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CSSH DISCUSSION

Tolerance and Conversion in the Ottoman Empire: A Conversation

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Religious conversion has lately enjoyed a resurgence of scholarly interest. The topic is generating fascinating research across the social sciences and humanities, and it is well represented in recent issues of *CSSH*.[1] Given our curatorial investment in this line of research, we were pleased to hear that the 2008 Albert Hourani Book Award—the Middle East Studies Association's prize for the best new monograph in the field—was shared by two *CSSH* authors, Marc Baer (*CSSH* 46-4) and Ussama Makdisi (*CSSH* 42-1), for books that focus specifically on conversion.

Baer's study, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2008), examines the reign of Sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687), who brought new European territories under Ottoman rule, laid siege to Vienna, and, as a supporter of the Kadizadelis, a pietistic reform movement, encouraged the conversion of Christians and Jews (and Muslims) to an Islam purified of false teachings. Makdisi's book, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 2008), explores the attempts of American missionaries, beginning in 1822, to convert the Christians and Muslims of Greater

[1] A sample from only the last two years would include essays by Alan Strathern (49-2), Ian Copland (49-3), Tijana Krstić (51-1), Matt Tomlinson (51-1), and Esra Özyürek (51-1).

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Syria to Protestant Christianity. This project produced a famous martyr—As'ad Shidyaq, who died in the custody of Maronite clergy—but otherwise yielded far fewer converts than anticipated. Instead, the Protestant venture in Lebanon led to unanticipated cultural interactions that transformed the political sensibilities of both the American missionaries and the Lebanese who attended the churches and educational institutions the missionaries established.

In its commendation, the selection committee for the Hourani Award noted, "Both books are united around the themes of mission and conversion, of Islam and the West, of the present relevance of the historic past. We believe they are great books that are even better when read together." *CSSH* would like to second this invitation to parallel reading, and to provide additional incentive I have asked Baer and Makdisi to reflect on shared themes in their work. In the exchanges that follow, topical and thematic overlaps go hand in hand with sharp distinctions in analytical style, producing insights that will be of use not only to Ottomanists, but to a wide range of scholars concerned with the theory and practice of conversion.

SHRYOCK: I'd like to start with the issue of tolerance in the Ottoman Empire. Your books are set about two hundred years apart. The imperial system of Mehmed IV was still strong and expansionist, unlike the empire that ruled over nineteenth-century Syria, which had already lost substantial ground to European powers. Yet in both periods, religious pluralism was a fact of life for the Ottomans. They seem to have taken for granted a political world in which Jews and Christians would be present in large numbers and would play prominent roles in society.

I see a fascinating kinship in your books, largely because you refuse to treat Ottoman tolerance as a virtue, opting instead to look at challenges, internal and external, to Ottoman systems of toleration. One such challenge was Sultan Mehmed IV's embrace of the puritanical Kadizadeli reform movement, which encouraged the conquest of Christian territories and suppression of non-Kadizadeli variants of Islam. The other was the arrival in Lebanon of Protestant missionaries, whose original goal was to lure people away from Islam and the eastern Christian churches, a kind of "soul poaching" Ottoman authorities clearly found inappropriate and threatening to the social order.

Your main historical characters are placed, in each case, against a backdrop that can be seen as somehow more tolerant, more accepting of religious difference. Clearly this backdrop was not the same in 1660 as it was in 1860, nor does it represent uniquely Ottoman ideals, but I'm curious to know how you would describe this "more tolerant" alternative, which is obviously important, as an ethical point of contrast, to both your studies.

MAKDISI: I would approach this question first by trying to make sense of the difference between toleration and coexistence. Both notions are concerned with difference, but it seems to me that toleration (both its implementation and its

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revocation) was first and foremost a strategy of empire. It was fluctuating and contingent. This is something that scholars of the Ottoman Empire have long recognized. Karen Barkey deals with this topic in her recent book, *Empire of Difference* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), and several other scholars of the Ottoman Empire, such as Tijana Krstić (*CSSH* 51-1) and Stefan Winter, have recently taken it up.

But toleration and coexistence are not to my mind synonymous; they do not ebb and flow together, but exist in a state of perpetual tension. You can have toleration withdrawn for any number of reasons. The coincidence of the Great Fire of 1660 and the advent of Kadizadeli puritanism, which Marc discusses in his book, led to the displacement of Istanbul's Jewish populations, among other things. But events of this kind by no means *actually* preclude coexistence, which I understand to mean a state of being in which different communities (as opposed to Ottoman state ideologues) recognize and adapt to the inevitability of difference.

