nature of the Ottoman imperial formation. In the nineteenth-century age of modern empires, when world history first took shape as a scholarly endeavor, the Ottomans looked like the bastard sons of both the Romans and the Abbasids. Trying in vain to imitate the British or to call attention to their Mongol predecessors would hardly have garnered them any cache on the stage of world

"civilization" in different imperial settings, see Kenneth Pomeranz, "Empire & 'Civilizing' Missions, Past & Present," *Daedalus* 134 (2005): 34–45.

[7] One might read another recent book by Niall Ferguson as expressing a justifying ethos similar to that of Gibbon about how the "civilization" of "the west" can nevertheless still hold out in the face of perceived political and economic challenges from "the rest": *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

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history.[8] As we now look back on empires in world history and try nobly to form a non-normative typology, we see that the Ottomans were both a land-based and a maritime empire, at times ruling indirectly through indigenous elites and at times sending out settlers to colonize new areas.[9] In these and myriad other ways, the Ottoman Empire, therefore, confounds conventional efforts to categorize empire into sub-types. The Ottomans seem caught in a no-man's-land somewhere between the Roman, Chinese, and British archetypes of empire.

A turning point in the comparative history of empire, particularly for those who study non-Western European empires, was the publication in 2000 of Dominic Lieven's *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*.[10] Lieven broke open a new type of comparative history for empire by situating the Russian Empire at the center of his analysis, positing it between the two antecedents of China and Rome and considering it alongside its many rival empires. This approach serves as a viable alternative to normalizing a Western European (Roman-British) model of empire in world history, but also to a kind of static comparison between empires as structures. Rather than simply searching for structural analogues between the Russian and other empires, Lieven explores how the nature of power in the Russian Empire changed in response to conflicts and tensions with its many rival empires.

In Ottoman studies, a few years before Lieven published *Empire*, Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj urged a new kind of comparative approach to Ottoman history, arguing that orientalist assumptions about the Ottomans as an aberrant state formation had prevented scholars from seeing phenomena in the empire as part of larger historical processes or as examples of more general (even European) historical occurrences.[11] Since the late 1990s a veritable flood of studies have been published that shed new light on Ottoman history and the workings of the Ottoman Empire *as an empire*, in many cases as part of a response to Abou-El-Haj and less often Lieven's work. The task of the current article is to critically assess the profusion of scholarship on Ottoman history that has been generated since the 1990s, in part by discerning the modes of comparative analysis that have been used. In short, how has the Imperial Turn over the past decade affected Ottoman studies?[12] How have recent studies of the internal

[8] By the twenty-first century even the Mongols have been rehabilitated. See Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth? Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritika* 8 (2007): 487–531.

[9] For the elaboration of a normative typology of empire, see Niall Ferguson, "The Unconscious Colossus: Limits of (& Alternatives to) American Empire," *Daedalus* 134 (2005): 18–33.

[10] Lieven, *Empire.*

[11] Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

[12] For a comparable analysis of the Imperial Turn in Russian history, see Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin, "The Imperial Turn," *Kritika* 7 (2006): 705–12. See also Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov, eds., *Empire Speaks Out: Languages*

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dynamics and localities of the Ottoman Empire, from the fourteenth century to the twentieth, used comparison as a tool, and in what ways have they changed, and could they change, the larger discussion about comparative empires? As will be clear from what follows, students of Ottoman history have answered the call to compare empires. The time has come to take stock of the results.

OUTCOMES AND CULTURE

Looking within the field of Ottoman studies, we can see that the larger Imperial Turn has brought out a highly productive tension that can be traced through virtually all the works that have been published since the late 1990s: this is a tension between what we are calling "outcome"-focused political history and "culture"-focused studies of Ottoman governance. The extreme case of the outcome-focused approach for the metanarrative of Ottoman history was, of course, the decline thesis, which has now been all but abandoned, at least in an explicit sense.[13] While the decline thesis and its critiques most obviously affected scholarship on the era of supposed decline itself (the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries), all phases of the empire's history have been retooled since the 1990s away from a vocabulary of apogee and decline to one of crisis, adaptation, transformation, and simply change.[14]

Particular studies have tried to dismantle the decline thesis by revising the underpinnings of the metanarrative at particular points in time. Starting from the medieval phase of Ottoman state-formation, Cemal Kafadar's *Between*

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of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Although we are largely sympathetic to Antoinette Burton's project, ours, as we have been explaining so far, is a very different understanding of the "imperial turn" than the one she offers in her critique of scholarship on the nation. She writes, "We take 'the imperial turn' to mean the accelerated attention to the impact of histories of imperialism on metropolitan societies in the wake of decolonization, pre- and post-1968 racial struggle and feminism in the last quarter century." In: "Introduction: On the Inadequacy and the Indispensability of the Nation," in A. Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

[13] The classical accounts of Ottoman decline are: Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); and *idem.*, "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire," *Studia Islamica* 9 (1958): 111–27. For some of the many critiques, see Mehmed Genç, "Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikane Sistemi," in Osman Okyar, ed., *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri Metinler/Tartışmalar* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1975), 231–96; Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1997–98): 30–75. For reviews of the literature and critiques of decline, see Donald Quataert, "Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes towards the Notion of 'Decline,'" *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1–9; Dana Sajdi, "Decline, Its Discontents and Ottoman Cultural History: By Way of Introduction," in Dana Sajdi, ed., *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 1–40.

[14] For examples of the use of this new vocabulary, see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Gábor Ágoston, "A Flexible Empire: Authority and Its Limits on the Ottoman Frontiers," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (2003): 15–31; Nicholas Doumanis, "Durable Empire: State Virtuosity and Social Accommodation in the Ottoman Mediterranean," *Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 953–66.

