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Donald Quataert

RECENT WRITINGS IN LATE OTTOMAN HISTORY

MEHMET GENÇ, *Osmanlı Imparatorluğunda Devlet ve Ekonomi* (State and economy in the Ottoman Empire) (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2000). Pp. 368.

EFRAIM KARSH AND INARI KARSH, *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789–1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Pp. 419.

USSAMA MAKDISI, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Pp. 274.

EUGENE L. ROGAN, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pp. 289.

The books under review here variously demonstrate the progress made in the recent historical writing of the late Ottoman period (c. 1750–1922). They also reflect the problems that persist in this important sub-discipline of the historian's craft. In the West, the writing of Ottoman history began as an offshoot of European history, often the purview of historians interested in the "Eastern Question." A notable example is William Langer's *Diplomacy of Imperialism*, a series of essays on various aspects of European diplomacy that gave prominent place to the Ottoman Empire.[1] These European specialists, well grounded in their discipline, correctly treated the Ottoman past as part of European history. For all their disciplinary skill, however, they studied the Ottoman experience from the outside, using a rich array of European-language material but not indigenous sources generated from within the Ottoman world. This scholarly pattern began to shift with the appearance of a number of seminal works that opened new paths for research into Ottoman history.[2] These studies are still noteworthy for their often extensive use of Ottoman primary sources, especially the writings of the Ottoman chroniclers and contemporary observers. The work of Bernard Lewis was particularly influential, expressing a paradigm that focused on Westernization

Donald Quataert is a Professor in the Department of History, State University of New York at Binghamton, Binghamton, N.Y. 13902, USA; e-mail: dquataer@binghamton.edu.

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during the Ottoman 19th century that inexorably—indeed, inevitably—led to the Turkish republican 20th century. Thus, these 1960s works also misdirected the field in a serious manner, creating a set of false assumptions that we live with now, in the present day—namely, all of them worked from the presupposition that "Ottoman Empire" and "Turkey" were synonymous terms. While speaking of the Ottoman past, their real agenda was to discuss the origins of the Turkish nation-state. In so doing, they dumped into the trash bin of history those Ottoman experiences that were not directly related to the formation of the Turkish republic. And so, the histories of the Balkan and Arab provinces of the empire became largely irrelevant and off the Ottoman historians' agenda.

With this mind set in place, a pioneering generation of scholars began using the Prime Ministry Archives in Istanbul, a repository for millions of the documents created by the recently defunct Ottoman state.[3] Led by Stanford Shaw, researchers enthusiastically plunged into these archives, which increasingly became available from the 1960s onward.[4] Zeal for these documents created some negative side effects. Most researchers left theory at the door of the archives, and they neglected sources outside those central archives. Further, many forgot the lessons of the Langer school and treated the Ottoman Empire as sui generis rather than as part of a broader history. Thus, as Ottoman history-writing during the 1970s and 1980s grew from a subfield occupied by a handful into one with an annual bibliography numbering in the thousands of entries,[5] most of the dissertations and published work focused on the Anatolian lands of the empire; narrated state actions and reproduced the arguments and perspectives of the archival documents; offered few theoretical insights; and treated Ottoman history in a vacuum, without connection to other histories. In the process, Ottoman scholars created a formidable body of work that often, alas, is neither integrated into the discipline of history nor accessible to any but the cognoscenti.

Since about 1990, there have been some significant developments both in the source base employed and the treatment of those sources. The studies by Ussama Makdisi and Eugene Rogan exemplify the emergence of a new, more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to Ottoman history. Both are based on a rich blend of wide-ranging sources, local and imperial, indigenous and foreign, private and official. In his study of Transjordan, Rogan employs the court records of several towns, land-registration records, archives of a local Latin church and of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and manuscript materials held by notable families and religious organizations. Into this mix he skillfully blends significant amounts of archival material from the imperial Ottoman capital and from Britain, France, and the United States. The source base for Makdisi, who examines the 19th-century Lebanon region, is no less impressive. He uses family papers, unpublished local histories from a number of locations, and missionary and patriarchate records. And he effectively interweaves these with a considerable body of material from the Ottoman central archives and from the foreign-office holdings of the British and French governments. Both Rogan and Makdisi use their manifold source bases in the service of overarching arguments regarding their respective subjects of study.