Coexistence is more difficult to gage, to describe, and to get at through the available sources than is the practice and politics of toleration, especially when the sources present history from the imperial center and from those at the pinnacle of power in this center. One way around this problem, it seems to me, is to move away from regime-centric views of the world and to offer a history of the Ottoman Empire that takes into account simultaneously imperial and provincial/local perspectives, and, above all, to show the contradictions and tensions of empire being played out synchronically as well as diachronically.

Our notion of coexistence, in short, ought to be rescued from the liberal state of mutual respect that many modern polities formally espouse. That framework is now dominant, but it is brittle, and it needs to be historicized. Coexistence can flourish on other terms, and I don't think coexistence simply came to an end with the emergence of puritanical movements such as the Kadizadelis.

SHRYOCK: Or with the appearance of American missionaries committed to the spiritual transformation of Maronites into good Protestants. It seems that a strong conception of "truth," Kadizadeli or Christian, works against an ethos of coexistence, favoring instead the assimilation and transformation of Others. Yet Protestant missionaries never endorsed forced conversion to Christianity, and neither did Kadizadelis to Islam; for me, this stance can only be understood in relation to notions of tolerance toward Others, which in turn makes coexistence a practical (or political) possibility.

BAER: Ussama made an important point about the need to explore Ottoman history simultaneously from imperial and provincial points of view. I agree that there can be benefits to this method in certain eras. If I were writing about late-nineteenth-century Islamic reform movements, it would be productive to compare developments in Istanbul and Cairo. But comparative analysis of this kind can't serve as a general template for doing Ottoman history. It is

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hard to compare ideas of toleration in different Ottoman cities, or in Ottoman and non-Ottoman societies, when we understand very little about developments in each place. *Honored by the Glory of Islam* is focused on the seventeenth century, and there is a real dearth of knowledge about the imperial center during this period. That's why I pay such close attention to how powerful Muslims in Istanbul articulated and implemented the "right" way of being Muslim. This focus enabled me to reconsider what Ottoman tolerance meant during this time, and how palace support for a rigorous expression of Islam affected the lives of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

SHRYOCK: How did you reconsider the issue of tolerance? For many people, this is simply a matter of more tolerance being better than less, and the Ottomans are often depicted as more tolerant than, say, European dynasts. I'm curious to know whether Ussama's notion of coexistence appeals to you, analytically.

BAER: Certainly when compared to neighboring and rival empires, the Ottomans appear to have been far more tolerant of groups such as Jews, who were persecuted elsewhere but took refuge and thrived in Ottoman domains. Ottoman treatment of Jews is usually cited when promoting Ottoman models of tolerance and praising the apparent coexistence of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the early modern empire.

It strikes me, however, that coexistence is probably the wrong term for describing inter-group relations in the early modern empire. Coexistence suggests equality between groups. But in the empire certain groups (women, Christians and Jews, and commoners) were legally subordinated to others (men, Muslims, the military class). Tolerance appears to me as a more useful concept, but only when two conditions are met. First, we need to include a notion of power. Tolerance is based on a state of inequality in which the most powerful party (such as the ruler) decides whether a less powerful group can exist or not and to what extent members of that group are allowed to manifest their difference. A regime can discriminate against certain groups while tolerating their being different. This in fact was how the Ottoman administration of gender, religious, and class difference normally functioned.

The second condition for using the concept of tolerance is to make sure our definition is not limited to how a regime treats minorities. The persecution I explore in *Honored by the Glory of Islam* was mainly directed against Ottoman Muslims in Istanbul. The reign of Mehmed IV was a rare period in Ottoman history during which the sultan and his circle were no longer tolerant of difference, especially among Muslims. They converted to piety and sought to convert other Muslims to their interpretation of Islam. As a consequence, they could no longer suffer the beliefs and practices of most other Muslims. They could not bear other Muslims engaging in ecstatic Sufi rituals, such as the public recitation of God's names, and Muslims who did not interpret

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Islam as the ruling circle did bore the brunt of persecution. Certain Sufi orders and their members, in particular, faced the destruction of their shrines, imprisonment, torture, banishment, and execution. Mehmed IV and his circle also could no longer accept the presence of Jews in palace service unless they converted to Islam, nor could they bear having distinct Jewish space abutting the palace and the latest royal mosque in the heart of Istanbul.