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Two Worlds and Heath Lowry's later work, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, argue that the hybridity and eclecticism of the early Ottomans were precisely what allowed them to emerge victorious in the chaotic political and military environment of fourteenth-century Anatolia.[15] Taking up early modern crises, Abou-El-Haj's *Formation of the Modern State* and more recently Baki Tezcan's *The Second Ottoman Empire* argue that key features of what had been termed decline actually signaled a transformation in political representation and even the beginnings of a kind of indigenous federalism or democratization.[16] Examining the later nineteenth century's dilemmas of empire, Selim Deringil's *The Well-Protected Domains* employs an explicitly comparative framework to understand the inherent contradictions between the geopolitical and domestic imperial role of the Ottoman state in the Hamidian period.[17] Meanwhile, Virginia Aksan's *Ottoman Wars* chooses to focus on the changing military capacity of the empire in the long nineteenth century as a kind of case study in state transformation in a time of European and Russian military supremacy.[18] All of these works engage quite directly with the military-political persona of the Ottoman state in its geopolitical (and therefore world historical) environment, an environment inhabited by a changing array of rival imperial formations.[19] The underlying questions at play in these works have to do with the legitimacy, capacity mechanisms, and techniques and strategies of governance that allowed the Ottoman Empire to defeat other empires or forces of opposition within its realms—issues that directly determined the outcomes each imperial formation managed to effect. In other words, what was it about the Ottoman state that caused it to be formed, to be transformed from a frontier principality into a world empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to adapt to the crises in its realms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and to survive the fundamental redefinition of the role of the state in the nineteenth century? These are all very different questions than the older ones about what made the empire so

[15] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

[16] Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*; Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[17] Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

[18] Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Longman/Pearson, 2007). Carter Findley's works, several of which were published before the 1990s, have been very influential in shaping understandings of bureaucratic change, itself so central to the Tanzimat project and the long nineteenth century. See *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[19] See, for example, Virginia H. Aksan, "Locating the Ottomans among Early Modern Empires," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 103–34.

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powerful and innovative for part of the sixteenth century, when it presumably had a piece of the Hegelian World Spirit, and after which it sank back into the darkness of stagnation.

But other Ottoman specialists have reacted against the outcome-focused decline thesis in a very different way: by relegating the geopolitical context to the background of their work and choosing instead to focus on the subjective experience of Ottoman actors, even (and often especially) in a period of crisis. This "cultural" arena of Ottoman scholarship, while firmly on one end of our "outcome-culture" spectrum, includes many productive new subfields for Ottoman history, such as gender studies exemplified by the works of Leslie Peirce, Madeline Zilfi, and others[20]; urban studies by, most recently, Fariba Zarinebaf, Shirine Hamadeh, James Grehan, and Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet[21]; and cultural studies, such as Marc Baer's *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, which seeks to understand the culture of conversion in the seventeenth-century empire, or Miri Shefer-Mossensohn's study of the cultural history of Ottoman medicine.[22]

Local studies, too, have gone far in illuminating the intricacies of imperial governance in individual times and places, therefore laying the groundwork for later comparisons within and across empires. Amy Singer's study of sixteenth-century Palestine and Jane Hathaway's work on the Arab provinces in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries come to mind, as does Molly Greene's *A Shared World* and Anton Minkov's analysis of conversion in the Balkans.[23] Others have turned away from the Mediterranean core of the

[20] Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); *idem.*, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *idem.*, ed., *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Amila Buturović and İrvin Cemil Schick, eds., *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007). See also the relevant contributions to: Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

[21] Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Shirine Hamadeh, *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); James Grehan, *Everyday Life & Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[22] Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500–1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010). See also Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir, eds., *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Izkowitz* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

[23] Amy Singer, *Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials: Rural Administration around Sixteenth-Century Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge

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Ottoman imperial experience and tried to carve out new regions of Ottoman penetration, such as the far-flung Indian Ocean, and thereby argue for a different, small-scale rise-decline narrative.[24]

Still others have explicitly synthesized outcomes and culture in formulating transimperial questions that inform their research. In *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, Suraiya Faroqhi, a doyenne of Ottoman studies, seeks to marry the social history of the empire with its interimperial milieu.[25] In her work on religious conversion, Tijana Krstić likewise places Ottoman religiosity in the context of similar processes occurring around the Mediterranean and in contested spaces between the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Safavid realms.[26] By the same token, studies of peoples who moved between empires—between the Venetian and Ottoman worlds or between Russia and the Ottoman Empire for example—reveal comparative possibilities for understanding ideas of governance, difference, and accommodation.[27]

One criticism regularly leveled at Ottoman historians has to do with their preoccupation with "the state." It is true that even some extreme forms of cultural history are informed by state-centered questions.[28] But one would have to wonder if this is not justified to a large extent, for those seeking to understand the Ottoman Empire *as an empire*. The hallmark of being Ottoman was one's relationship to the ruling dynasty, without which the state would have lacked any basis for legitimacy and, therefore, for effecting outcomes. Any study of "Ottoman" history *per se* (as opposed to Egyptian or Mediterranean history) would thus logically revolve around some understanding of the state. One could imagine studies of remote areas of the Balkans or of, for instance, Pomak folklore, that may have been untouched by the state apparatus and yet existed within imperial realms. The logical question for an Ottoman

University Press, 1997); *idem.*, *A Tale of Two Factions: Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Jane Hathaway, with contributions by Karl K. Barbir, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516–1800* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008); Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans:* Kisve Bahası *Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[24] Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[25] Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World around It* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

[26] Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[27] E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Cemal Kafadar, "A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986): 191–217; Eileen M. Kane, "Pilgrims, Holy Places, and the Multi-Confessional Empire: Russian Policy toward the Ottoman Empire under Tsar Nicholas I, 1825–1855," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2005).

[28] See, for example, Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*; Metin And, *16. Yüzyılda İstanbul: Kent—Saray—Günlük Yaşam* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011).

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historian caught in the Imperial Turn is then: is there a history separate from the state, or can Pomak folklore only be seen as an example of the limits of the Ottoman state and therefore, unwittingly perhaps, still be seen through the lens of the state?

