

## REVIEW ARTICLE

## A snapshot of historiography on the nineteenth-century Ottoman provinces

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Eugene L. Rogan. *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, xiv + 274 pages.

Janet Klein. "Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914." Dissertation, Princeton University, 2002, v + 424 pages.

Milen V. Petrov. "Tanzimat for the Countryside: Midhat Paşa and the Vilayet of Danube, 1864-1868." Dissertation, Princeton University, 2006, xiii + 456 pages.

### Introduction

Despite territorial losses and changes, the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century covered a vast geographic area. For most of the century, its territories extended from the deserts surrounding the Red Sea to the Balkan lands, from the North African coast of the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. However, for such a vast expanse, the history written on nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire has been limited, both theoretically and geographically.

This article aims to review three doctoral theses (one of which has been published as book), which, as part of the growth in the historiography on the Ottoman provinces in recent years, have gone beyond these theoretical and geographical limitations. The works of Eugene L. Rogan on Transjordan, Janet Klein on Kurdistan, and Milen V. Petrov on the Danube focus on the Ottoman periphery as it was affected by, reacting

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upon, and negotiating with the imperial center. All are revisionist studies emphasizing the issue of land and taxation and the simultaneous existence of local, governmental, and international agents in the historical arena. These three studies all focus on modern state formation through the interaction of multiple agents: the state, tradesmen, and missionaries in Transjordan; the state and Kurdish tribes in Ottoman Kurdistan; and the state, the governor, and ordinary people in the Danube province. The aim of this review is to analyze the thematic and historiographic divergences and convergences in these three studies.

Nationalism is perhaps the strongest barrier to the broadening of the scope of Ottoman history. Turkish historiography has long been trapped in the infertile perspective of differentiating and alienating the Turkish Republic from its Ottoman past and glorifying the novelty of the former, while disdaining and denigrating the latter. Many historical works of the 1960s equated the Ottoman Empire with Turkey and delved into the Ottoman past in order to "discuss the origins of the Turkish nation-state," while "dump[ing] into the trash bin of history those Ottoman experiences that were not directly related to the formation of the Turkish Republic."<sup>1</sup> The national historiographies of the Balkan and Middle Eastern states have followed a similar path; while the Ottoman era has been neglected or regarded "as a period of oppression and backwardness," the aftermath of Ottoman rule has been emphasized and venerated.<sup>2</sup>

The geographic limitations of Ottoman historiography undoubtedly depend, foremost, on the contemporary political organization of the former Ottoman territories. In Turkey, the country that claims to be the heir to the empire, Ottoman studies usually focus on the "familiar milieu," which is the present territory of the Turkish Republic, *i.e.*, Anatolia. Yet, the geographic limits are not the sole reason for Ottomanists being stuck in a certain geo-historiography. Whether produced within the frontiers of Republican Turkey or not, "existing Ottoman studies deal largely with the central institutions and the 'core' provinces, that is, Anatolia and the Balkans."<sup>3</sup> The Arab and North African provinces, and even Ottoman Kurdistan nearby, have been largely neglected.

Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century Ottoman provinces (other than the "core" ones) are not completely absent in Ottoman history writing. In

1 Donald Quataert, "Recent Writings in Late Ottoman History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003): 134.

2 Kemal H. Karpat, "Comments on Contributions and the Borderlands," in *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes*, eds. Kemal H. Karpat and Robert W. Zens (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 2.

3 *Ibid.*, 1.

American universities, studies on the Ottoman provinces began to accelerate in the 1950s, parallel to the increasing academic interest in other parts of the world in general and the Middle East in particular. Until the 1990s, a substantial number of doctoral dissertations were written about the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and its "remote" provinces. In Turkey, studies by İlber Ortaylı on provincial administration,<sup>4</sup> as well as Halil İnalçık on the implementation of the *Tanzimat* reforms in various provinces,<sup>5</sup> have shed light on the *Tanzimat* administration of the *vilayets*.

However, in most studies, "the rest of the territories," the other Ottoman Empire, "are treated in terms of their political relations to İstanbul rather than being viewed as cultural-social units with their own identity and internal dynamics."<sup>6</sup> In addition to overemphasizing the determinant power of the state, some historians, as Isa Blumi has suggested, enter the wrong path of accentuating the Western influence in the region, which hinders those scholars from noticing the transforming social dynamics in the provinces.<sup>7</sup> Keiko Kiyotaki has also claimed that the dominance of European countries as historical agents has pervaded the historiography to the point of disregarding the local effects of Ottoman provincial administration.<sup>8</sup>

Since the 1990s, interest in the historical study of the Ottoman Empire has flourished, and there is an increasing number of doctoral dissertations on the Ottoman provinces in the nineteenth century. These studies usually employ a theoretical outlook that gives the provinces their due significance as historical topic. Local elites and non-elites have entered the picture as historical agents within regional socio-economic dynamics, affecting the nineteenth-century transformation of the provinces along with the Ottoman state and the Western powers.

