From Decline to Transformation: Reflections on a New Paradigm in Ottoman History

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Çöküşten Dönüşüme: Osmanlı Tarihinde Yeni Bir Paradigma Üzerine Düşünceler

Öz ■ Bu makale, Osmanlı araştırmaları alanında yeni ortaya çıkmış bir paradigma olarak "dönüşüm" kavramını ele almaktadır. Öncelikle, 20. yüzyılın son otuz yılında ortaya konan 16 ve 18. yüzyıl Osmanlı araştırmalarında geniş çapta yer bulan gerileme teorilerinin eleştirisi yapıldı. İkinci olarak ise son yirmi yılda yayımlanan pek çok makale ve kitapta 19. yüzyılın, dönüşümün yeni bir altın çağı olarak nitelendirilmesi mercek altına alındı. Bu makale mevcut paradigmanın özgünlüğünü, yaygın ancak basmakalıp temalar bağlamında sorguladıktan sonra paradigmanın kullanışlılığını meydan okuma ve imkanlar çerçevesinde ölçmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu paradigmada, dönüşümcülük gerilemecilikten kapsamlı bir analiz sunamadığı sebebiyle ayrışıyorsa da, kullanmaktan kaçındığını iddia etmesine rağmen ona bağımlı olduğu iki baskın özelliğini de taklit eder: -müessese tarihinin kadir-i mutlaklığı ve adını dahi anmadığı bir modernizm kuramı-. Kısacası bu yeni beyan, bir paradigma dönüşümü iddiasının cazibesini kullanarak eski tarih yazımını yeniden üretmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı araştırmaları; çöküş ve gerileme; dönüşüm kavramı; modernizasyon; paradigmatik yenileme.

"Nothing is born or perishes, but already existing things combine, then separate anew."

Anaxagoras of Clazomenae

"Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed."

Antoine Laurent Lavoisier

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Only the second quote has remained famous. A concise and striking reformulation of the former by the father of the law of conservation of mass, it encapsulates a science that is much more complex than the principle which had supposedly founded it, namely thermodynamics. Why apply it to an empire that – if we are to believe the so-called Orientalist literature – destroyed more than it created, consumed more than it produced, and emulated more than it invented? Simply because it offers a perspective on an apparently simple, yet dominant problem in Ottoman history: the substitution of one paradigm (decline) for another (transformation) that took place in the last quarter of the twentieth century and has been backed up since by increasing numbers of studies, predominantly published in North America.

Over the past decade, *transformation* has become a watchword, as rarely debated as the one that it replaced was condemned. Historians have devoted books and articles to the concept without thinking to define it in other than general terms. A global process, a collective becoming – transformation is what happened to the Empire after its "construction" or "formation".[1] The term is alternately taken in the sense of change, becoming or mutation, as a narrative, or discursive element, and as an analytical frame, a historian's concept. It is the subject of estimations and evaluations, made to refer to both gradual and radical, in-depth and incomplete developments. It all depends on the chronological framework, the forms it takes and the turning points that it consolidates.[2] It is the subject of a debate that is ongoing to this day. This echoes reflections by specialists in other geographical areas.

1 Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, "General Introduction", Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. XXXVII-XLIII, p. XXXVII; Olivier Bouquet, review of Virginia A. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 57/1 (2010), pp. 221-224.

2 Jane Hathaway, "Problems of Periodization in Ottoman History: The Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 20/2 (1996), pp. 25-31; Karl Barbir, "The Changing Face of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Past and Future Scholarship", *Oriente Moderno, Nuova Serie*, 18 (79)/1 (1999), pp. 253-267; Linda Darling, "Another Look at Periodization in Ottoman History", *Turkish Studies Association Journal*, 26 (2002), pp. 19-28; Jane Hathaway, "Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Ottoman History", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 19/1 (2004), pp. 29-53; Dror Ze'evi, "Back to Napoleon: Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 119/1 (2004), pp. 73-94.