Economic histories of the Ottoman Empire have similarly divided between studies of economic and, in turn, political outcomes and social or cultural histories of economic actors like merchants, artisans, laborers, property owners, and so forth. Timur Kuran's work begins from the question of why the Middle East—which for him usually means the Ottoman Empire—"fell behind the West" in developing capitalist institutions and modes of exchange.[29] His answer is that Islamic law did not provide the tools necessary to create lasting economic institutions to build capital, to create joint-stock companies, or to invest in corporations, thereby laying "the seeds of a long divergence in organizational development."[30] Kuran, however, does not take the Ottoman Empire's economic "retardation" in producing a normative notion of capitalism as a foregone conclusion.[31] Quite to the contrary, his work seeks to rigorously assess the specific strictures and processes that "held back" the region.

In contrast, the work of scholars like Suraiya Faroqhi, Beshara Doumani, Nelly Hanna, and others seeks to describe the economic worlds that brought various sectors of Ottoman society and beyond into partnerships of trust, credit, and commerce.[32] For example, Hanna's study of one Egyptian merchant at the turn of the seventeenth century brings to life the connections and relationships that this merchant maintained and that also served to sustain sectors of the early modern Cairene economy.[33] In these works of social and cultural economic history, the ends of the Ottoman Empire in the twentieth century do not

[29] Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., ix.

[32] Suraiya Faroqhi, *Artisans of Empire: Crafts and Craftspeople under the Ottomans* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009); *idem.*, *Men of Modest Substance: House Owners and House Property in Seventeenth-Century Ankara and Kayseri* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); *idem.*, *Making a Living in the Ottoman Lands, 1480 to 1820* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1995); Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Nelly Hanna, *Artisan Entrepreneurs in Cairo and Early-Modern Capitalism (1600–1800)* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); *idem.*, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); *idem.*, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Suraiya Faroqhi and Gilles Veinstein, eds., *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (Paris: Peeters, 2008); Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ann Elizabeth Mayer, ed., *Property, Social Structure, and Law in the Modern Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

[33] Hanna, *Making Big Money.*

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obviously set the agenda; rather, these studies seek to further our understanding of the early modern Ottoman Empire by fleshing out a robust set of examples of economic actors and their interests.[34] Instead of a teleology of ends, pathways, and mechanisms, we have a thick descriptive world of relationships, contradictory business alliances, and clusters of interests.

The contrast between these two modes of Ottoman economic history and indeed of the larger tension between outcomes and cultural history is usefully crystallized by two questions recently posed in purposeful opposition to one another: Bernard Lewis's question "what went wrong?" and Richard W. Bulliet's "what went on?"[35] Lewis's is a civilizational question with a civilizational answer; Bulliet's is a historical one with a historical answer. On the spectrum of Ottoman economic history, Kuran's work stands closer to the civilizational end, while Hanna's, Faroqhi's, Doumani's, and others' work tends more to the historical end.

EMPIRE FOR THE AGES

If the state has been central to the Ottoman historiography of the Imperial Turn, then so too have questions of periodization. Indeed, one of the most common strategies Ottoman historians have employed to square macro-political outcomes with the lived experiences of Ottoman subjects is to carve out a notion of "ages." These have so far included the Age of Beloveds, the Ottoman Age of Exploration, an Age of Revolution, the Age of Confessionalization, the Age of Discovery, the Age of Sinan, the Age of the Ayans, the Age of Reforms, the Golden Age, and, of course, the Classical and post-Classical Ages.[36] Why so many ages in Ottoman history? Beyond the sheer fact that

[34] The final chapter of Nelly Hanna's most recent book does address Egyptian economic history into the twentieth century, arguing that there were multiple forms of capitalism in the early modern period and that "the development of forms of artisan capitalism" were later "subsumed by more dominant ones" (*Artisan Entrepreneurs*, 194).

[35] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 47–93.

[36] See, respectively, Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Casale, *Ottoman Age of Exploration*; Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Tijana Krstić, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 35–63; Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion, 2005); Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699–1812," in Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire: Volume Two, 1600–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 637–758; Donald Quataert, "The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914," in Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire: Volume Two, 1600–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 759–944; John Freely and Augusto Romano Burelli, *Sinan: Architect of Süleyman*

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very few historians can fathom the entirety of the empire's more than six hundred-year full stretch, the larger significance of these divisions is that they help to break up a unitary teleology leading to the present—from tribal principality in the sphere of waning Byzantine sovereignty, to rising imperial power, to consolidated empire, to declining administrative state, to fractured empire, to nation, to state. Ages, in other words, help to forestall reading Ottoman history as *only* a story of imperial outcomes and ends. Identifying particular ages with their own characteristics, features, and cultural attributes allows one to see how a given period's political life affected culture, economy, and society. Suspending the question of outcomes for a moment thus makes it possible to understand a given period on its own terms. Furthermore, it allows for a different, synchronic mode of comparison with other empires.

In *The Age of Beloveds*, Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı demonstrate the utility of a notion of ages in Ottoman history. They carefully explain what they mean by an Age of Beloveds, a periodization that is for them not just a marking of time but also "a conceptual tool."[37] The Age of Beloveds extended from the late fifteenth century to the early seventeenth. It was a period in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire during which "love was everywhere."[38] In the authors' words, "We want to talk about certain cultural and social phenomena as they were made manifest in the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire during a period from the late fifteenth century through the early seventeenth. But we also want to talk about those phenomena in a more general context, as if they were a part of that European period and constellation of phenomena that we call *the late Renaissance*."[39] Thus, in their words, "by inventing" a temporal unit called the Age of Beloveds, Andrews and Kalpaklı are able to argue for a shared literary and urban culture stretching from England to Istanbul.[40] Their discussion thus clearly shows how a notion of ages can also easily become a spatial comparative analysis between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, where commonalities and specificities of sexuality and desire emerge across continents. In wanting to offer both a new chronology and a new geography of the Ottoman Empire, Andrews and Kalpaklı raise a cautionary note: "Early-modern Ottomans would have rejected as absurd the contention that they behaved as much like Europeans as they did like Persians. And, as we have already pointed out, it would be equally as

the Magnificent and the Ottoman Golden Age (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992); Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600*, Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, trans. (New York: Praeger, 1973).