Many recent studies on the nineteenth-century provinces stress and problematize these regions' peripheral situation with respect to the centralizing Ottoman state. For instance, Elizabeth Thompson has analyzed the advisory councils in Damascus, which appeared as a result of the *Tanzimat* reforms. Her work is "a reevaluation of center-periphery relations in the early *Tanzimat* period," in which she sees the state's

4 İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye İdare Tarihi* (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1979).

5 Halil İnalçık, *Application of the Tanzimat and Its Social Effects* (Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press, 1976).

6 "Karpāt, "Comments on Contributions and the Borderlands," 2.

7 Isa Blumi, "The Consequences of Empire in the Balkans and Red Sea: Reading Possibilities in the Transformations of the Modern World" (Dissertation, New York University, 2005), 488.

8 Keiko Kiyotaki, "Ottoman Land Policies in the Province of Baghdad, 1831-1881" (Dissertation, The University Of Wisconsin, 1997), 1.

centralization efforts in Damascus as a bargaining process to which the Ottoman bureaucracy, the European states, and the local/peripheral elites were "unequal parties."<sup>9</sup> Ussama Makdisi has developed the term "Ottoman Orientalism" in order to shed light on how Ottomans in the center attempted to legitimate their modernizing/civilizing efforts and affirm their "much stricter political and administrative control over the periphery of the empire, by promoting a unifying notion of *Osmanlılık*,"<sup>10</sup> a discourse in which the Ottoman Muslim-Turkish nation was the justified ruler over "the empire's other putatively stagnant ethnic and national groups."<sup>11</sup> In his work exploring the making of the borders between the Ottoman Empire and Iran, Sabri Ateş has focused on the efforts of the Ottoman and Iranian states on the one hand and the borderland people on the other, in order to emphasize the "center-periphery tensions" between the autonomy-seeking local power holders and the increasingly manipulative states.<sup>12</sup> Isa Blumi has stressed the importance of international trade channels and the "larger economic world" for the functioning of the empire and tells the story of local Yemenis and Balkan people clashing with the Ottoman state on the issue of engagement in the world economy.<sup>13</sup> Ebubekir Ceylan, in his dissertation on Ottoman Iraq, has evaluated the *Tanzimat* process in Baghdad as an intrusion of the state in this remote province, as the introduction of modern statecraft and infrastructure to the province,<sup>14</sup> and as an inducement for the state to negotiate with the local tribal structures in the land reform process.<sup>15</sup>

The nineteenth century was a century of transformation for the world as much as for the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, any study that focuses on the Ottoman provinces of the nineteenth century inevitably has to deal with this transformation, namely the *Tanzimat*. Arguably, the chief aim of the Gülhane Decree of 1839 was to create a modern, bureaucratized, and centralized state, which would "re-establish a firm control over its semi-autonomous and virtually independent provinces."<sup>16</sup> Hence, the

9 Elizabeth Thompson, "Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces: The Damascus Advisory Council in 1844-45," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 3 (1993): 472.

10 Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 799.

11 *Ibid.*: 769.

12 Sabri Ateş, "Empires at the Margin: Towards a History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881" (Dissertation, New York University, 2006), 436.

13 Blumi, "The Consequences of Empire in the Balkans and Red Sea," 485.

14 Ebubekir Ceylan, "Ottoman Centralization and Modernization in the Province of Baghdad, 1831-1872" (Dissertation, Boğaziçi University, 2006), 30-31.

15 *Ibid.*, 262.

16 Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 30.

history writing on the Ottoman provinces coincides with the historiography of the *Tanzimat* and the subsequent legal, economic, and social transformations, especially those following the Land Code of 1858 and the Provincial Law of 1864.