In the case of Japan, declinism is a common method of understanding history. The majority of Confucian thinkers described their eras as being marked by the degeneration of morals and institutions, as a result of the virtues of their dynasty's founders being forgotten. Hence a narrative of reform that ritually takes on the appearance of a reactionary will to return to the past. This was the case even for the Meiji era which, far from being presented as a revolution, was considered as a period of "restoration".[3] In the case of China, readings of the fall of dynasties, particularly the Ming and Qing dynasties, as a consequence of decline gave rise to debates in economic history. Collapse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was evident, but controversy remained regarding the possible involution of the Chinese economy from the end of the eighteenth century: whilst for some specialists, Chinese economy and society had entered into an irretrievable period of impoverishment due to their very structures, others believed that the Chinese had been the victims of a more efficient Western economy.[4]

In the case of Ottoman history, as in others, the concept of *transformation* refers more specifically to the pre-modern period.[5] Yet since the paradigm of decline influenced historians' approaches to subsequent centuries, its recent substitution has produced effects which also concern the nineteenth century. I would argue that examining these effects helps us to study this period and to formulate new questions. What is to be understood by transformation? Does the concept imply that the sum of the levels of production and wealth were not all in decline and that other developments are visible, assuming that historians have the means to measure them? Has Ottoman history modified one of its main paradigms for reasons that are specific to the field, or as a result of developments at work in other areas of history? Should such a change be the cause for celebration, conjuring up

3 Conrad Totman, *A History of Japan* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Francine Hérail (ed.), *L'Histoire du Japon. Des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Hermann, 2010); Pierre-François Souyri, *Nouvelle histoire du Japon* (Paris: Perrin, 2010).

4 Ray Huang, *Taxation and Finance in Sixteenth Century Ming China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Richard von Glahn, *The Economic History of China, from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

5 See Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 77-93.

the possibility of a third way, between decline and transformation, or should it be, more cautiously, set aside?

Decline is dead…

Bookended by the "Classical Age" (1300-1600) and the era of modernisation, decline characterised an inexorable process, barely hindered by the first attempts in the Tulip era (1718-1730) and the reforms of the reign of Selim III (1789-1807). Specialists fell in with this concept as best they could until the mid-1970s, when theories of modernisation began to run out of steam. Over the following years, social and economic history produced results that contradicted the *topos* of the Empire's generalised decline.

Decline therefore began its decline, completing it twenty years later.[6] The term is currently only used to refer to a given drop in production or a demographic downturn. It no longer refers to a period in general, let alone to the predicted fall of the "sick man of Europe", as it was known in the nineteenth century. In the absence of an alternative model,[7] a number of critical perspectives and counterproposals were formulated. Amongst the latter, let us focus on those that will lead us to questions of transformation:

1/ A refusal of the projection of categories ("advancement", "progress", "delay", "failure") developed by ideologues from nation states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against imperial despotism.[8]

2/ A critique of the recurrent transfer of categories of actor (such-and-such a traveller evokes the decline of the Janissary corps) towards researchers' analytical frameworks (such-and-such historian is inspired to make Janissaries the privileged symptom of a generalised decline).[9] Intellectual history has emphasised the

6 Mustafa Armağan (ed.), *Osmanlı Tarihini Yeniden Yazmak: Gerileme Paradigmasını Sonu* (Istanbul: Timaş, 2011).

7 Darling, "Another", p. 19; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

8 Kemal H. Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3 (1972), pp. 243-281, p. 243.

9 On the Celali rebellions depicted as alterations in the tımar system, see Mustafa Akdağ, *Celâlî İsyanları (1550-1603)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Yayınları, 1963). Also see Rhoads Murphey, "Review Article. Mustafa Ali and the Politics

importance of conducting a critique of the concepts used in chronicles, treatises and pamphlets before reading effective realities into them.[10]

3/ An acknowledgement of a possible discrepancy between political dysfunction (in the Ottoman case, for example, endemic, sometimes structural corruption) and demographic, economic or social phenomena (the Ottoman population doubled in the midst of the decline, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century).

4/ An emphasis on the relative and non-absolute nature of decline. Historians specialised in the Ottoman economy have brought to light a succession of cycles of decline and phases of stabilisation.[11] For instance, real wages were indeed lower in 1750 than in 1500, but more marked decreases took place elsewhere, namely in Western Europe, and levels in Istanbul were comparable to those in several major European cities.[12] It was especially in the second half of the eighteenth century that the average income per head began to diverge from that of most European countries.[13] In the same way, purchasing power, the stability of the price index or the degree of military innovation reached lower levels in comparison to European standards over the course of several decades in the nineteenth century (which were nevertheless associated with State modernisation) than those observed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[14]

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of Cultural Despair", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 21 (1989), pp. 243-255, pp. 245-246.