[37] Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, 24.

[38] Ibid., 22.

[39] Ibid., 23 (original emphasis).

[40] Ibid.

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difficult for us to assert that Europeans or Ottomans were consciously imitating one another. Nonetheless, we are suggesting that there are informative and interesting commonalities to social and intellectual life in the Mediterranean world that extend far into Europe and the Middle East and transcend perceived cultural and religious boundaries."[41] Exemplary of other works identifying ages within Ottoman history, *The Age of Beloveds* usefully explores the possibilities of a deep comparative analysis, in both space and time, of sexuality and desire.

The multiple benefits of thinking of the Ottoman Empire as a set of ages, however, also come with their drawbacks. One of these is that we are left with a series of temporal descriptions that do not obviously (or even historically) connect to one another in any immediately transparent way. These become disconnected floating moments in time that may make sense on their own, but not necessarily when one tries to explain how one age derives from or leads to another. Therefore, the interpretative challenge posed by the conception of the Ottoman Empire as a closed system or as a set of outcomes also has its resonances in the periodization of the empire. With ages, we focus less on transitions than on consistencies over time—piecemeal temporal chunks rather than a full chronological arc of empire. The dynasty did indeed exist for over six centuries, but there was not necessarily any fixed ideology of power or statecraft in the empire—not in a specific age and certainly not over centuries.[42]

EVERYWHERE EMPIRE

In attempting to link various Ottoman ages to one another, several noteworthy recent works do push us to think beyond piecemeal temporal histories in favor of more holistic sweeps of the entirety of Ottoman history. Caroline Finkel's synthetic narrative account of the empire covers the entire period from 1300 to 1923, showing some of the ways to treat the empire as a unitary historical phenomenon.[43] Significantly, apart from Lord Kinross's 1977 book, a study largely written within the framework of epic nineteenth-century imperial history, Finkel's is perhaps the only single-volume, single-authored English-language scholarly book attempting to cover the entire chronology of Ottoman history.[44] Other important multi-authored collaborative works of

[41] Ibid., 30.

[42] For a deeper discussion of this point, see Molly Greene, "The Ottoman Experience," *Daedalus* 134 (2005): 88–99.

[43] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[44] Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow, 1977). Stanford Shaw's two-volume work is also important in this regard. See Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976–1977).

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course exist—the foundational *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* and the more-recent *Cambridge History of Turkey*, to name the obviously indispensable.[45] And still other historians have employed focused conceptual frames as organizing principles to examine the entire span of Ottoman history.[46]

In thinking through the empire's six centuries, Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference* in many ways represents the culmination of efforts to connect the historiography of decline, statist conceptions of Ottoman imperial history, questions of periodization, and other metanarratives of Ottoman history to the larger concerns of the Imperial Turn.[47] One of Barkey's chief achievements is her particular synthesis of outcomes and culture. In culling from, combining, and juxtaposing a wide range of specific studies, from both before and after what we have dubbed the Imperial Turn, Barkey constructs an analytical approach that is at once informed by theories of empire derived from those beyond the Ottoman realm but still ensconced in the specificities of the logic and workings of the Ottoman imperial system. In thereby investing the Ottoman case with theorizable potential, *Empire of Difference* can be seen as an Ottoman historical sociologist's answer to Dominic Lieven's Russocentric *Empire*.

Barkey shifts from the paradigm centered around decline, largely already eschewed in myriad specific ways in those studies discussed above, to an approach centered around longevity. She argues that "the answer to the question of the longevity of empire can be found in analyses of the organizations and networks connecting large segmented and constantly changing structures, and by focusing on the multivalent, networked, vertical, and horizontal linkages and the malleable compacts established between state and social actors."[48] Linguistic, religious, and cultural differences were, therefore, unproblematic from the perspective of the imperial elite since it was perfectly willing to maintain differences as long as it could still achieve its desired outcomes through negotiation. In short, to use Nicholas Doumanis's words, the Ottoman Empire was "a master of metamorphosis."[49]

Thus, skating along "meso-level network structures that link macro-level events and phenomena to macro social and political outcomes" to theorize the reasons for the empire's longevity, Barkey's is an inventive and largely

[45] Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006–2012).

[46] In this regard, see, for example, Reşat Kasaba's *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), which uses the study of mobility to understand the entire temporal scope of Ottoman history.

[47] Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[48] Ibid., 6.

[49] Doumanis, "Durable Empire," 955.

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successful solution to the potential contradiction between outcomes and cultural history.[50] It remains, though, a structural solution, which still aims at explaining the empire's ultimate outcome—longevity as opposed to decline—and which also serves her explanation of what happened to the empire once it tried to adapt to Western European modes of rule in the nineteenth century. As in other of the larger synthetic works attempting to address the totality of Ottoman history, Barkey's focus is not on any one specific crisis in the course of Ottoman history, but rather on the larger patterns that maintained imperial hegemony across a wide expanse of time and space through all manner of crises. To this end, intermediaries and brokers were inextricable from the Ottoman variant of empire, from its late thirteenth-century inception until its protracted crisis in the long nineteenth century. Such brokers facilitated the flexibility and negotiation necessary for such a large and socio-culturally diverse subject population.