A considerable number of previous studies have concentrated on whether the *Tanzimat* and the implementation of its reforms were successful. As Milen V. Petrov suggests, "for a long time, republican Turkish historiography had difficulties in conceptualizing nineteenth-century Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms and Turkish Ottomanists faced a dilemma between wanting to emphasize the 'positive' or 'modern' aspects of these reforms and having to present them, ultimately, as a false start undone by the Kemalist denouement."<sup>17</sup> Some works might even be situated on a spectrum that extends from glorifying the *Pax Ottomana* to vilifying the *Tanzimat's* modernization and centralization. On the other hand, there are scholars who believe in the sincere attempts of the *Tanzimat* men to reform the empire and the provinces, while acknowledging the economic, social, and personnel-related limits of the reforms;<sup>18</sup> on the other hand, there are those scholars who approach the state as an omnipotent and omnipresent entity colonizing and degenerating the "incapable" and "inert" provinces. It might not be fruitful to evaluate the *Tanzimat* and the transformations around it based on the litmus test of success and failure. Neither might it be wise to give the state such a central position in history. The "Ottoman state was not the beneficent angel of reform,"<sup>19</sup> nor it was a massively penetrating villain. Rather, the nineteenth-century state with its reform projects in the provinces was one of the actors of the story who needed to bargain with the local people and to take into account regional socio-economic and international politico-economic conditions; certainly a powerful actor, but not Superman.

This review focuses on three doctoral studies falling into the post-1990 period of historiography on the nineteenth-century Ottoman provinces. I will first discuss Eugene Rogan's book on Ottoman Transjordan (based on his dissertation written at Harvard University in 1991), which evaluates the process of modern state formation in the frontier region of Ottoman Syria. The second is Janet Klein's dissertation "Power in the Periphery" (Princeton University, 2002), analyzing "the transformation of the local power structure" in Ottoman Kurdistan. Milen Petrov's "*Tanzimat* for the Countryside" (Princeton University, 2006) is

17 Milen V. Petrov, "*Tanzimat* for the Countryside: Midhat Paşa and the *Vilayet* of Danube, 1864-1868" (Dissertation, Princeton University, 2006), 31.

18 See Inalcik, *Application of the Tanzimat and Its Social Effects*.

19 Thompson, "Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces," 472.

the third dissertation; it examines the four-year-history of the Ottoman Danube province under the rule of its *Tanzimat* governor Midhat Paşa. My aim is to scrutinize the historiographic parameters that these works employ and to find out particular historiographic trends concerning the Ottoman Empire's long nineteenth century.

### The "frontiers" of the Ottoman State: Transjordan<sup>20</sup>

In *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*,<sup>21</sup> Rogan tells the story of Ottoman Transjordan's social and economic transformation in the last decades of Ottoman rule. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman government had superficial relations with Eastern Anatolian and the Arab *vilayets*, leaving them almost untouched. However, after the mid-nineteenth century, especially after the 1864 Provincial Reform Law, the Ottoman state began to take measures to apply its authority and introduce the elements of the modern state to the empire's frontier zones. Correspondingly, communication networks, roads, post service and telegraph connections, railroads, schools, and hospitals were brought to Transjordan, as symbols of modernity. All these investments allowed the state to "penetrate" the lives of ordinary people and thus to extend its rule over the provinces as well as individuals.<sup>22</sup> The attempt to incorporate the frontier territories within the Ottoman zone of influence was "an act of controlling the space and facilitating the geographical expansion of [its] social system and [...] surveillance capacity."<sup>23</sup> To borrow from Engin Deniz Akarlı, "the means and technologies of modern statecraft [...] introduced into the region gradually linked its disparate parts and population to a bureaucratically organized, hierarchically controlled, and relatively uniform legal and administrative structure."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, ordinary people also benefited from these infrastructural innovations.

One of the most important components of the reforms of the Ottoman state in Transjordan pertained to land. In order to increase the productive capacity of the land and, thus, taxation, the Ottoman government followed a policy of settling Chechen and Circassian refugees in

20 Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

21 In this review, I focus on Rogan's book based on his dissertation: "Incorporating the Periphery: The Ottoman Extension of Direct Rule over Southeastern Syria (Transjordan), 1867-1914" (Dissertation, Harvard University, 1991).

22 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 13.

23 Ateş, "Empires at the Margin," 15-16.

24 Engin Deniz Akarlı, "Book Review on Eugene L. Rogan's *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 3 (2001): 349.

the region. The Land Law of 1858 was applied to districts in a rather flexible manner and according to the requirements of each district, in order to “establish title and tax every piece of productive land in the Empire.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus far, I have mentioned the state’s attempts to incorporate Transjordan into its bureaucratized and centralized administrative framework. Yet, the state was not the only transformative agent in the history of Transjordan. Regional merchants who came to Transjordan to benefit from the new economic opportunities presented by a transforming locality and cooperated with the state to become the new economic agents of the region, and Christian missionaries who had arrived in Transjordan by the 1860s were further agents of change and catalysts of tension.