Makdisi asserts that Lebanese sectarianism indeed is modernity. He forcefully argues that it was not an expression of primordial loyalties and identities that somehow failed to make the transition to nationalism. For him, sectarianism was a rupture in

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Lebanese life brought about by the interaction between Lebanese society as it had existed before about 1840, on the one hand, and the Tanzimat policies of the Ottoman state and Great Power intervention on behalf of local religious communities, on the other. As he puts it, the genealogical geography of local, non-religious elites gave way to a sectarian geography in which religious identity became the defining characteristic of the modern subject and citizen. For Makdisi, the failed 1860 revolt of Tanyus Shahin—presented as a popular effort to create a space for mass politics—was a turning point that failed to turn. In a process that received the full cooperation of local elites, the Ottoman state and the European powers worked together to block popular politics and re-install elite politics, now based on sectarian identities. Thus, in Makdisi's work, the agency of international forces combined with that of the distant Ottoman imperium and of the local popular and elite groups to give rise to the new form of identity. In this formulation, we indeed are a long way from Westernization imposed from afar and above.

Rogan's work, for its part, should be a model for those who study frontier zones, and not merely Ottoman frontiers. In a series of chapters, he successively treats the establishment in Transjordan of a firmer Ottoman military and administrative presence, the settlement of refugees, and the incursion of both merchants and missionaries. In subsequent chapters on accommodation, resistance, and World War I, he traces the impact of these processes on the Transjordanian region. In some ways this is an amazing work, for it gives tangible meaning to the generalizations made by previous generations of Ottoman historians who have written in extenso but often vaguely about imperial Ottoman reform legislation. Rogan illustrates the implementation of these reforms on the ground. Take, for example, his treatment of the Ottoman Land Law of 1858 and its impact on tribal landholding patterns: he demonstrates that the impact varied from tribe to tribe, depending on whether members drew their livelihoods from agriculture or animal raising. (Here in particular we can see the value of triangulation on a problem through the use of multiple imperial and local sources.) More generally, he shows how central state policies of improved security, refugee settlement, and land distribution filled in the frontier in the Ajlun and Balqa areas of northern Transjordan, radically transforming their demography, economy, society, politics, and culture. As the process proceeded, merchants moved in from nearby towns to the north and the west of the Transjordanian region. These merchants, who replaced the indigenous elites, linked Transjordan to the wider regional economy, just as new government officials linked the provincial administration to the larger Ottoman state. In the Karak and Ma'an districts of southern Transjordan, however, these processes were far less advanced. On the eve of World War I, these districts largely were unassimilated into the larger Ottoman body. Around Karak in 1910, a major revolt erupted and defined the limits of Ottoman rule, demonstrating the problems inherent in the "regime of exceptions" that the state employed to win broad support for its direct rule (p. 214). There is one final merit to Rogan's work: it shows the dynamism of a region that usually is dismissed as without history until the formation of the Hashemite state in 1921. Moreover, it helps us to understand the history of Transjordan before that region became enmeshed in the struggle for Palestine. Thus, it can be read profitably together with Beshara Doumani's work on 19th century Nablus.[6]

Given their admirable diligence in research, it seems remarkable that the two au-

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thors, each of whom was preparing a book on Arab provincial areas of the late Ottoman Empire, do not cite each other in their bibliographies. Each previously had prepared a dissertation and some articles on their respective subjects; hence, the work of each in principle was available to the other. This mutual neglect is a pity, because the two scholars were working on common problems: the evolution of Ottoman society during the 19th century and the formation of the contemporary Arab world. Each sees the Ottoman period as absolutely essential for understanding the history of modern Jordan and Lebanon. Both implicitly (and correctly) disregard the barrier of 1918 that previous generations had erected between the Ottoman world and that of the Ottoman successor states, not only in the Arab lands, but also Turkey and the Balkan provinces.