10 For a close examination of 16th-17th century *Nasihatname*, see Mehmet Öz, *Kanun-ı Kadimin Peşinde: Osmanlı'da Çözülme ve Gelenekçi Yorumcuları (XVI. Yüzyıldan XVIII. Yüzyıl Başlarına)* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005). For a critical approach of the terminology used in the *ıslahatname* genre, see Coşkun Yılmaz, "Osmanlı Siyaset Düşüncesi Kaynakları ile İlgili Yeni Bir Kavramsallaştırma: Islahatnameler", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 1/2 (2003), pp. 299-338.

11 Ahmet Tabakoğlu, *Gerileme Dönemine Girerken Osmanlı Maliyesi* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1985); Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi (XVIII. yy'dan Tanzimat'a Mali Tarih*) (Ankara: Alan Yayıncılık, 1986).

12 Şevket Pamuk and Süleyman Özmucur, "Real Wages and the Standards of Living in the Ottoman Empire, 1469-1914", *Journal of Economic History*, 62/2 (2002), pp. 293-321.

13 K. Kivanç Karaman and Şevket Pamuk, "Ottoman State Finances in European Perspective, 1500-1914", *Journal of Economic History*, 70/3 (2010), pp. 593-629, p. 594.

14 Şevket Pamuk, "Prices in the Ottoman Empire, 1469-1914", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004), pp. 451-468.

5/ A disputing of the strict opposition between "decline" (seen in relation to Islam, as a civilisation, and to tradition) and "progress" (associated with the West and with modernity). Interestingly enough, this discussion extended beyond the close-knit circle of Ottoman historians, feeding into a wider debate. An increasing number of North American specialists in the 1980s began to distance themselves from B. Lewis' model of "modern Turkey" (that of irreversible development through Westernisation) to rally behind E. Said's critique of orientalism.[15] When the former published *What Went Wrong?* in 2002, a colleague from the University of Michigan, J. Cole, strongly criticised his approach: "Lewis creates a problematic West/Islam dichotomy virtually everywhere".[16] 2002 marked another important change: the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) came to power in Turkey. Contemporary historians, engaged in a reflection on the parallel developments of Kemalist political change and official historiography since the 1930s, were compelled to take this change into account to further distort the *telos* of modernisation.[17] The title of a book by C. V. Findley is revelatory of this rearranging of opposites, introducing a term (*Islam*) that had rarely been associated with those following it before: *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism and Modernity. A History, 1789-2007*. Islam had been invited to the wedding between Turkey and modernity, without the second being modified in relation to what it had been under Kemalism.[18] New attention was given to hypotheses formulated over the preceding decades, which had not been paid much heed at the time: that some members of the ulema had supported reforms in the nineteenth century and that reputedly reactionary sultans (such as Abdülhamid II) were in fact committed reformers.[19]

15 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Erik J. Zürcher "The Rise and Fall of 'Modern' Turkey: Bernard Lewis's *Emergence* Fifty Years On", Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 41-54.

16 "Review of Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)", *Global Dialogue*, 27 (January 2003).

17 Reşat Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities", Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), pp. 15-36.

18 Carter V. Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

19 Uriel Heyd, "The Ottoman 'Ulema' and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Mahmud II", Uriel Heyd (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), pp. 63-96; Richard L. Chambers, "Ahmed Cevdet Paşa: The

Strikingly, the critical theories of decline did not involve any in-depth or coordinated reflection with specialists of contemporary Middle Eastern societies.[20] Furthermore, they did not apply beyond the nineteenth century (the preserve of historians of modernisation) and were based more on a reading of the sources than on a comparative reflection in the human and social sciences.[21] None, for example, seem to have been inspired by the proposals formulated by anthropologists (including Turkologists) against the ideological foundations of universal progress conducted by the West.[22] Moreover, the critique of decline left aside reflections that had been formulated in other areas (in Latin America, for example), associated with countries that had undergone similar ideological debates.[23]

… Long live transformation

The search for an alternative model, that would be more focused on the study of transformations, began in the early 1970s. The rereading of the *timar* (a non-transferrable land allowance attributed in exchange for military services), an issue that was then central to modern Ottoman history and an exemplary illustration of the thesis of decline, was one of the first opportunities.[24] From 1980,

Formative Years of an Ottoman Transitional" (doctoral dissertation), Princeton University, 1968; Engin D. Akarlı, "The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggles, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics under Abdülhamid II (1876-1909): Origins and Solutions" (doctoral dissertation), Princeton University, 1976.