These intolerant attitudes were new. The reign of Sultan Mehmed IV overturned the live and let live attitude that had previously characterized the dominant Ottoman interpretation of Islam. This radical departure from convention had repercussions for Muslims as well as Christians and Jews. The sultan and the pietists defied local sensibilities and breached general propriety and religious discretion by provoking religious controversy among their co-religionists. The bluntness and directness of their missionary zeal produced intra-religious violence where before there had been discretion and acceptance of plurality.

SHRYOCK: This is one point at which I detect strong resonances between your books. The push for conversion is fueled, in each case, by a moral certainty that makes coexistence problematic. Truth becomes the medium in which difference is construed as error, or as a discontinuity that needs mending. In retrospect, these periods of intense moral certainty can seem scandalous to us. The Ottoman elite abandoned Kadizadeli Islam after the failed siege of Vienna in 1683, and contemporary Presbyterians at the American University in Beirut (or Cairo, or at Boğaziçi University in Turkey) find the missionary zeal of nineteenth-century churchmen utterly retrograde. Again, I think this rejection, which almost always entails labeling the rejected movement as intolerant or racist or puritanical, is an intellectual frame common to your books, and it points to underlying dynamics of empire (and faith) we need to understand better.

MAKDISI: I would like to return to this idea, which is important, but I'd first like to insist that our books not be compared too quickly, and that the underlying dynamic you speak of not be contextualized in terms provided by Ottoman imperial history alone. I see the story I tell in *Artillery of Heaven* as a quintessentially nineteenth-century story, in which major societies across the world grappled with a fundamentally similar question: how to overcome deep, often systemic problems of discrimination in an age of citizenship and "enlightenment," and how to do this in the context of extraordinary Western imperialism. To that end, part of what I'm trying to do in the book is get scholars of U.S. history and Ottoman/Arab history to compare what is rarely ever compared, indeed to compare contexts that are thought of as entirely different historical processes (for instance, the nineteenth-century rise of the United States and the decline of the Ottoman Empire).

My constant juxtaposition of U.S. and Ottoman/Arab history sprang from the evidence of missionary encounters that I was following and that brought together Americans and Arabs; but as I was writing my book, I became

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aware of how beneficial it would be, heuristically at least, to think about the nineteenth-century persecution of a community in the Ottoman Empire (the Christians of Damascus in 1860, say) with roughly coeval moments of persecution of blacks, Indians, or Catholics in the United States. Rather than judging Ottomans or Arabs (as so much Orientalist and even recent Ottomanist scholarship on sectarianism has done) against the explicit or implicit assumption of a normative Western enlightenment, I found it far more productive and stimulating to think of the violence of nineteenth-century persecution in the Ottoman Empire as an example of the difficulty of transforming discourses and practices of discrimination into ones of citizenship, difficulties that were faced just as intensely in the United States.

SHRYOCK: I think your approach to comparison has brought separate readerships together in new and productive ways, and it reawakens an interest in things Ottoman that was, in fact, quite well developed in nineteenth-century America. What you're doing is also in line with a kind of transregional analysis we are seeing more of in *CSSH*, one that insists on placing what were once thought of as (innovative) centers and (imitative) peripheries within a single, mutually constituting social field. One of the moral certainties critical theorists now blush at—although this is clearly a minority position—is the stark distinction between East and West, self and other, Christian and Muslim, so essential to the way the early Protestant missionaries in Lebanon saw the world.

MAKDISI: Perhaps because I've found a transregional perspective so useful, I was wondering, Marc, about the claim you make in your book that the Ottoman Empire was "a European empire." I think I understand what you mean in that significant portions of the Ottoman Empire lay in Europe, that the Ottomans were part of a "European political order," and that nineteenth-century scholarship orientalized the Ottomans in an attempt to underscore its supposed peculiarity, but I would ask you to clarify your politics of comparison. Why make this claim? Several other Ottomanists have made it, as if the only way to get the Ottoman Empire to be taken seriously—to gain it historiographical respect in a world of scholarship still dominated by European and American academies—is to make it a European empire when the empire was clearly by 1660 so much more than "European." How, after all, can one describe the empire after 1516 as European without doing significant damage to the extraordinary complexity of an imperial landscape that included Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Mecca, and Medina.