While the Ottoman state, the merchants, and the missionaries are the three main agents of change, ordinary people also play a role in the story of Transjordan, as told by Rogan. Peasants, town leaders, and the Bedouin tribes reacted to the reforms implemented by the Ottoman state. They had bargaining power. As Rogan suggests, “so long as the Ottoman government was flexible in the application of its laws, and willing to negotiate contentious points, they were able to extend their rule with only minor resistance.”<sup>26</sup> The Ottoman government’s was “a regime of exceptions,” designed to win acceptance from the local people.<sup>27</sup> However, when the government clashed with the local population, usually in terms of the three major fields of conflict—that is, taxation, conscription, and disarmament—it faced serious rebellions.<sup>28</sup>

Rogan’s ultimate goal in *Frontiers of the State* is to show that modern Jordan has been based on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, along with other forces of transformation (such as merchants and missionaries) who introduced modern technologies and means of statecraft as well as modern ideas of sectarianism and intolerance to Ottoman Transjordan. The incorporation of the Ottoman frontier laid the foundation and enabled the succeeding rulers of Jordan to consummate the modern state formation. As Linda T. Darling has suggested, in Rogan’s book, “the old story of somnolent Ottomans modernized from outside yields to a narrative of an Ottoman state activity and intervention that [...] maintained order, collected reasonable taxes, and, in time, created a modern state in the region.”<sup>29</sup> But is this story not “too good to be true?”

25 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 83.

26 *Ibid.*, 184.

27 *Ibid.*, 214.

28 *Ibid.*, 185.

29 Linda T. Darling, “The Ottoman State,” *The Historian* 68, no. 4 (2006).

One of the weaknesses of Rogan's work is its potential to turn into a story of degeneration. In some parts of the text, Rogan seems to fall into the trap of creating the image of a nostalgic pre-modern Transjordan, corrupted by the arrival of merchants together with economic inequality and the arrival of missionaries together with religious inequality. The isolated Transjordan is depicted as a "tolerant land,"<sup>30</sup> "distinctive for its high degree of tolerance."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, its relative isolation, its sparse and divided demographic character, and its lack of diverse economic activities might have created this tolerant environment depicted by Rogan.

Rogan's second weakness might be the historiographic discontinuity that seems to separate the last chapter and the epilogue from the rest of the book. Rogan seems to jump ahead to demonstrate that the seeds of Arab Revolt and Arab nationalism were planted in the Ottoman period, particularly during the Karak Revolt. According to Akarlı, Rogan gives only "circumstantial" evidence to prove the link between the Karak Revolt and Arab nationalism and "appears to be reading the Jordanian nationalist interpretation of the Arab Revolt into the Arabist discourse, thus somewhat blurring the complex tensions and soul-searching that this discourse reflected."<sup>32</sup>

Rogan contributes to the historiography of the nineteenth-century Ottoman provinces and frontier zones by showing that different local and governmental actors in the region—actors affected by the local geographic, climatic, and socio-economic realities—were part of the history of Transjordan. His refusal to handle the Transjordanian geography as a whole gives his story a historical sensitivity, away from false generalizations. He reflects the "dynamism of the region" well,<sup>33</sup> unlike the former historiography that has regarded Transjordan and other Arab provinces as stagnant territories. Furthermore, the flexible picture of the Ottoman state that he draws enables him to prevent the image of a uniform state with uniform goals. The inclusion of the agency of ordinary Transjordanians in the process of local transformation contributes to the dynamism of the region that he describes. For him, the frontier is not an inert territory to be penetrated by the over-effective state or by European forces, but "a contact zone between the state and tribal society."<sup>34</sup> Local elites and non-elites, Europeans and Ottomans were both agents of

30 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 159.

31 *Ibid.*, 183.