To explain the long-term durability of Ottoman rule, Barkey moreover puts forth a "hub-and-spoke" model where the hub represents the imperial center and the spokes the periphery. She argues that the beauty and success of the Ottoman mode of rule was the vertical integration of horizontal power relationships—a theoretical twist, suggesting, "all roads lead to Istanbul." Again, in an outcome-focused study this appears to be true, but if one were to carve the Ottoman period into separate ages, or incarnations, one wonders if certain horizontal relationships did not present a mortal threat to Ottoman hegemony at several points in time—from the simple escape of farmers from tax burdens to the all-out armed rebellions of imperial provincial governors.[51] Certainly, loyalists to the Ottoman central state would no doubt have wanted to project the image of a hub-and-spoke mode of rule to both imperial subjects and the outside world alike. And, indeed, it seems Barkey's model of hubs and spokes holds firmest for the period before the end of the eighteenth century, when various spokes began forming horizontal relationships of their own, thereby challenging the state's vertical monopolization of power relations.

THE (EARLY) MODERN CONDITION

Despite these few larger works on the whole of Ottoman history, the preference among Ottoman historians—both comparativists and otherwise—has, as we have already noted, been to focus in on just one imperial "age." Of all the periods of the empire's history, perhaps none has received more attention in the comparative work of the past few decades than the early modern or middle period, by which we mean the seventeenth and eighteenth

[50] Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 17.
[51] On the role of large-scale rebellions in Ottoman history, see Jane Hathaway, ed., *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

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centuries.[52] The attention paid to these centuries is a relatively new phenomenon within Ottoman Studies and one that deserves some explanation. Ottoman historiography first cut its teeth on the sixteenth century and, to a lesser extent, the nineteenth as well. These were two periods when the Ottomans presented, respectively, the greatest threat to and the greatest proof of the master narrative of European supremacy. The sixteenth century, moreover, was the supposed apex of the empire—its greatest geographic expanse, the reign of Sultan Süleyman, and the most sophisticated articulation of Ottoman governing institutions.[53] In a post-Saidian era in which culture and empire as inherent, monolithic, bounded, and fixed categories no longer made sense, Ottoman historians turned to the period after the beginning of the empire's purported decline from its sixteenth-century pinnacle both to dilute the hegemony of this century and to understand more fully how the empire functioned in a period we still know relatively little about.[54] The result has been a wealth of studies over the past few decades on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Beyond these reasons internal to the field of Ottoman Studies, Ottomanists have more generally been part of larger scholarly trends across disciplines and geographic specializations that have seen an upswing in interest in the early modern world.[55] Work done on South Asia, China, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic World, and elsewhere has all put the early modern world more squarely on the map of historical inquiry. And, it must be said, much of this work is in the mode of comparative empires or other forms of comparative analysis. This attraction to the early modern period is largely an outgrowth of our presentist ambitions for a post-national age. If the twentieth century taught us anything, it is that nation-states perpetrate violence on a massive scale, inculcate a hatred of certain "problematic" peoples and ideas, and create gaping disparities in wealth and resources. At the start of the twenty-first century, the perhaps utopian ambitions of some are for a post-national world in which people, money, and ideas move; borders are porous, fictitious, and easily crossed; and political and economic organization takes place at levels other than the nation-state (for example, the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, but also initiatives like microcredit).

[52] For a very useful recent snapshot of some of this work from the past decade or so, see Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman, eds., *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[53] This narrative of the sixteenth century is recounted in Halil İnalcık's *The Ottoman Empire*.

[54] For the Saidian critique, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); *idem.*, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

[55] For critical evaluation of this trend, see Jack A. Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World," *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 41 (1998): 249–84; Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6 (2002): 296–307. See also the articles in the following very useful publication: "The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800," special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997).

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The empires of the early modern world therefore offer the most recent historical precedent for a world of highly idealized fluidity supposedly free from the violence, destruction, and hatred inherent in the nation-state. This then is perhaps the most important reason that historians, Ottomanist and otherwise, have become more and more interested in early modern history. Early modernity has become a repository and testing ground for our post-national ambitions and desires.

Early modern castings of concepts like subjecthood, for example, seem to offer an alternative to the rigidity of militarily defended modes of belonging sanctioned and protected by the modern nation-state. For the Ottomans, such notions of belonging were articulated through the older concept of the circle of justice—a statement of imperial governance meant to ensure peace and security so that rural cultivators could produce agricultural goods that would benefit their own lives and ultimately sustain the empire's administration.[56] Without overstating the supposed justice of this system, it is true that both the early modern state and its subjects (*reaya*) had responsibilities and rights against each other, largely mediated through imperial institutions, and that differences of various sorts were allowed, encouraged, and accommodated. This understanding of subjecthood is wholly different from that of our contemporary moment, in which, despite assertions of supposedly globalized citizenship, the nation-state nevertheless continues to exert overwhelming power in the determination of political, economic, and cultural belonging.[57] Early modernity—cleansed of the power relations and elitism that sustained the empires of that era—thus emerges as the last best example of a different and desirable model.

Despite the upsurge in studies of the early modern period in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere, the problematics of a periodization built around ages remain. In Ottoman historiography, we still do not fully understand how or why early modernity is integral to the study of the nineteenth century. Surely it is, since the nineteenth century did not come from nowhere. As yet, though, the field of Ottoman history has remained divided between those who work on the early modern period and those who work on the nineteenth century. This fact is largely a vestige both of Orientalism and its critiques and, relatedly, of periodizations that accept European colonial encounters as fundamental turning points in the history of the Ottoman

[56] On the Ottoman circle of justice, see Cornell Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldûnism' in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–220.

[57] For an analysis of some of the potentials and possibilities of what certain forms of post-national belonging might look like, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). See especially their invocation of the specter of premodern societies in what they term "the twilight of the peasant world": ibid., 115–27.

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Empire.[58] In this literature, early modernity thus appears as simply background to the main event of the nineteenth century.