BAER: I use the phrase Ottoman Europe for two reasons. First, Mehmed IV spent his entire reign in continental Europe, waging war against Habsburgs, Romanovs, and Venetians, pushing the frontiers of the empire to Ukraine, Poland, and Crete. I did not narrate events that took place in the Arabophone regions because the worldview of the sultan and his ruling circle was directed

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west. Mehmed IV was depicted as the caesar, and his attempt to capture Vienna, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, must be seen in this light.

The second reason I use the term Ottoman Europe is to emphasize that I am describing and analyzing a trend that is quintessentially an early modern European religious one. Between 1500 and 1700, diverse European peoples, Muslim and Christian, sought to reform the way they worshipped God by returning to the true faith practiced by the first believers, shorn of corrupting innovations. Examples include the German Reformation and the Puritan Movement. Where radical reformists gained influence, societies had to grapple with the consequences when pietism and political power are joined. The Kadizadeli led by Vani Mehmed and supported by Sultan Mehmed IV encouraged the interiorization of religion, spiritual conversion, and a revitalized commitment to the faith. They promoted rationality in religion, stripping ecstatic Islam practiced in Ottoman domains of innovations that they believed ran counter to the practices of the first Muslim community. In this way their efforts were similar to those of the Christian Reformists.

SHRYOCK: What you're describing is a transregional system of convergences. This reformist pattern is akin, in the way you frame it, to the more recent problem of citizenship politics Ussama was just describing, even though the political content is markedly different. You can, in fact, run a line of analysis from Vienna to Istanbul, or from Boston to Beirut, and find a variety of connected historical and political trends.

BAER: This similarity is not just an artifact of analytical style; it is also rooted in our shared focus on groups that attempted to purify their religion and revive what they understood to be its original impulse. We also intersect in exploring the political ramifications of religious conversion. Nevertheless, as I read *Artillery of Heaven*, I kept expecting you to theorize religious conversion; instead, I was surprised to see the text moving in other directions. You discuss cultural imperialism, the history of American missions abroad, or U.S.-Arab encounters. *Artillery of Heaven* is also explicitly pitched toward refuting the theory of the "clash of civilizations." Rather than attack this much criticized idea, I'd like to invite you to describe how *Artillery of Heaven* contributes to the study of religious conversion. It strikes me that As'ad Shidyaq's conversion, and his torture and death at the hands of Maronite clerics, was not "the failed conversion" you allude to in *Artillery of Heaven*'s subtitle, but rather a model conversion when considering the perspective of nineteenth-century American Protestant missionaries.

MAKDISI: I would not be so quick to dismiss the "clash of civilizations" thesis as discredited in scholarly circles and leave it at that; putting aside the fact that all around us there are accounts of U.S.-Middle Eastern relations, or the Middle East more broadly, that are based on some version of the idea propagated by

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Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis and that reach far broader audiences than you or I will with our books, there is another point to be made. We (as scholars) may know that such a theory is untenable; but to work on how cultural clashes actually unfold—that is what my book is about after all—is not something we have often done or, at any rate, done well. Think of the paucity of histories of missions, for example, despite the tremendous source base that exists.

SHRYOCK: The issue of missions brings us back to Marc's question about conversion, which we should discuss more directly. It seems to me that what we call "religious" conversion can never be explained in completely religious terms, or in the terms provided by the religion one leaves or enters. What I admire in both your books is the deftness with which you move beyond the language of conversion provided by Kadizadelis or American missionaries. The Ottomans under Mehmed IV often spent much more effort Islamizing the landscape, turning churches and synagogues into mosques, than they did converting individual Christians and Jews to Islam. The impulse to convert is hard to discern in the historical materials you analyze, Marc, and often it seems that security and dignity are what people sought in the moment of passage into Islam. It is also quite clear that many Lebanese converts were as attracted to an Anglophone education, and to the larger world of cultural opportunities Americans had access to, as they were to specific doctrinal elements of the faith they accepted. I'm wondering, basically, what people are calling for when they ask for a "theory of religious conversion."

BAER: In my case, I've argued that Islamization in the period of Mehmed IV was shaped by the intersection of three modalities of conversion: a turn to piety, or conversion of the self, the conversion of others, and the transformation of sacred space. These three processes can be thought of as intricately related, concentric rings of change set in motion when important members of the dynasty and ruling elite converted to a reformist interpretation of Islam. Linked to this argument is a second one: that conversion is best understood in the context of war, conquest, and changing power relations.