32 Akarlı, "Book Review on Eugene L. Rogan's *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*," 350.

33 Quataert, "Recent Writings in Late Ottoman History," 135.

34 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 6.



transformation, bargaining with each other. As Sabri Ateş has claimed, incorporation of the periphery is a “two-way exchange between state and periphery, between the borderland peoples and central states, rather than simple impositions from the center.”<sup>35</sup>

### Power in the peripheral Kurdistan<sup>36</sup>

Janet Klein's dissertation is on the Ottoman state's efforts to solidify its rule over Ottoman Kurdistan through the invention of the *Hamidiye* Light Cavalry, which was “an irregular militia composed of select Kurdish tribes, created in 1890 by Sultan Abdülhamid II and his trusted confidantes, Şakir Pasha and the Marshal Zeki Pasha.”<sup>37</sup> Klein attempts to analyze the impact of the *Hamidiye* militia on the transformation of the regional structure of power, on tribal society, on socio-economic relations among the local people, and on changes in the land tenure and land holdings.

In the introduction and the first chapter, Klein describes the multiple reasons behind the establishment of the cavalry. Officially, it was declared that the government wanted to protect the eastern frontier from Russian aggression. Nevertheless, there were also latent reasons, such as suppressing socialist or nationalist Armenian revolutionaries, strengthening Ottoman rule in the region, creating a bond between the sultan and the Kurds, “civilizing” and settling the tribes and turning them into tax-paying “peaceful agriculturalists,” and winning the support of Kurdish chieftains as local power holders.<sup>38</sup> To be sure, the government did fear the Russians as an external threat. The “Armenian threat” was also a valid reason in the eyes of the Ottoman government. Revolutionary Armenians who, in the perception of the Ottoman rulers, had a tendency to collaborate with the Russians were regarded as traitors. As Klein suggests, “if we were to superimpose a map of the *Hamidiye* regiments on a map showing the distribution of the Armenian population in the region, particularly keeping in mind where the centers of Armenian revolutionary activity [were] located, we find a strong overlap between the two.”<sup>39</sup>

Urban notables and Kurdish chieftains were restraining Ottoman rule and control in the region by offering local systems of taxation, security and justice.<sup>40</sup> Giving them the status of a *Hamidiye* Pasha would mean to control them. Similarly, as Ortaylı has claimed, a new provincial

35 Ateş, “Empires at the Margin,” 447.

36 Janet Klein, “Power in the Periphery: The *Hamidiye* Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914” (Dissertation, Princeton University, 2002).

37 *Ibid.*, 4.

38 *Ibid.*, 5-7.

39 *Ibid.*, 39.

40 *Ibid.*, 31.

unit called *nahiye* was also used to control the tribes in Eastern Anatolia, by giving the tribal chiefs the status of *nahiye* administrators.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, while the Ottoman state tried to make use of tribal chieftains, the chieftains used the state for their own ends. This was a two-way process in which the two sides negotiated with each other and affected each others' attitudes. As an example, the Ottoman government designed new uniforms and badges in order to win the moral support of the sheiks and to develop bonds of loyalty and submission. The ultimate aim of the government was to exchange "tribal loyalties" with a "supra' Ottoman" one.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Kurdish tribal chiefs used the same uniforms as elements of superiority in their daily lives, because a *Hamidiye* uniform meant increased respect and fear on the part of the local population.<sup>43</sup>

Klein organizes each part of her dissertation to reflect "a long-standing dialectical relationship between the state and the tribes, whereby the two have often contributed to the creation and maintenance of the other."<sup>44</sup> And the *Hamidiye* example perfectly fits into this relationship. The Ottoman government employed Kurdish tribes in the last decade of the nineteenth century to realize its projects and goals, and in the course of governmental manipulation, the local power structure of Ottoman Kurdistan was transformed dramatically, "entailing the transformation of the tribal system and its relationship to the state."<sup>45</sup>

In the second chapter, "Power in the Periphery I: 1890-1908," Klein describes how certain tribes, whose power the Ottoman state wanted to curb, became more powerful in the process of establishing the *Hamidiye*, by founding "new tribal emirates."<sup>46</sup> This story of a consolidation of power by certain tribes is supported by the evidence presented in the fourth chapter, entitled "The *Hamidiye* and the Agrarian Question." The "agrarian question" that emerged in 1908 was a "euphemism for the matter of the Armenian lands usurped during the previous decades by Kurdish tribal chiefs."<sup>47</sup> The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the appropriation of Armenian and Kurdish peasants' lands by local notables, government officials, and especially Kurdish chieftains who held the power of the *Hamidiye* uniform. The result was "a general trend of dispossession" among Kurdish and Armenian peasants,<sup>48</sup>

41 Ortaylı, *Türkiye İdare Tarihi*, 293.

42 Klein, "Power in the Periphery," 60.

43 *Ibid.*, 65.

44 *Ibid.*, 125.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*, 297.