20 Timothy Mitchell (ed.), *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

21 Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

22 Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Chris Hann, *Turkish Region: State, Market & Social Identities on the East Black Sea Coast* (Oxford: School of American Research Press, 2001); Deniz Kandiyoti, "Introduction: Reading the Fragments", Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber (eds.), *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 1-21.

23 For a summary of the impact of the revolutionary paradigm on Latin American historiography, see Pedro Pérez Herrero (ed.), *La «izquierda» en América Latina* (Madrid: Ed. Pablo Iglesias, 2006); Verónica Oikion Solano, Eduardo Rey Tristan (ed.), *El estudio de las luchas revolucionarias en América Latina (1959-1996): Estado de la cuestión* (Zamora-Santiago de Compostela: El Colegio de Michoacán/Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2014).

24 Douglas Howard, "The Ottoman Timar System and its Transformation, 1563-1656" (doctoral dissertation), Indiana University, 1987.

several historians were able to show that the development of the *timar* regime was more akin to a long transformation than to a decline, extending until the nineteenth century, if not beyond.[25] These kinds of analyses were subsequently applied to other institutions, such as the army and the tax system, which were no longer presented in terms of decline and foretold collapse, but rather in terms of permanent transformation. If there was "decline" in the army (in the sense of an accelerated erosion followed by a loss of production capacity), it did not begin before the nineteenth century.[26] Similarly, taxes were not to be seen as a system dominated by prevarication and patronage. Taxation was a tool that the central administration used, thereby transforming extraordinary taxes into regular taxes, in order to support the collection of the *cizye,*[27] of leasing resources and of fixed lump sum tax payments (*maktu*).[28]

This rereading of the role of the State intersected with new reflections in global history:[29] as in other countries, the financial administration adapted to the needs of the time and to developments in the military machine.[30] In the Ottoman case, the "transformation of the army[31]" and the "transformations in the system of taxation"[32] both operated as "structural reorganizations".[33] "In the seventeenth century, militarization became the most significant transformation in the countryside".[34] As a result, historians decided there was no more room

25 Nathalie Clayer, "Note sur la survivance du système des timâr dans la région de Shkodër au début du XX^{e} siècle", *Turcica*, 29 (1997), pp. 423-431.

26 Jonathan Grant, "Rethinking the Ottoman 'Decline': Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, 15th to 18th Centuries", *Journal of World History*, 10/1 (1999), pp. 179-201.

27 Poll tax collected from non-Muslims for the protection of the sultan.

28 Linda Darling, *Revenue-Raising & Legitimacy: Tax Collection & Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 299.

29 Patrick O'Brien and Bartolome Yun-Casalilla (eds.), *The Rise of Fiscal States: A Global History, 1500-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

30 Rhoads Murphey, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Ottoman Administrative Theory and Practice during the Late Seventeenth Century", *Poetics Today*, 14/2 (1993), pp. 419-443.

31 Linda Darling, "Public Finances: The Role of the Ottoman Centre," Suraiya Faroqhi (ed.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3: *The Later Ottoman Empire 1603–1839* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 118-131, p. 118.

32 Darling, *Revenue*, p. 301.

33 Darling, *Revenue*, p. 304.

34 Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route of State Centralization* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 164.

left for decline as an analytical tool, drawing a junction between the "Classical age" and the "post-Classical age".[35] Among others, S. Faroqhi chose to "adopt the more neutral term "transformation" for what happened in the political life of the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire. This term allows for a variety of divergent trends, and does not imply that any deviation from the standards of an idealized "Süleymanic age" is equivalent to deterioration".[36] This means that in both periods, the Ottoman Empire was governed by a "military-fiscal State": the conquest of new territory was considered to be the primary means of ensuring the production of wealth (military imperialism); the central administration aimed to constantly maximise public revenue for reasons other than economic ones (fiscalism). It also means that in the long-term, an "Ottoman economic mind" (H. İnalcık) determined the actions that were undertaken, the predominant concern of ensuring the wellbeing of the community, and the equitable redistribution of revenue.[37]