This theory works on multiple scales of experience and analysis. I don't think religious conversion can ever be reduced to psychological, sociological, or cultural terms. We shouldn't discount the pious claims of historical actors. Why doubt that spiritual motivations compel people to change their lives and those of others? As'ad Shidyaq, for one, is an example of a person so committed to his newfound faith that he preferred to die rather than recant in the name of social or cultural belonging.

MAKDISI: I wouldn't say that As'ad preferred to die. Part of what I was showing is how the hagiographic narrative meticulously constructed by American missionaries *subsequent* to As'ad's persecution was at tremendous odds with the convert's own ambivalence. There is less an abstract, universal

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model or theory of conversion at work here as much as there is a historical context—a consciousness of piety, a conversion (although As'ad never used this word), a transformation—that can only be described by taking into account several historical genealogies. One needs to study the intersection of American Congregationalism, Maronite and Vatican reforms, coexistence and tolerance in the Ottoman Empire, and Christian missionary work among Native Americans. These all led to a specific juncture: As'ad's turn to the Protestant faith, a moment that cannot be described or reduced merely to "Ottoman" or "Lebanese" or "American" history.

Whatever a theory of religious conversion might look like, I think it has to be pieced together from a diversity of materials, only some of which can be described, or are experienced, as "religious." One of the main questions I grappled with in writing *Artillery of Heaven* was how to engage with a multi-perspectival view of missionary encounters. It was clear to me that there was an entire dimension of the history of American missions in the Middle East that was missing in the conventional missionary hagiographies and in Arabic anti-missionary treatises: namely, the views of the converts and of local actors more generally. These included the Eastern patriarchs, the Ottoman state, and of course converts such as As'ad Shidyaq and Butrus al-Bustani. My point was not simply to give the other side of the story, but to argue that there was an entire middle ground on which the genealogy of secularism and liberalism in the Ottoman Empire can be upended. Rather than seeing liberalism as an import (the old view, which assumed secularism and liberalism to be unproblematic facts in the West), I wanted to study it as a cross-cultural process in which American missionaries were one crucial, but by no means predominant, element. The only way I could see this was through the juxtaposition of a variety of American and Arab sources.

SHRYOCK: You also were equipped, by these sources, to show how conversion, secularism, and liberalism are part of the same formative discourse, then and now. This insight is the link to citizenship you mentioned earlier. It's the key contrast between your work and Marc's, which is still located in a world of rulers and subjects. This contrast between the models of equality that underlie citizenship and those of inequality that underlie imperial rule stands out vividly in your books. It accounts for the disorienting jolt of insight I experienced when I read them side by side.

Of course, I read the books in circumstances that put heavy constraints on what they could mean, politically. The War on Terror and the expansion of American imperial might around the world, but most oppressively in Muslim regions, will color almost any contemporary reading of your books. I'm wondering how it shaped the writing of them.

MAKDISI: One of the main thrusts of my work was to get beyond the absurd notion of a "clash of civilizations" that has structured so much of recent

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American commentary on the Arab world. I cannot deny that I was thinking about contemporary politics as I wrote my account. But to me the greatest antidote to the totalizing claims of polemicists who exploit history to justify or celebrate the chauvinism of American or Arab or Muslim nationalism is a constant and total (to the best of our abilities) historicizing of both the United States and the Ottoman Empire. I insist on specificity at every turn, and I am careful to talk about some Americans and some Arabs at a particular point in time rather than speak about "civilizations" as such. For that reason I hesitate to label American missionaries "cultural imperialists" because such descriptions tend to obscure, and allow us to evade, the interconnectedness of mission work with what eventually came to be seen as "national" cultures.

SHRYOCK: The imperialist label also fails to explain why the spiritual descendants of the early Christian missionaries in Lebanon, and Egypt, and Turkey are often today stern critics of American foreign policy in the Middle East, now that U.S. policy is many times more imperial than it was before World War II. Also, it fails to explain why Arab Christian Protestantism has produced not only Anglophilia and immigration to America, but also some of the most vocal and effective critiques of Orientalism.