47 *Ibid.*, 261.

48 *Ibid.*, 295.

increased violence between different ethnic groups in the region, and forced emigration and mass destruction of Armenian people. Klein says that “a distance separated the Ottoman official, charged with maintaining order and maximizing the returns of [...] frontier territories, and a local population struggling to survive ever-present contingencies.”<sup>49</sup>

While Klein acknowledges that the appropriation of the land did not start with the *Hamidiye*, she depicts how the *Hamidiye* process accelerated usurpation. She is also prudent about historicizing the role of the government in land usurpation and violence in the region. According to Klein, the Ottoman state did not make the first move in the process, yet supported or connived the violence and appropriations, as long as it was compatible with its goals of (1) settling the nomads and Chechen and Circassian immigrants, (2) guaranteeing that the Kurdish tribal chiefs remained loyal to the state, and (3) “uprooting what some perceived to be a potentially treacherous population” (i.e., the Armenians).<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Ottoman government was neither an innocent party, nor an omnipotent villain. “It was a historical process that ended up working out well for the government.”<sup>51</sup>

Klein might be criticized for the lack of Ottoman sources in her work. Although she perused the archives of many different countries (including the Public Records Office in London, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives in Paris and Nantes, the French Ministry of Defense Archives at Vincennes, the Kurdish Institute and the Nubar Pasha Library in Paris, and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC), she did not use sources from the Ottoman archives in Turkey. She claims that “due apparently to the sensitivity of the topic, [she] was denied access to all Turkish research facilities, including the Ottoman Archives.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Klein used the material she obtained from Western countries in a very creative way and also included published Ottoman materials and documents from the Kurdish-Ottoman press.

Klein demonstrates in her dissertation that “the *Hamidiye* was created as part of the late nineteenth-century drive by Sultan Abdülhamid II for control of the empire’s far-flung provinces.”<sup>53</sup> Her study is, foremost, a historiographically powerful work that challenges nationalist stances that evaluate and reconstruct history through narrow and biased points of view. Although she claims that her dissertation is “not based

49 Blumi, “The Consequences of Empire in the Balkans and Red Sea.”

50 Klein, “Power in the Periphery,” 301.

51 *Ibid.*, 299.

52 *Ibid.*, 10.

53 *Ibid.*, 115.

on a political agenda,<sup>54</sup> one may argue that she has a strong political stand, since her work sheds light on the historical grounds of contemporary problems. She says that “the violence was neither primordial, nor uniquely the result of either government orders or religious tensions, but occurred at a specific historical juncture for concrete reasons.”<sup>55</sup> The *Hamidiye Cavalry* not only “left a legacy of state-tribe relations,”<sup>56</sup> but also created a controversial legacy of Turkish policies towards Armenians and Kurds. Klein’s work, by analyzing the *Hamidiye* as a “historical juncture” of violence, historicizes this ongoing issue.

### The Danube countryside “speaking *Tanzimat*”<sup>57</sup>

In his dissertation, Milen V. Petrov analyzes the transformation of the Danube province under the rule of Midhat Paşa, a dedicated *Tanzimat* statesman. The Danube province was selected as a “model” province on which the new administrative, legal, and fiscal reforms were to be implemented first. The Ottoman government expected that “the new territorial unit would serve as both a showcase and a proving ground for an impending empire-wide reorganization of provincial administration.”<sup>58</sup>

Petrov evaluates the infrastructural, administrative, legal, and economic reforms from both the government’s and the local inhabitants’ perspectives. According to him, those reforms might have meant the improvement of the region’s economy (*i.e.*, an increase in the taxes collected) or winning the support of foreign powers for the government. However, for the local non-elite inhabitants, the modernization led by Midhat Paşa “represented, above all, a never before seen intrusion of state power on their pockets, bodies, and minds.”<sup>59</sup> Newly built roads meant forced and unpaid labor for the local people.<sup>60</sup> They carried the financial burden of the modern reforms by paying more taxes, or through mandatory contributions to government funds for reforms. The new regime also devised new technologies of counting, documenting, enlisting, and conscripting individuals. Non-elite people of the Danube province reacted to and resisted against these new innovations of state intrusion into their daily lives.<sup>61</sup>

54 *Ibid.*, 15.

55 *Ibid.*, 337.

56 *Ibid.*, 347.

57 Petrov, “*Tanzimat* for the Countryside.”

58 *Ibid.*, 184.

59 *Ibid.*, 133.

