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NOTES AND COMMENTS

A COMMENT ON MEHMET BENGÜ ULUENGIN, "SECULARIZING ANATOLIA TICK BY TICK: CLOCK TOWERS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE TURKISH REPUBLIC" (*IJMES* 42 [2010]: 17–36)

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In his recent article, "Secularizing Anatolia Tick by Tick: Clock Towers in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic," Mehmet Bengü Uluengin makes a significant contribution to our understanding of late Ottoman and early republican clock towers. Uluengin shows that Ottoman clock towers carried "complex and seemingly contradictory layering of meanings" (p. 31). These buildings were at times associated with Christianity and with European power but were also seen as modern extensions of the Islamic institution of the *muvakkit* (timekeeper) or as symbols of the Ottoman government and its modernizing project. The cultural meanings associated with clock towers were fluid, concludes Uluengin, and it was the context that determined the way clock towers were interpreted.

Uluengin seems to be arguing against an old, dichotomous narrative according to which clock towers were agents of secularization and modernization that in some essential way conflicted with "traditional" Muslim time. However, as the title of the article clearly indicates, that narrative continues to haunt Uluengin's analysis.[1] I challenge that narrative more openly and argue that down to the end of the Hamidian era, the individuals who were involved in the construction of clock towers did not perceive any conflict between clock towers and their indigenous hour system or the religious system in which it was embedded.

In Uluengin's account, the spread of clock towers is bound up with the increasing use of mean time over the second half of the 19th century. According to the emerging picture, a modern hour system that was European, secular, and abstract was taking over as the *alaturka* hours became "an obstacle to modernization" (pp. 8–9, 18). The abolition of the *alaturka* hour system is thus presented somewhat teleologically, as an almost unavoidable result of blind historical processes. The truth of the matter is that the marginalization and ultimate elimination of the Ottoman hour system were promoted and carried out by the rising professional elites of the early 20th century, a social group that had a clear cultural and political agenda on which they based their claim to power. According to that agenda, *alaturka* time was indeed an obstacle to "progress" as they perceived it.[2] However, these notions were hardly universal at the time and should not be accepted uncritically today.

In fact, there was no inherent contradiction between clock towers and the *alaturka* time, because by the second half of the 19th century, the government usage of that system no longer relied on "seasonal" hours of changing length but, rather, on two sets of standard, sixty-minute hours measured from sunset.[3] This "official" *alaturka*

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system did present some significant problems, but it was nevertheless used in almost all governmental bodies, including such transportation networks as the Şirket-i Hayriye.[4] There is no wonder, then, that down to the end of the Hamidian era many clock towers showed *alaturka* hours, often alongside *alafranga* hours. This was clearly a pragmatic attempt to cope with real needs.[5] As Uluengin correctly notes, the fact that the Islamist sultan Abdülhamid II actively promoted this trend obviously shows that he did not think that either clock towers or mean time were inherently anti-Islamic as long as they did not undermine the Ottoman hour system. The sultan actually erected a clock tower showing both *alafranga* and *alaturka* time right next to the mosque that bore his name, in the compound of the Yıldız palace.[6] In short, more than advertising some secular, foreign time, Ottoman clock towers reflected the attempt to calibrate the two hour systems, to interact with the outer world while holding on to the indigenous.

Just as boundaries between the religious and the nonreligious, or between foreign and local, were less clear than often assumed, so was the divide between the modern and the "traditional." It is worth remembering once again that these very dichotomies were products of a discourse of modernization produced by interested groups rather than some transparent reflection of an objective reality. As Uluengin notes, clock towers were often identified with the centuries-old institution of the *muvakkit,* which was, if anything, more "traditional" than modern. The same point can be made with regard to the nature of the political authority the clock towers were meant to project. Following Selim Deringil and others, Uluengin discusses clock towers as symbols of a new type of central government, a component in the "project of modernity" the ruling elite was trying to promote. That is no doubt true. However, it is equally important to stress that clock towers expressed at the same time continuity with "traditional" notions of rule, most notably, an understanding of the state as the patrimonial household of the sultan.