MAKDISI: I'd like to discuss the political implications of *Honored by the Glory of Islam*. What fascinated me most about your book, Marc, is that you put center stage the very question of the Ottoman Empire as an empire. You end with a comparison between Mehmed IV and Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) as two powerful sultans who sought to reassert/reclaim an imperial sovereignty. One of the most remarkable facets of the historiography of the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire, however, is the degree to which Ottomanists writing back against a "decline" thesis, and (correctly) emphasizing the use of Ottoman sources, have overlooked questions of imperial power and the violence of the Ottomans; there are exceptions of course, such as Selim Deringil's *The Well-Protected Domains* (I. B. Tauris, 1999). The Ottoman state, in other words, is treated as a victim of Western imperialism (which on one level it was) but is far less often seen simultaneously as a violent, hegemonic imperial formation in its own right. Rather, the tone of much of the scholarship is far more defensive, if not to say apologetic; there's almost an over-identification with the Ottoman state as part of a concerted effort to write back against Orientalist scholarship. Do you see a similar process at play in the scholarship of the early modern Ottoman Empire, and does it replicate the same political tendencies?

BAER: Confronting Orientalism explains some aspects of the problem, but another important factor is the inability of many scholars to deal, intellectually or professionally, with the skeletons in the Ottoman closet. Scholarship on the late empire still has not come to terms with the events of 1915. Despite the

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brutal end of the Armenians, published books and research and fellowship proposals still promote the entire six hundred year existence of the Ottoman Empire as a model of tolerance and coexistence for the world to emulate.

The failure to assimilate the destruction of the Armenian presence in Anatolia into the mainstream of Ottoman history has to be understood in relation to the long sweep of Ottoman history; it is part of that history. We can't effectively compare tolerance and religious oppression in the Ottoman Empire to the treatment of minorities in other states or empires until Ottoman historiography itself has greater depth. Why were Armenians privileged in the early nineteenth century but deported and massacred a century later? I have yet to read a convincing argument that explains how this change in imperial policy happened. Why were Jews tolerated in the sixteenth century but not in the seventeenth, and why did Greek Christians become increasingly influential during the same period?

Understanding the seventeenth century will help us create the larger historical contexts we need to address these questions more convincingly. It is a crucial epoch, and it is still understudied, despite events that radically changed all aspects of Ottoman society and challenge the conventional wisdom promoted by those writing about the period up to 1600. These include the first execution of a reigning sultan, the movement of the capital from Istanbul to Edirne, the religious revival, Sunnification of Islam, suppression of some Sufi orders, the revivification of war on the path of God, the greatest territorial expansion of the empire, the ending of the recruiting of Christians to fill the ranks of the army and administration, an increase in the scale of conversion to Islam, the messianic movement of Rabbi Shabbatai Tzevi, and the undercutting of the Jewish elite in favor of the Orthodox Christian elite to serve in sensitive positions as part of an imperial policy of playing the elite of minority groups against one another.

SHRYOCK: Your portrayal of the seventeenth century is especially suggestive in the way it links conversion with Ottoman imperial expansion. It would be easy (and more predictable) to give a negative coloring to Mehmed IV's understanding of jihad, or simply to downplay the whole enterprise, but you never do this. Instead, you create a much more challenging political context for the reader by presenting, in an unapologetic way, the Otherness of Mehmed IV's world, as a Muslim, European, and imperial world. When you describe the violent destruction of Christian cities as a form of enlightenment, which is how Ottomans saw it, you force us to see conversion as a medium of dominance, as a sense of moral superiority asserted, at great cost, on behalf of others. This stance, I think, is close to the way many scholars now portray conversion to Christianity in recent periods of European colonial expansion. I also see likenesses, and perhaps other readers will as well, between Ottoman expansionism and the march of self-avowedly secular and democratic imperial formations, which destroy their opponents and lay down the infrastructure of neoliberal governance long before they admit their subjects to the status of democratic equals.

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BAER: Readings of that kind are always possible, and one has to be mindful of the way they can be used, effectively and misleadingly. The more difficult politics, perhaps, is located in my attempt to take religious people seriously and on their own terms, whether it agrees with our contemporary politics or not. While *Artillery of Heaven* has as an explicit aim the refutation of the "clash of civilizations" thesis, *Honored by the Glory of Islam* unabashedly depicts pious Muslims converting people and places in Europe. It may be more fashionable today to present the Ottomans in a kind, gentle, nostalgic light, and even compare them favorably to Americans on the western frontier. It may be politically fruitful to discuss the "concord of civilizations" and pursue interfaith dialogue. It may be wiser politically to depict a past in which diverse peoples engaged in cooperation rather than conflict. And it may not be a convenient time to devote a monograph to an early modern Ottoman sultan who linked conversion and conquest and personally waged war against Christian-majority empires in order to conquer their territories and transform them into Muslim spaces. These aspects of Mehmed IV's reign will attract more of the readers' attention than the fact that the sultan was mainly focused on reforming co-religionists at home by promoting an Islam which he believed did not stray from the beliefs and practices of the first Muslims.