60 *Ibid.*, 135.

61 Musa Çadırcı tells a similar story of the Anatolian provinces, where people revolted against the state in order to escape conscription into the army. Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Döneminde Anadolu Kentleri’nin*

Petrov also stresses the input of the local elites in the process of modernization. Midhat Paşa and his officials were stuck in “the dilemma between finding a form of administration ‘corresponding altogether to the needs of the country’ and ‘to the customs of the populations.’”<sup>62</sup> Although the ultimate aim of the provincial reforms was to standardize the administration and optimize the tax collection all over the empire, no reform could be done without considering local dynamics and dispositions. In order to map local dynamics and gather information about the local population, many inspection tours were organized in Bulgaria in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>63</sup>

Not only the resisting local inhabitants and policy-shaping local elites, but also “marginals” find a place in Petrov’s study. He explores the employment of orphans in *islahhanes* and prisoners in the service of Midhat’s reform projects. The Ottoman government, on the one hand, found a way to complete the modernizing projects with as little cost as possible. On the other hand, the government officials sought to “inculcat[e ...] an ethic of discipline and industriousness”<sup>64</sup> in prisoners’ minds and produce “disciplined individuals.”<sup>65</sup>

The ordinary people in Petrov’s story are also knowledgeable agents who “turn out to have been much better attuned to the dominant state discourse than they are assumed to have been by historians dismissive of *Tanzimat* ideological production altogether.”<sup>66</sup> They understood the reforms, they played the game of the *Tanzimat*, and they utilized innovations, such as the new *nizamiye* courts, to achieve their own ends. An aggrieved mother applied to the court regarding her murdered son and against a suspicious policeman;<sup>67</sup> an army deserter expressed his remorse before the court, as an effective defense strategy aiming at the court’s leniency.<sup>68</sup> In short, the local inhabitants of the Danube province began to “speak *Tanzimat*” a short time after it had been introduced.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, Petrov writes not only the history of resisting individuals, but also that of complying ones. This is a story of ordinary people transforming alien state control into familiar advantages; it is a story of “everyday forms of compliance.”<sup>70</sup>

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*Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1991), 316.

62 Petrov, “*Tanzimat for the Countryside*,” 164.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, 156.

65 *Ibid.*, 154.

66 *Ibid.*, 165.

67 *Ibid.*, 288.

68 *Ibid.*, 294.

69 *Ibid.*, 264.

70 *Ibid.*, 313.

In the last chapter, "Nationalism and the *Paşa*," Petrov goes in search of Bulgarian nationalism in the Midhat period. Although Midhat's reforms managed to appease nationalist goals for a short time, they could not prevent, or perhaps they even contributed to, the escalation of Bulgarian nationalism and sectarian conflicts in the region.<sup>71</sup> The settling of Tatar and Circassian migrants in the province and their employment them in the militia against "future Bulgarian bands" no doubt increased the resentment of the Bulgarian population against the reforms and paved the way for nationalism.<sup>72</sup>

Petrov provides a thorough analysis of the implementation and reception of the *Tanzimat* in the Danube province between 1864 and 1868. Petrov's multidimensional story includes Midhat Paşa as the governor, local elites as policy partners of the government, local inhabitants resisting against or complying with the *Tanzimat* reforms, and marginal people as ineffectual but still present actors. Nevertheless, this study evokes questions of exaggerated or biased utilization of archival material; could such a law-conscious society possibly exist? Are *istintaknames* sufficient to prove that "less than two years after the establishment of the *vilayet*, its new legal framework was already intimately understood and proactively taken advantage of by Midhat Paşa's 'ordinary' subjects"<sup>73</sup> on a collective basis? Nevertheless, Petrov presents the readers with a complex study on the four years of the Danube province under the governance of Midhat Paşa and shows why this was a period of extensive transformation.

## Conclusion

In the past decade, the number and quality of studies on the nineteenth-century provinces of the Ottoman Empire have increased considerably. These studies are usually theoretically strong, presenting complex arguments and revisionist accounts of the Ottoman Empire's frontiers in the long nineteenth century. Furthermore, the dissertations reviewed here, as well as other studies on the provinces, utilize a diverse and rich array of primary sources, from European and US archives to Arabic newspapers.

One central element in all three works is the primacy of the issue of land and taxation. According to Haim Gerber, "the socioagrarian structure of the past is a key to understanding the present political structure of Turkey and the Arab states."<sup>74</sup> None of the three studies I have discussed

71 *Ibid.*, 436.