From a historiographical perspective, the collection of articles by Mehmet Genç is an incomplete transition to the new kind of research embodied in the contributions of Rogan and Makdisi. This is perhaps hardly surprising, as the Genç volume reproduces articles that he wrote between the early 1970s and the late 1990s. Scarcely known outside Turkey because he writes nearly exclusively in Turkish,[7] Genç's exhaustive research on the Ottoman economy around the period 1700–1830 led the way to a series of original insights into its character. During this era, the sources are exceptionally difficult in nature, and Genç mastered the mysteries of some of the most arcane of all Ottoman source materials (the financial records of the "Maliyeden Müdevver"). In so doing, he showed the financial order behind the seeming chaos of the long 18th century and brought historians to a new understanding of Ottoman politics and economics during this crucial period before the famed Tanzimat era. His work led others to find that the Istanbul elites used lifetime tax-farming as a tool of control over notables in distant provinces.[8] Connections between the 18th-century imperial and provincial elites are thus much closer than historians had once supposed. Thus, Genç's research has led to a major attack on existing notions of Ottoman decentralizing in the pre–Tanzimat era, one that gives order and rationality to the 18th-century Ottoman world. In so doing, it undercuts the novelty of the Tanzimat reforms and invites us to see continuity between the Ottoman worlds of the 18th and 19th centuries.[9] This reassessment, still under way in Ottoman studies, is no small achievement.

Also, Genç's work blends an impressive array of Ottoman archival sources and contemporary European writings, with an active effort to incorporate theoretical insights from European economic history. And although his work is certainly geographically focused on the lands that became the Turkish republic, he sometimes includes sections of the Ottoman European and Arab provinces in his scope of inquiry. On the negative side, his view mirrors that expressed by his major sources: the documents of the imperial Ottoman state. In Genç's writings, the state is the elephant in the middle of the room that leaves no room for other agents. Thus, both economic growth and contraction derive from state governmental policies. Genç gives the Ottoman state powers that 21st-century states would envy. It appears as omnipotent and omniscient—as perhaps it would have wanted Ottoman subjects to see it. I would add that his emphasis on state policies could be an antidote to interpretations that over-emphasize the impact of exogenous factors, such as the workings of the world economy or the machinations of the Great Powers. But this potential to offer agency to internal Ottoman dynamics is unrealized and is not developed in his writings.

The book by Efraim and Inari Karsh forms part of a recent body of writing that

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uses the entire Middle East as its canvas to re-introduce an Ottoman context to the re-mapping of the region during and after World War I. The Karsh book and David Fromkin's earlier *A Peace to End All Peace* revisit the Eastern Question.[10]

Fromkin's book was lavishly praised in some circles, and according to publicity on its cover, was named a *New York Times* Book Review Editor's choice. This book suffers from the same fundamental flaws as the Karsh book under review here. Namely, it studies the complex diplomacy of the World War I era through external sources and is based solely on English-language material. Indeed, the narrative device around which Fromkin's book about the Middle East revolves is not the Young Turk leadership or Husayn of Mecca but, rather, Winston Churchill. It relates the creation of the modern Middle East and the actions of Young Turks, loyalist and rebel Arabs alike, through English eyes. Fromkin specifically excludes Middle Eastern agents from his narrative, because, he says, they were not around the table when the decisions were being made (p. 17).

The Karsh book, by contrast, poses an important hypothesis: that "Middle Eastern actors were not hapless victims of predatory imperial powers but active participants in the restructuring of their region."[11] This perspective can only be applauded, because it seeks to give agency to those who too often have been considered the passive recipients of Western action. Indeed, presentations of local agents are successfully achieved in the Rogan, Makdisi, and Genç books reviewed earlier. Those three works collectively leave us with a better appreciation for the internal logic of Ottoman/Middle Eastern politics and social, cultural, and economic life. No such achievement, alas, is registered in the Karshes' *Empires of the Sand* (whatever this title is supposed to imply).

The book promises to offer the perspective of the Ottoman and Arab elites in the decisions that they made before and during World War I. It is their decisions, the authors argue—not the policies of the Great Powers—that brought about the partition and destruction of the Ottoman Empire. These are controversial statements, but they are valid interpretive positions that deserve to be argued. Indeed, they have exercised historians for decades. Could the Ottoman state have done anything to prevent its partition? Was Ottoman neutrality an option? What were the reasons for the Ottoman entry on the German and Austro-Hungarian side? Unfortunately, the book utterly fails to shed new light on these questions and does not deliver its promised internal perspective on Ottoman decision-making. Indeed, it is doomed to fail because of its complete dependence on external—in fact, hostile—sources. The entire foundation on which the authors build their inquiry consists of British government sources.[12] The British government, remember, was the Ottoman state's mortal foe between 1914 and 1918. Although British insights into the behavior of the Ottoman and provincial Arab elites indeed are valuable, they cannot be used to provide an insider's view of Ottoman thinking. The Ottoman perspective—and, to a lesser extent, that of the local Arab elite—in fact has been available in Istanbul for many years. The first relatively comprehensive catalogue of Ottoman archival documents was published more than fifteen years ago. Over the past decades, vast additional collections of archival documents have been classified and made available to scholars via inventories that can be consulted at the Ottoman archives in Istanbul. Accordingly, increasingly comprehensive catalogues of these document inventories over the years have been published and

