THE LAST OTTOMAN GENERATION AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST. By MICHAEL PROVENCE. pp. xxii. 292. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.
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For almost a century, scholars of the modern Middle East have usually tried to understand the formation and history of the latter with a perspective that foregrounds the rise of nationalisms, the birth of nations, and the emergence of new states. Michael Provence's *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* is a significant challenge to this deeply rooted perspective forged within the framework of nationalism in the early twentieth century. Offering a novel outlook that exceeds the horizons of the former, Provence's book seeks to understand the making of the modern Middle East by focusing, instead of on the birth of new nations and states, on the slow demise of the old Ottoman Empire whose institutions and elite survived after the defeat in the Great War of 1914–1918. Thus, Provence's book situates the emergence of the modern Middle East within the late Ottoman context as "the common legacy of the late Ottoman modernization project is second only to the colonial legacy in shaping the history of the region and its peoples" (p. 6). Having noted the decisive influence of both the late Ottoman and colonial periods in the making of the modern Middle East, Provence underlines that this process should be studied with a beyond national approach since the "tendency to view the history of the region through the lens of national histories […] obscures the commonalities that were clear to all until at least the 1940s" (p. 6). One theme that intersects both the two periods and enables such an approach is the life trajectories of "the last Ottoman generation", who were the products of the late Ottoman education system and shared a sense of belonging to the empire but later turned into the military and political elites of various post-Ottoman countries in the Middle East.

Tracing the life trajectories of the members of this generation, Provence's book provides a transnational and connected history of the formative period of the modern Middle East. That is to say, rather than recounting the separate histories of the colonial states of Iraq, Syria, Greater Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine, Provence's book highlights the common historical trajectory these countries shared and, thus, represents a significant break from the existing literature that mostly underlines ruptures in the transition from empire to nation-state, such as the First World War, the end of the Ottoman state, and the imposition of colonial rule. The book, in this respect, opens with a chapter on "Ottoman modernity in the long nineteenth century", which surveys the development of the Ottoman education and training system that raised the last Ottoman generation. Sketching the formative years of these 'Ottoman sons' coming from different regional and ethnic backgrounds, this chapter argues that the stories of the future statesmen, revolutionaries, and nation builders of the interwar Middle East begin not with the Turkish or Arab nationalism they eventually espoused, but with their transformation into self-conscious Ottoman state elite in late Ottoman schools and institutions, which inculcated them with love for, and loyalty to, the empire.

The second chapter examines the wartime arrangements and post-war negotiations for the partition of Ottoman territories by Britain and France. Besides the establishment of Anglo-French colonial rule in the Middle East following the end of the Great War, the chapter also surveys how Britain and France legitimised their continued presence in the region with the League of Nations mandate system, which bore deep traces of religious and race-hierarchical theories of the time that did not qualify Muslim Arabs for independence and self-governance. In the third chapter, Provence returns to the last Ottoman generation and explores how its members coped with the defeat and subsequent developments between 1918 and 1922. Refuting the widespread view that many Arab officers deserted the Ottoman army during the war to join the British-sponsored revolt of Sharif Husayn and Faysal, Provence

convincingly demonstrates that most members of the last Ottoman generation preserved their attachment to the Ottoman state even after the ultimate defeat in 1918. While some stayed in Anatolia, took part in the Anatolian insurgency, and eventually became citizens of the new Turkish Republic, those who preferred or had to return to their places of origin struggled against the colonial powers and sought to organise resistance movements in the same manner as their counterparts in Anatolia.

Chapter Four deals with the events of 1923–1927 in the post-Ottoman Middle East, such as the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that was ratified in 1924 and the Syrian Revolt of 1925–1927. What Provence particularly underlines in this chapter is the significant role of ex-Ottoman officers in the Syrian uprising on which the author also has a detailed monograph entitled *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*.[1] One of the most striking results of the Syrian Revolt's defeat, according to Provence, was the shift of the last Ottoman generation from resistance to reconciliation and politics. Forced to adapt to the post-Ottoman order established in the region, ex-Ottoman officers and Ottoman-schooled civilians began to enter government service following the revolt's defeat and gradually became military and political elites of interwar Syria. This process, which had commenced in Iraq earlier, coincided with the colonial powers' tendency to devolve more responsibility and authority to native governments. Chapter Five, "Colonial Constitutions and Treaties: Post-Ottoman Militarism, 1927–1936", examines this critical juncture in modern Middle Eastern history during which constitutions were drawn up, elections were held, and Iraq became formally independent. The next chapter is devoted to the final years of the last Ottoman generation, which after a heyday that raised hopes for Arab unity and independence, gradually retreated from the scene of Middle Eastern politics in the late 1930s. Lastly, Chapter Seven details the end of the mandate system and discusses its inheritance in the Middle East.

Based on rigorous archival research in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Provence's book masterfully connects the individual stories of the last Ottoman generation with macro-political processes and provides a sophisticated history of the making of the modern Middle East. It also disentangles the latter from the framework of national histories and presents the story of "a post-Ottoman Middle East of great cities, and rural and pastoral hinterlands, interconnected through modern infrastructure, and institutions, undivided by borders, ruling arrangements, or the constructed barriers of human consciousness" (p. 7). Partly as a result of this perspective, however, the book tends to overlook some tensions and conflicts that originated from new loyalties, senses of belonging, and (inter)national politics in the post-Ottoman Middle East. The relations between Kemalist Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries, for instance, were mostly portrayed quite positively due to the common historical background and remaining threads of Ottoman brotherhood. This was indeed the case to some extent, but there were also some severe tensions among these countries as well as their elites because of ideological differences, revisionist intentions, and mutual distrust, all of which had an effect on the making of the modern Middle East.[2]

This point notwithstanding, Provence's book substantially contributes to the literature on modern Middle Eastern history. Additionally, although its focus lies mainly on the Arab Middle East, it significantly enhances our understanding of the history of modern Turkey. Put more explicitly, the book enables us to consider early republican Turkey within its regional context by revealing, besides the continuities between the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods, the connections among the Middle Eastern countries of the 1920s and 1930s, including Turkey. Thus, Provence's book draws the reader's attention to the much-neglected links, relations, and interactions between the Arab Middle East and republican Turkey, the study of which has long suffered from methodological problems that led to the treatment of the latter as a disconnected and separate entity shorn of its regional, and also historical,

[1]Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin, 2005).

[2]For further detail on these tensions and conflicts, see Amit Bein, *Kemalist Turkey and the Middle East: International Relations in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, 2017).

context(s). Accordingly, the book provokes, among other things, much-needed rethinking and even rewriting of the history of early republican Turkey by considering its connections and interactions with Middle Eastern countries. In sum, Michael Provence's *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* is an essential read for anyone interested in the history of the late Ottoman Empire, republican Turkey, and the modern Arab Middle East.

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