The comparison of empires is, however, one of the few frameworks that has offered the potential to bridge this divide between early modern and modern in Ottoman Studies. Most of this work does not explicitly compare the Ottomans to other empires, but rather attempts to understand the Ottoman Empire within wider comparative interpretative frames like constitutional politics, state and society relations, governance, environmental politics, or modernization theory.[59] One of the important collective contributions of this work has been to help us reimagine the empire beyond a discrete set of ages. Each of these works, however, not only offers a periodization that straddles the early modern-modern fence—roughly 1760 to 1840—but each also seeks to challenge or change some of the interpretative lenses we have for explaining early modernity, the nineteenth century, and relationships between the two.

A similar historiographical tension in linking chronologically consecutive, though usually hermetically sealed periods maintains in works on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Within the larger framework of the Imperial Turn, Barkey's *Empire of Difference* again offers a useful way of thinking about how and why the flexibility that seemed to characterize the early modern period of the empire's existence turned into a bloody mess in 1915. Barkey herself edited a separate volume with Mark von Hagen, *After Empire*, which sought to compare the ends and afterlives of the Ottoman, Russian, and Habsburg Empires.[60] Cleaving the questions of longevity and violent demise into two demonstrates the difficulty, indeed near impossibility, of weaving together the early modern empire with the presumptive modern one. The brokers who proved so crucial to the long-term survival of the empire from the thirteenth through the eighteenth centuries were precisely the ones who were pushed out of the system when the reforms we associate with "modernization" and "westernization" were instituted in the nineteenth century. And yet we are only beginning to understand in all their complexities the final tests of diversity, crisis, and change that buried the empire in the twentieth century.

In searching for a connection between the early modern Ottomans and the end of the empire, we again find insight in Lieven's treatment of the question of empire. Lieven asserts that the key dilemma of empire in the long nineteenth

[58] On these points, see Dror Ze'evi, "Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19 (2004): 73–94.

[59] See, respectively, Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*; Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*; Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[60] Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

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century, and the dilemma that leads us straight into World War I, grew out of the following inherent contradiction. On one hand, if one wanted one's state to matter on the stage of international (world) politics, one had to control territory on a continental scale (empire), and yet, the principles of sovereignty and legitimacy were increasingly coming to be based on the idea and will of homogeneous ethno-linguistic entities (nation).[61] In this sense, the Ottomans were facing the very same contradiction that the Russians, Germans, and British (in Ireland as well as India) were facing: how to square the business of empire with the idea of nation and the governing practices of a modern state.[62] The Ottomans, more so than their fellow "Great Powers," however, were facing it from a severely compromised position in the geopolitical neighborhood they inhabited.

The two greatest comparables to the Ottomans in their nineteenth-century iteration are lately the Russian and British Empires. While Lieven's *Empire* suggests highly interesting and useful comparisons between the Ottoman and Russian empires, other recent works have been devoted to particular aspects of this comparison. Linking up in many ways with the scholarship on Ottoman strategies for governing Christians, Robert D. Crews's *For Prophet and Tsar*, as well as Mustafa Tuna's more recent work, explore the ways Muslims in Russian territories fit into the ever higher aspirations of the central state to exert control over its subjects and potential citizens.[63] All these studies are reflective of a larger trend in both Russian and Ottoman historiography toward illuminating the experiences of non-dominant confessional and ethnic groups. In the Ottoman case, however, this pursuit of the history of non-Muslim communities is laden with the burden that these groups were central to the devolution of the empire over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Once again, the diversity and tolerance of the early modern empire toward non-Muslims runs up against the violence and bloodshed of the long nineteenth century.

For their part, Ottoman-British comparisons tend to grow out of the question of how the Ottomans remade themselves in the nineteenth century and

[61] Lieven, *Empire*, xiii.

[62] On some of the many lingering effects of empire on the modern nation-state, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); *idem.*, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[63] Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Mustafa Tuna, "Madrasa Reform as a Secularizing Process: A View from the Late Russian Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53 (2011): 540–70. For work on Ottoman Christians, see Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Christine Philliou, "Communities on the Verge: Unraveling the Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 151–81; Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

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attempted to "reconquer" some of their own tenuously held territories. Thus, works comparing the Ottoman and British Empires have focused on how the Ottomans were or were not a colonial state like the British in India, on imperial ideologies of rule and sovereignty, and on comparative attempts at state modernization in the nineteenth century.[64] Inspired largely by comparative studies of British imperialism, Ussama Makdisi and Selim Deringil have also usefully analyzed, respectively, Ottoman Orientalism vis-à-vis the Arab world and the Ottoman Empire's uncomfortable positionality in postcolonial studies.[65] Others have taken this inter-imperial comparison between the Ottomans and British as an opportunity to develop intra-imperial comparisons across Ottoman localities.[66]

The Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), state-led efforts to rationalize Ottoman administration and remake the principles and laws of political belonging in the empire, are ordinarily the centerpiece of any treatment of the Ottoman nineteenth century. As an object of study the reforms themselves can be seen to lie somewhere between the Russian-Ottoman and British-Ottoman comparisons. They were the main institutional strategy used both for the control of the Ottoman central state—the British often pushed these reforms at moments when they had the greatest leverage—and for the Ottoman central state to remake itself into a state of continental proportions that would matter on the new stage of imperial and international politics. The Tanzimat reform project has, of course, generated a large volume of scholarship, and yet it has inspired a relatively small range of questions, most of which are still discussed on the spectrum of success or failure—in other words, as outcomes. Recent work, however, is moving the study of the Tanzimat in new directions. Milen V. Petrov, for example, productively departs from the dominant historiography of the Tanzimat era with his analysis of the administrative reorganization of *nizami* courts in the *vilayet* of Danube, "a 'pilot' province" as he calls it.[67] Reşat Kasaba's *A Moveable Empire* creatively shows how the

[64] Dina Rizk Khoury and Dane Keith Kennedy, "Comparing Empires: The Ottoman Domains and the British Raj in the Long Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 233–44; Thomas Kühn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 315–31; C. A. Bayly, "Distorted Development: The Ottoman Empire and British India, circa 1780–1916," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27 (2007): 332–44.