In this perspective, the "classical age" corresponds to "a well-defined, distinct period with an autocratic centralist government and a command economy".[38] "The story of the Ottoman Empire can be told as that of the transformation from a rather small house of nomadic conquest into an established house of rule relying on strong patrimonial guidelines".[39] In comparison, the seventeenth century appears as a time of "crisis and change" (S. Faroqhi), uprisings, monetization of the economy and growing importance of vizier and pasha households.[40] This said, the Ottomans played a full part in the construction and "territorialisation" of the Mediterranean space,[41] implementing an inventive, pragmatic and often aggressive imperial policy, which established and then consolidated the foundations of their power. Furthermore, many historians consider that a new age (a "middle

35 Darling, *Revenue,* p. 16; Hathaway, "Problems"; Hathaway, "Rewriting".

36 Suraiya Faroqhi, "Crisis and Change, 1590-1699", İnalcık and Quataert (eds.), *An Economic,* pp. 413-622, p. 553.

37 Halil İnalcık, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 44-54.

38 Quataert and İnalcık, "General", p. XXXVII.

39 Barkey, *Bandits*, p. 26.

40 Mehmet Genç, "17. Yüzyıl Dönüşümüne Genel Bakış", Açılış Konuşması, *17. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Kriz ve Dönüşüm III. Çalıştay: Kriz ve Değişmeler*, ODTÜ, Ankara, 7-9 Şubat 2013.

41 Barkey, *Empire*, pp. 245-252.

period"[42]) started after the failed siege of Vienna in 1683, if not the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. Between "the crisis of the 1683-99 war"[43] and the beginning of the Tulip era, they identify a period of cultural renaissance and borrowings from both East and West. From this time, "the political structure evolved steadily, taking new forms in a process that should be seen as transformation but not decline".[44]

In the eighteenth century, there were increasing challenges: the sultan was forced to fight simultaneously against Austria, Venice and Russia. The authorities had to deploy considerable means in order to prevent an influx into saturated urban areas of populations fleeing war. Luckily, they could use relays that were usefully called upon, with local notables (*ayan*) at the forefront.[45] These notables turned out to be invaluable, combining all the important activities: lenders, tax collectors, tax farmers, landowners, property owners, merchants, and commercial intermediaries. At the end of the eighteenth century, Selim III launched an attack on the Janissaries, who had been the symbols of decline for two centuries. He was nevertheless governing alongside a "generation of crisis" that was unable to shake off the weight of Ottoman "tradition".[46] Once deposed in 1807, the pioneering autocrat paid the price of his aborted reform and failure to enter into contemporary modernity with his life. His reign, which began in 1789 – a happy coincidence for those historians wishing to highlight the impact of the French revolution on the dissemination of new ideas and references throughout the Empire – is part of a history of openness to the West.

Interestingly enough, this period has also been coined as transitional. The reign of Abdülhamid I (1774-1789) has been integrated to the historiography of transformation, whilst the reign of Mahmud I (1730-1754) has been inscribed in the continuation of major innovations implemented under his direct predecessor,

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42 Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj, "Theorizing in Historical Writing Beyond the Nation-State: Ottoman Society in the Middle Period", Ingeborg Baldauf and Suraiya Faroqhi (eds.), *Armağan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze* (Prague: Enigma Corporation, 1994), pp. 1-18, p. 16.

43 Faroqhi, "Crisis", p. 553.

44 Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire. 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 37.

45 Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699-1812", İnalcık and Quataert (eds.), *An Economic,* pp. 637-758, p. 637.

46 Cristoph Neumann, "Political and Diplomatic Developments", Faroqhi (ed.), *The Cambridge*, pp. 44-62, p. 57.

Ahmed III (1703-1730).[47] Moreover, such retroactive search for the origins of the reforms meets a historiographical trend dedicated to delineating the fate of an "Ancien Régime" through the scope of fiscal change.[48] Between the generalisation of the farming system in the 1580s and the Sublime Porte attempts to bring it to an end in the 1840s, this regime was enhanced by the institution of revenue contracts held for the life of the contractors (*malikâne*) in 1695. Building on this framework, "long-term institutional decentralization may well be a viable strategy, in fact an integral part, of the socio-organizational evolution of the modern state."[49]

These chronological issues had two consequences: on the one hand, the meeting of a long nineteenth century (1789-1914) and a long eighteenth century (1695-1808 for some, 1699-1812 for others) maintained the transitory status of Selim III's reign towards modernity; on the other hand, the thesis of the *ancien regime* laid a fiscal, measurable foundation for theories of transformation, and prefigured the inaugural period of reform: the *Tanzimat*.