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distributed and are available for purchase.[13] These reveal a host of material relevant to the issues of concern here. Surely useful, for example, is the enormous body of records from the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior (Dahiliye Nezareti).[14] These would, if consulted, shed considerable light not only on debates within the imperial elite over the entry into World War I but also on the activities of Sharif Husayn and his family and its decision to revolt against Ottoman rule. To this reviewer, the Karsh book's exclusive reliance on outside sources and its complete neglect of such indigenous primary sources are unacceptable practices at this stage of Ottoman historical writing. Moreover, it is astonishing that Harvard University Press would publish such a study.

Obviously, the use of indigenous primary sources alone cannot produce good history-writing. An informed theoretical framework and a command of the secondary sources and other archival holdings, inter alia, also are required. But good history that seeks to determine the actions of agents cannot succeed if based on only external sources.

The Karsh book's attempt to analyze Ottoman and Arab elite policies exclusively through the prism of British government documents is the German-history equivalent of examining imperial German government decisions regarding the *Griff zur Weltmacht* through only British or French archival records. Such an effort today would be ridiculed in German history-writing; it is equally unacceptable in Ottoman history-writing. It seems both fair and self-evident to say that Ottoman records of Ottoman statesmen's conversations and decisions require consultation. Ottoman history-writing without reference to Ottoman archival documents or assessments based on those documents no longer can be tolerated by those who till the field of Ottoman history.

NOTES

[1]William Langer, *Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890–1902*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1951); and, for example, M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923* (London, 1966). Roderic Davison was a transitional figure who began in European history and, over his career, incorporated increasing amounts of Ottoman sources. Compare his *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, N.J., 1963) with his collection of articles, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774–1923: The Impact of the West* (Austin, Tex., 1990).

[2]For example, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1961); Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal, 1964).

[3]Formerly the Başbakanlık Arşivi, now the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi.

[4]The triumphalist narrative of a linear progression from empire to republic is highlighted in the title of Lewis's book cited in n. 2 and even more explicitly in Stanford J. Shaw and Erel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Volume 2. Reform, Revolution, and Republic. The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge, 1977).

[5]See the *Turcology Annual/Turkologischer Anzeiger*, produced by an international team of bibliographers and published in Vienna.

[6]Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995).

[7]For an English-language version of his fundamental ideas and approach to Ottoman history, see "Ottoman Industry in the Eighteenth Century: General Framework, Characteristics, and Main Trends," in *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1950*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany, N.Y., 1994), 59–86.

[8]Ariel Salzmann first explored this imperial use of tax-farming to control the provinces in her influential "Measures of Empire: Tax Farmers and the Ottoman *Ancien Regime*, 1695–1807" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, N.Y., 1995).

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[9]For such continuities, see, for example, Dina Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge, 1997).

[10]David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 1989).

[11]This assertion is emphasized by its placement on the rear cover of the book's dust jacket and so must be seen as the author's own assessment of their own contribution. See also p. 2.

[12]Except for a smattering of Arabic and Turkish secondary sources, indigenous-language sources are absent from this book.

[13]To the best of my knowledge, the first published catalogue of archival holdings appeared in 1955 and consisted of ninety pages of archival inventory and commentary. A far more complete catalogue followed in 1979, comprising 171 pages of catalogue entries and other archival data. As the classifying and organizing of the archives continued, the catalogue grew accordingly and reached 634 pages in the 1992 edition. These catalogues are readily available and make clear the abundance of material available to scholars researching topics related to Ottoman history. For the most recent editions, see T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşıvleri Genel Müdurlüğü, *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Katalogları Rehberi* (Ankara, 1995), and idem, *Basbakanlik Osmanli Arsivi Rehberi* (Ankara, 2000).

[14]Müdurlüğü, *Rehberi* (1995), 88–93. Recently, a new classification of Foreign Ministry materials has been opened and is mentioned here to guide future researchers. It is the Hariciye Nezareti/siyasi kisim, 1845–1921, relating to Ottoman state relations with various countries, from Sudan to Germany.

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