72 *Ibid.*, 370.

73 *Ibid.*, 291.

74 Haim Gerber, *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 1.

employ a uni-linear and one-sided perspective, assigning the land issue sole importance. Rather, these works have situated the issue of land and taxation within a more complex picture including local socio-economic, governmental, and international dynamics. Rogan's merchants acquiring wealth by buying land from indebted peasants, Klein's dispossessed and displaced Armenian peasants, and Petrov's Bulgarian inhabitants who resented the settlement of Tatars and Circassians on their lands are all real historical characters in real environments.

Another parallel feature of these studies is the existence of various agents in the stories they present, at the local, governmental, and international levels (with changing degrees of emphasis on each other). All present accounts based on a dynamic interaction between multiple agents of change. For the historiography of provinces in the Ottoman Empire, this interplay might be translated as:

[...] imperial interactions with subjects of empire [being exposed to] new systems of meaning that adapted technologies of expression from an "alien world," [which were] applied [...] to ever changing situations in the provinces. At the same time, however, new definitions of reality were equally in contention with a multiplicity of local forces that sought to (re)establish order and impose new forms of exchange between people and the wealth they produced.<sup>75</sup>

Provinces are not static or inert entities controlled by the state or dominated by European forces, but products of an active engagement between the local, the governmental, and the international. Recent historical scholarship has given local elites and peripheral people a "more constructive role in the state-building process, as perceptive guardians of local interests against the hunger of central states for military and other resources."<sup>76</sup> Some previous studies have regarded the resistance against the *Tanzimat* reforms as "conservative revolts." Ortaylı has described the reactions against the centralist administration as the conservatism of local elites afraid of losing their economic primacy, local elites who hypocritically entered the administrative councils, municipalities and courts when it matched their interests.<sup>77</sup> These older studies, according to Thompson, "have suggested that [local elites] acted solely from self interest, appeasing authorities insofar as that policy aggrandized their

75 Blumi, "The Consequences of Empire in the Balkans and Red Sea," 488.

76 Thompson, "Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces," 472.

77 Ortaylı, *Türkiye İdare Tarihi*, 290-91.

personal influence and fortunes.”<sup>78</sup> She continues: “Evidence from the council’s register suggests however that representation on the council cannot be explained as a result of members’ ill will, but rather of negotiations between the state and local elites, with give and take on both sides.”

Ebubekir Ceylan has told a similar story of Ottoman Iraq, in which the Ottoman state tried to negotiate with the local tribes in the reform process, as in Transjordan, the Danube province, and Kurdistan, trying to articulate the local power holders into *vilayet* administration. After the introduction of the *Tanzimat* in Ottoman Iraq in 1844,<sup>79</sup> and through the implementation of the Land Code of 1858, “not only were the tribal areas divided so as to de-construct the tribal structures, but also the tribal sheiks were incorporated to the Ottoman administrative system.”<sup>80</sup> The tribes became the very party of local decision-making.

Recent studies on the last century of the Ottoman Empire acknowledge these negotiations, the relations of give-and-take between the locality and the state. This acknowledgement is what makes these studies valuable as well as revisionist. These works usually do not fall into the trap of one-sided and sterile history writing. The complexity of the plot, the emphasis upon geographical and socio-economic dynamics, and the incorporation of various agents and multiple catalysts of transformation into the story make the new scholarship on the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire vibrant and realistic. Their revisionist approach towards earlier accounts of Ottoman history gives these studies a political stance (although the writers sometimes deny their engagement with politics).

The works of Rogan, Petrov, and Klein focus on a change of mentality that originated from the elites and was imposed on or received by ordinary people. But this mentality was transformed by the bargaining and the interaction among the state, the elites, and the local people into something entirely different from the original. Jordanian Bedouins, Kurdish tribal chiefs visiting İstanbul, and Bulgarian peasant women applying to the *nizamiye* court were all integrated into the discourse and the actions of the *Tanzimat*. While the *Tanzimat* state wanted to conquer the *pockets, bodies, and minds* of the individuals through conscription, legitimacy, and a new unifying identity, individuals reacted to the process within their local environments and their daily lives. In the end, “nothing remained untouched by empire, especially the empire itself.”<sup>81</sup>

78 Thompson, “Ottoman Political Reform in the Provinces,” 461.

79 Ceylan, “Ottoman Centralization,” 335.

80 *Ibid.*, 262.

81 Blumi, “The Consequences of Empire in the Balkans and Red Sea,” 489.



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