[65] Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 768–96; Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003): 311–42.

[66] See, for example, the following comparison between the Ottoman territories of Albania and Yemen: Isa Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878–1918* (Istanbul: Isis, 2003).

[67] Milen V. Petrov, "Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864–1868," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (2004): 730–59.

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movement of itinerant, usually pastoral, populations, which often pitted them against the sedentarizing impulses of the imperial administration, was recast at the end of the empire as a means of ridding parts of the empire of unwanted groups.[68] In an analysis of some of these groups, Janet Klein opens up the long-neglected Hamidian period (1876–1909) and examines the formation and use of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry, a contingent made up of Kurdish tribal levies that were trained and redeployed by the central state to police Armenian populations in eastern Anatolia in the 1890s.[69] Klein goes so far as to compare the Ottoman "civilizing mission" among Kurds to that of the United States against Native American populations in the nineteenth century.[70]

Thus in both the early modern and modern periods, the Ottoman Empire has emerged over the preceding few decades as up for comparative grabs. At different times and for different purposes—whether to illuminate a cultural phenomenon or to make a point about how the Ottomans stacked up against other world powers—the Ottoman imperial experience has been compared to that of Russia, Britain, Germany, China, Spain, the Habsburgs, the United States, Mughal South Asia, Rome, and so on and so forth. Still, although the durable empire seems durably comparable, whether or not the Ottoman case can generate bases for comparison of its own, rather than simply importing them from elsewhere, remains an open question.[71]

COMPARATIVE ENDS

Particularly fascinating and controversial is recent and emerging scholarship that is disentangling the many conflictual processes around World War I, the final demise of the Ottoman Empire, and the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. This subject has long been taboo in Turkish scholarship and society, and was long neglected by scholars outside of Turkey due in large part to prohibitions on access to Ottoman archives from the period. Several new and important studies, however, have emerged since the Imperial Turn in Ottoman Studies that deal with the empire in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Earlier works by M. Şükrü Hanioğlu on the Young Turks before 1908 and by Erik Jan Zürcher and Feroz Ahmad on the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) after 1908 set the stage for more recent studies of the Ottomans in the First World War, such as Michael Reynolds's comparative study of Ottoman eastern Anatolia and the Russian Caucasus during the war and Mustafa Aksakal's treatment of the Ottoman state's fateful decision to enter

[68] Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*.
[69] Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
[70] For a further comparative view of "civilizing missions," see Pomeranz, "Empire & 'Civilizing' Missions."
[71] We borrow the phrase "durable empire" from Nicholas Doumanis's "Durable Empire."

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the conflict.[72] Other works about the end of the empire that have opened up previously unexplored topics include Fuat Dündar's study of the use of statistics in Young Turk demographic engineering, Ryan Gingeras's social and political history of the ethnic violence that riddled the southern Marmara region of western Anatolia in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and Taner Akçam's fine-grained empirical account of the genocidal consequences of late-Ottoman Turkification policies on the empire's Armenian and Greek populations.[73]

One work that stands out among these on the devolution of the empire is Uğur Ümit Üngör's *The Making of Modern Turkey*, which goes even further in time, tracking what he calls (following from Erik Jan Zürcher before him) the CUP period, not 1908 to 1918, but rather 1913 to 1950. This is a revolutionary periodization in that it considers the first twenty-seven years of the Turkish Republic to be part of the CUP period.[74] This undermines the periodization maintained in the Kemalist paradigm, a periodization that insists on a total rupture in 1923 from anything that came before the establishment of the Republic, and has profound ramifications for our understanding of modern Turkey. A few other works have likewise bridged the gap from empire to republic—Carter Vaughn Findley's *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* explores some of the cultural, literary, and political continuities of the entire period from 1789 to 2007; Fatma Müge Göçek's recent book also fuses the histories of the empire and the Republic into an indivisible unit; and likewise M. Şükrü Hanioğlu's biography of Atatürk both outlines the ways in which Atatürk's intellect was shaped in and by the politics of the late Ottoman period and places the history of the early Republic in comparative context alongside the early Soviet Union.[75]

[72] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); *idem.*, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[73] Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878–1918)* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010); Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[74] Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[75] Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789–2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University

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Üngör's study, however, does more than just reperiodize Ottoman-turned-Turkish history. It also takes a close-up look at multiple phases of Ottoman and then Republican state violence—which Üngör considers a typical feature of modern state-building—in Diyarbekir in eastern Anatolia. These phases involved not only the annihilation of the Armenian civilian population but also the mass deportation of Kurdish populations and the resettlement of nominally Turkish populations from the Balkans and western Anatolia to formerly Armenian and Kurdish areas in the 1920s and beyond. The final phase of state violence, Üngör maintains, was the obliteration of the memory of earlier phases and the construction of histories that blotted out these events and the policies that led to them. Why is this a story of empire? Precisely because it follows Lieven's dilemma of empire to its logical conclusion: once the continental-scale empire was lost, the ethnic, ideological, cultural, religious, and political homogenization of the national territory that remained had to be completed at all costs by those who were still operating in an imperial mindset. As Üngör demonstrates, leaders of the early Turkish Republic were not only often the very same individuals as their Ottoman-CUP predecessors, but were, more importantly, operating with a continuous logic as, not to mention similar tactics to, these men.

Countless questions cascade from Üngör's argument, many having to do with the limits of empire. In what respects can power in an imperial context be compared to power in non-imperial realms, whether sub-imperial state formations in the pre-modern period or post-imperial nation-states? Is Turkey a "post-colonial state?" Why are legacies of the Ottoman past not conventionally examined in the framework of post-colonialism? Certainly one hopes that the robust discussion of comparative empires will connect more substantively to even larger discussions in the post-imperial fray. Üngör's book is one study that allows us to imagine a range of such possible connections.