When viewed from this perspective, it becomes clear that the construction of clock towers was not very different from the endowment of a mosque complex or a fountain. The patterns of endowment and the inscriptions on some clock towers reveal that they were indeed seen in the context of Islamic philanthropic traditions.[7] It follows that we should understand these buildings not merely as the image that some abstract state mechanism was trying to project on to its subjects but also in the context of intra-elite contests for power, in which philanthropy had always played a major role. The sultan was trying to assert and sustain his dominance within the ruling elite through the construction of clock towers, and high officials competed over his attention using the very same means.[8] Many provincial governors who initiated the building of clock towers in their provinces staged ceremonies that tied the buildings to the person of the sultan and commissioned inscriptions in his honor. What is no less important, they made sure that the sultan knew about it.[9] Using such methods in order to win the personal favor of the sultan was a continuation of an old tradition rather than a break from it.

However, it could very well be that the other actors who participated in building the very same clock towers had motives that were significantly different. The people in the province of Jerusalem, who donated large sums for the construction of the clock tower on the city walls, probably cared little for the politics of their governor. For them, the building was a focal point of civic identity and pride, which was clearly reflected by the local press.[10] The building remained important for the townsmen, and when the British governor of Jerusalem decided to demolish the clock tower in 1922, a group of notables

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petitioned the authorities in hope that they would spare the building, which had become "the pride of the city." The British plans, however, were not changed, and the clock tower was removed despite all protests.[11]

In conclusion, clock towers did not "secularize Anatolia tick by tick." They were not merely land posts in a road leading to the secular, European type of modernity endorsed by the early republicans. Rather, they were *alaturka* and *alafranga*, traditional and modern, religious and secular, patrimonial and civic, all at the same time; they were indicative of the multiplicity of valid cultural alternatives available to contemporaries and, even more important, of the fluidity of the boundaries running between those alternatives. If anything, Ottoman clock towers reflected the pragmatic eclecticism adopted by Ottoman elites in their attempts to pave their own way to the future.

NOTES

[1]Only in the last page of the article does Uluengin clearly acknowledge that clock towers were "transformed" at some point to "agents of secularization *à la* Ataürk" (p. 32) or in other words, that they had not served that function earlier. However, according to Uluengin, Atatürk's republic consciously distanced itself from the Ottoman clock towers rather than transformed their meanings. If neither the Ottomans nor the early republicans saw the Ottoman clock towers as agents of secularization, why are they still presented that way?

[2]Avner Wishnitzer, "The Transformation of Ottoman Temporal Culture during the 'Long Nineteenth Century'" (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2009), 154–57, 215–23, 324–48.

[3]Uğur Tanyeli, "The Emergence of Modern Time Consciousness in the Islamic World and the Problematics of Spatial Perception," in *Anytime*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 162. That the government use of the *alaturka* system referred to standard clock hours measured from sunset is evident also in the very exact hours specified in countless official documents. Such exactitude would have been impossible with the seasonal hours used in previous centuries. For more on the Ottoman hour system, see Wishnitzer, "The Transformation," 43–51. It seems that outside governmental systems many people still used mechanical clocks to roughly indicate seasonal hours.

[4]For the coordination of ferries' schedules with working hours, see, for example, BOA, Y.MTV 188/71, 15 Mart 1315 (27.3.1899). For the use of the *alaturka* system in the administrative and education systems, see Wishnitzer, "The Transformation," 99–115, 125–54, 235–65. For contemporary discussions of the problems presented by the *alaturka* system, see, for example, Hassan Hamid, "Şemsi Tarih, Zevali Saat," *Mülkiye* 2, 1 Mart 1325 (14 March 1909): 25–29; and Ahmet Samım, "Vaktimizi Bilelim," *Sada-ı Millet* 111 (21 March 1910): 1–5.

[5]BOA, Y.PRK.PT 8/11, 1.C.1310 (21 October 1892). See also BOA, I.DH 940/74403, 3.Ra.1302 (21 December 1884); BOA, DH.MKT 1405/50, 22.C.1304 (17 March 1887); BOA, DH.MKT 1408/109, 6.R.1304 (31 March 1887).