The Ottomans were not us, they were not who we want them to be, and they were more than how they depicted themselves for posterity. It is best to honestly depict what they thought they achieved and the nature of their society when they ruled much of what is today divided into Europe and the Middle East. Silencing inconvenient aspects of the past means we will never come to terms with it.

MAKDISI: I agree, but it is impossible to resurrect the Ottomans or anyone else as they were, as if we were not utterly limited by the sources we choose to focus on, or the manner in which we were educated in various schools of historiography, or by the politics of comparison that shapes our horizon. I hear the call from fellow academics to "take religion seriously." Insofar as this call means we should not ignore elements of faith and piety, I would obviously agree, but beyond that, what does it really mean? How does one distinguish between faith and the social world to which it is inextricably bound? Where does one draw the line between the certainties of faith and the inherent skepticism that underlies critical analysis? Is religion a thing "out there" that can be grasped, and how? One would have thought that, in Middle Eastern studies, the two things that have been analyzed to death are religion and religious texts!

BAER: Yet we've both chosen to write books about religious conversion, and it would appear that neither you nor I believe scholars in our field have convincingly handled the topic. We're still trying to make the study of religion

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(and religious texts) central to our understanding of American, European, and Middle Eastern history.

SHRYOCK: I see deeper commonalities. I think Marc's commitment to portraying the Ottomans as distinctive, yet subject to the same religious trends that defined Reformation Europe, is actually enhanced by the kind of analysis that pervades *Artillery of Heaven*, in which societies that imagine themselves to be starkly Other are, over time, brought together through difficult, sometimes lethal modes of interaction, then find themselves unable to remember or talk about how they have shaped each other. This aspect of forgetting, useful or debilitating as it might be in everyday politics, is what I think both your books effectively unsettle.

MAKDISI: I'm sympathetic to your point, Andrew. But as much as I appreciate your reading of our books together, I still feel that their being brought together in this forum raises an interesting question about how Middle Eastern societies get compared across time. I do not think, for example, that a book on seventeenth-century dynastic politics in England would be compared to a history of missionary encounters in nineteenth-century British India, although both may deal with piety and conversion.

SHRYOCK: A comparison of that kind is not as implausible as it seems. If you read the opening pages of Webb Keane's book on conversion, *Christian Moderns* (University of California Press, 2007; reviewed in *CSSH* 50-3), you'll see him jump from English dynastic politics in the seventeenth century to the ideas Calvinist missionaries took with them to Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. I think a good comparison is often one that looks initially odd, but which creates new insights when carried off intelligently. When done well, comparison resembles conversion, or translation; but it is distinctive in the extent to which it requires us to problematize the backdrop against which things move and change as we analyze them. I hope I'm not peculiar in thinking that your books, read together, are potentially of great use to scholars who want to create larger analytical frames in which to think about conversion and tolerance. The fact that both books are about Middle Eastern societies is important, and their placement within Ottoman worlds does give them a family resemblance, but it's really the transregional frames that I find most exciting. Citizenship was a common problem for Ottomans and Americans in the nineteenth century; religious reformation movements were a shared reality for Ottomans and Europeans in the seventeenth century. To understand conversion in either period, the key points of comparison cannot be the Ottoman Empire or the West as separate cultural domains. The same is true for a comparison across time. It is less likely to be reductive and geographically confining if we keep in mind that transregional frames have histories of their own and favor certain kinds of historiography.

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MAKDISI: What I think we need more of is historiographical juxtaposition, not comparison in the way that the field has traditionally done it. We should avoid situations in which we are trying to argue that the Ottomans or the Arabs are like "Europe" or "the West." Rather, I would advocate for a move away from normative notions of Europe or the West, and instead juxtapose what we acknowledge beforehand are fundamentally different historical contexts, but at least see what common elements can be discerned from bringing together disparate historiographies that have normally not been compared. Juxtaposition I see as heuristic; comparison, more often than not, political. Our common aim as scholars, to my mind at least, is indeed to move away from the certainties and the chauvinism of religious, nationalist, and civilizational talk. At the same time, we cannot predict how others will read or characterize our work. This effectively should instill in us a little humility, if not about our desire to challenge conventional wisdom, then at least about our ability to unsettle it.

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