CONCLUSIONS: COMPARISONS, CONNECTIONS, CROSSINGS

When Rifaʿat Abou-El-Haj and Dominic Lieven published their works nearly two decades ago and a decade ago, respectively, the Ottoman Empire was considered to be an incommensurable and incompatible empire—so different as to be a freak among history's other states. Since these foundational works, the name of the game in Ottoman Studies has been comparison—to make the case that the empire indeed *was* like other empires and states throughout

Press, 2011). Göçek's and Üngör's studies are inextricable from the project known as the Workshop for Armenian-Turkish Studies, which, over the past decade, has moved the scholarly discussion of the Armenian Genocide and Ottoman history of that period forward in crucial ways. One of the recent products of these collaborative efforts is: Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark, eds., *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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history. This enormous historiographical pendulum swing has, as we have been discussing, produced many benefits for the field. The very strength of this collective work though has also proven to be perhaps its biggest drawback. The Ottomans have become so comparable as to now be nearly devoid of any particularity. Abou-El-Haj challenged Ottoman historians to get past continually stressing the "differentness" of the empire.[76] It now seems we need to get past its "sameness" as well.

Thus, the imperative in moving forward is to maintain the particularities of the empire while at the same time opening it up to comparative analysis. Simply stating that the Ottomans shared imperial ideologies of rule with Spain or the Mughals in the early modern period or that the early modern past perhaps offers a template for conceiving of an as-yet-unrealized post-national present is not analytically productive enough to move us in the direction of understanding what power meant, first in an Ottoman context and then beyond. Difference—specificity not freakishness—must come before similarity. The crucial point is that the Ottoman Empire *was not* like any other empire. This, of course, let us stress, does not mean it is beyond comparison. Quite the contrary. The Ottoman Empire was an elaborate and changing power formation where the structures and mentalities of empire met more abstract ideologies of early modern sovereignty, then nationalism and the exigencies of imperial rivalry, and then colonialist contestation. It is in the interaction among all of these forces that the dynamism of *this* empire takes center stage. Our accustomed images of Ottoman sameness with Europe or Ottoman passivity as the Sick Man of Europe or the binary opposition between "traditionalism" and "westernization" within the empire thus come to look increasingly and painfully two-dimensional. We should therefore begin to think beyond these images to examine the positive processes going on in the space "between"—not the assumed void, but an arena of intense contestation between a panoply of forces, actors, and places. Only in this way can the empire's specificity—whether due to geography, history, demography, or so many levels of contingency and crisis—shine through in all its diversity and conflict.

The "meso-historical" solution to the divide between the historiographies of outcomes and cultural history in Ottoman Studies—a solution so-termed by Karen Barkey and carried out in the work of other scholars—is therefore crucial as perhaps the first robust conceptualization of how to maintain Ottoman particularity while at the same time offering an exportable analytical toolkit for comparison. This starting point allows us, moreover, to push our comparative questions even further. How do various actors in the hub-and-spoke model interact with each other along different lines of

[76] Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*, 2.

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connection? When and how is the state involved and when and how is it bypassed? How do imperial subjects cross spokes, move beyond the wheel altogether, or constitute their own hubs of power and influence in ways comparable to historical actors in other times and places? These are lines of inquiry usefully examined both within and beyond the empire. Thinking about how certain institutions created empire-wide networks of ethical and commercial interests or how particular elites both produced and were produced by the specific context of Ottoman governance are possible ways of pushing on the meso-historical front.[77] In a very different way, showing, for example, how global familial and trading links weaved in and out of the empire to benefit from and challenge Ottoman commerce is yet another avenue of recent research that allows us to reconcile (or break out of?) the tension between macro-outcomes and cultural historical particularism.[78] In these and numerous other as-yet-unforeseen ways of doing some form of what Sanjay Subrahmanyam calls "connected history," we can preserve the specificities of the Ottoman historical experience while at the same time allowing the empire to be usefully engaged in comparative analysis.[79]

Why compare empires? It allows us to generate questions beyond our own specific field specialties and to see particular phenomena as part of larger historical processes. Why compare the Ottoman Empire? It was at the geographic and political center of the world for over six centuries; it was the inheritor and synthesizer of Roman, Mongol, Islamic, and other global traditions; it offers a laboratory for thinking about practices of governance, culture, and economics that were in continual transformation from the late medieval period to the twentieth century. In stepping back from the precipice of comparative imperial analysis and taking stock of where we have been and where we might go, it is clear that comparison can be a gift for students of Ottoman history, but only if it is taken not just as a collection of structural analogues, but as a means of allowing us to see the Ottoman Empire in all its specificities as an

[77] For these two examples, see, respectively, Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002); and Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*.

[78] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Francesca Trivellato, eds., *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[79] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 735–62; *idem*., *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); *idem*., *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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imperial and deeply political ecosystem teeming with struggle, tension, mutuality, and sometimes violent contestation.

Abstract: As a polity that existed for over six centuries and that ruled on three continents, the Ottoman Empire is perhaps both the easiest and hardest empire to compare in world history. It is somewhat paradoxical then that the Ottoman Empire has only recently become a focus of students of empires as historical phenomena. This approach to the Ottoman Empire as an empire has succeeded in generating an impressive profusion of scholarship. This article critically assesses this literature within the larger context of what we term the Imperial Turn to explain how comparative perspectives have been used to analyze the empire. In doing so, it sheds new light on some older historiographical questions about the dynamics of imperial rule, periodization, and political transformation, while at the same time opening up new avenues of inquiry and analysis about the role of various actors in the empire, the recent emphasis on the empire's early modern history, and the scholarly literature of comparative empires itself. Throughout, the authors speak both to Ottoman specialists and others interested in comparative imperial histories to offer a holistic picture of recent Ottoman historiography and to suggest many possible directions for future scholarship. Instead of accepting comparison for comparison's sake, the article offers a bold new vocabulary for rigorous comparative work on the Ottoman Empire and beyond.

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