[6]BOA, Y.MTV 49/84, 1.N.1308 (10 April 1891). Touraj Atabaki has already suggested that religious opposition to public clocks focused on the bells and not on the clocks or the towers. See Touraj Atabaki, "Time, Labour-Discipline and Modernization in Turkey and Iran: Some Comparative Remarks," in *The State and the Subalterns: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 3–4, 15.

[7]The inscriptions often resembled inscriptions on *muvakkit* houses. See Nil Birol, "Managing the Time of the Bureaucrat in the Late Nineteenth Century Ottoman Administration" (M.A. thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2005), 50, 53–54. See also Klaus Kreiser, "Ottoman Clock Towers: A Preliminary Survey and Some General Remarks on Construction Dates, Sponsors, Locations and Functions," in *Essays in Honour of Ekmeledin İhsanoğlu*, vol. 1, ed. Mustafa Kaçar and Zeynep Durukal (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2006), 545–47.

[8]For a very explicit example of the use of a clock tower in such competitions, see Sabrı Yetkin, *Kentsel bir Sembolün Doğuşu—İzmir Saat Kulesi* (İzmir, Turkey: İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2001). For the role played by high officials in the construction of clock towers, see Kreiser, "Ottoman Clock Towers," 543–56.

[9]At least two governors took the trouble of preparing a small, decorated model of the tower they had constructed and sent it to Yıldız. See BOA, Y.PRK.UM 53/67, 2.Z.1318 (22.3.1901); and BOA, Y.PRK.UM 80/69, 21.N.1325 (27.10.1907).

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[10]See, for example, "Ha-Shavuʿa," *Hashkafa* 93 (30 August 1907), 2 (in Hebrew). For the enthusiastic coverage of the construction of the clock tower in Izmir, see Yetkin, *Kentsel*, 8–10.

[11]Ron Fuchs and Herbert Gilbert, "A Colonial Portrait of Jerusalem: British Architecture in Mandate Era Palestine," in *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment*, ed. Nezar Alsayyad (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 89–91.

COMMENT ON CYRUS SCHAYEGH, "'SEEING LIKE A STATE': AN ESSAY ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MODERN IRAN" (*IJMES* 42 [2010]: 37–61)

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Cyrus Schayegh's "'Seeing Like a State': An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran" tries to show how historians of the Pahlavi era "have been gripped by the image of an omnipotent, completely autonomous state and how, each one . . . turned this image into what I call methodological statism" (p. 38). He discusses critically several works by historians and political scientists while mentioning more favorably a few works by anthropologists and sociologists and then indicates what he considers a better approach to Pahlavi history. Although I agree with some of his criticisms and am glad to see a serious discussion of historiography, I think he overstates the sins of historians and fails to distinguish between historians and political scientists, whose discipline leads them to emphasize the state.

Schayegh's essay appeared as I was preparing for interviews to be transcribed into an oral history by the University of California, Los Angeles, library archives. This involves rereading some of my writings and thinking about Iranian historiography. I therefore have something to add and some points of critique to Schayegh's essay. I will not emphasize my many points of agreement or the essay's positive contribution to creating a critical bibliography of scholarly works on modern Iran nor will I repeat bibliographical information for all the books Schayegh cites. "Modern Iran" here covers the period from 1796 to 2009, but I continue his emphasis on the Pahlavi period. Briefly, I agree with his criticisms of modernization theory and of works that attribute all major developments in Pahlavi times to the shahs, but I believe few recent historians have followed these paths. I also agree that many more varieties of history should (and will) be written but note that only very recently have there been enough trained historians and available primary sources to pursue many of these new subjects. Research has also been hindered by limits on scholarly travel and contact between the United States and Iran.

An important new book, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, edited by Touraj Atabaki, includes several chapters relevant to Schayegh's concerns. Two chapters support one element of Schayegh's view, noting how Iranian historians under the Pahlavis glorified rulers and saw them as "the sole guarantors of the country's integrity and sovereignty."[1] Atabaki states that this view affected many Iranians. However, other chapters point to ideological trends more important among recent historians writing in the West: a more generalized nationalism, Marxism, anti-imperialism, and, for a few, Islamism and feminism. One could add the overlapping influence of Edward Said, Michel Foucault, postmodernism, and postcolonialism.

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