The nineteenth century: "the age of transformation"

The paradigm of decline described the modernisation of institutions as the State's last bid before its final "collapse" in 1918-1922. From the perspective of transformation, the institutions persisted and became corrupt, to the point that they became "problematic".[50] The Janissaries are no doubt the most emblematic example. These soldiers are designated in a number of chronicles as the problematic institution *par excellence*, against which all attempts failed. The remedy was radical, and in the image of the problem: in 1826, every last one was eliminated. This "Auspicious Event" (*vaka-ı hayriye*) in the eyes of the chroniclers paved the way for others: in the same year, the first ministries were created (war,

47 Murat Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul: Transformation and Modernisation of a City* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 1; Uğur Kurtaran, *Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı: Sultan I. Mahmud ve Dönemi, 1730-1754* (Ankara: Atıf, 2014); "Lalenin ve İsyanın Gölgelediği Yıllar. I. Mahmûd Dönemi (1730-1754)", Istanbul, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 26-27 sept. 2014; Fatih Yeşil, *Aydınlanma Çağında Bir Osmanlı Kâtibi: Ebubekir Râtib Efendi (1750-1799)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2011).

48 Ariel Salzmann, "An Ancien Régime Revisited: Privatization and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire", *Politics and Society*, 21/4 (1993), pp. 393- 424.

49 Salzmann, "An Ancien Régime", p. 394.

50 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *La construction sociale de la réalité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1996), p. 161.

pious foundations). The State began its modernisation. Yet the discrediting of the theory of decline crippled this sequence of events, whilst in parallel, theories of modernisation/Westernisation connected to the study of the nineteenth century were beginning to be undermined.[51] If modernisation did not emerge against a backdrop of the decline of institutions and of power, then everything was being transformed.

As summarised by Marc Aymes, *Tanzimat* = modernity + process.[52] In post-WWI historiography, the three elements were closely connected – with the period of 1878-1922 (associated with the authoritarian power of the sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), the suspension of the Constitution and pan-Islamism) serving as a foil to Kemalist ideology in between the two wars. Yet in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the third element was dissociated from the two others: the *Tanzimat* remained the period of "reforms" (*ıslahat devri*) *par excellence*, even though some historians recognised that processes of change (*usul-i cedid*, "new principles") had marked other eras. Subsequently, the reign of Abdülhamid II was integrated into the history of State modernisation.[53] Prior to the period, Selim III and Mahmud II were associated with the implementation of "traditional" reforms.[54]

The pursuit of a political history of the "modernising autocratic government"[55] enabled a three-part reflection. Firstly, the exploration of objects specific to the nineteenth century (political representation, the emergence of nationalisms) – the

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51 Raymond Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique", *Democratization*, 13/3 (2006), pp. 373–395; Olivier Bouquet, "Is It Time to Stop Speaking about Ottoman Modernisation?", Marc Aymes, Élise Massicard and Benjamin Gourisse (eds.), *Order and Compromise: Patterns of Government and Administration in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 45-67.

52 Marc Aymes, "Dissipation de l'État: l'Impensé des institutions ottomanes", *Workshop Servir l'État en Turquie*, Paris, EHESS, 5 Dec. 2008.

53 Stanford Shaw, "Sultan Abdül-Hamid II: Last Man of the Tanzimat", *Tanzimat'ın 150 Yıldönümü Uluslararası Sempozyumu (Bildiriler), 25-27 Aralık 1989* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, Milli Kütüphane Başkanlığı, 1991), pp. 179-197, p. 179.

54 Stanford Shaw, "Some Aspects of the Aims and Achievements of the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Reformers", R. Polk and R. L. Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 29-39, p. 30-31.

55 Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 193.

thesis of a "political nation" constituted from the end of the sixteenth century having failed to convince specialists.[56] Secondly, integration into a history of modernisation, with the transport revolution, industrialisation and the emergence of a banking sector – without the usual perspectives being much modified by the attention paid to classic studies (K. Polanyi for example) or new proposals in global history. And thirdly, the validity of the analytical categories that had been used up until that point.

The last point is an important one. The Ottoman State produced and left behind an enormous quantity of documents. A majority of historians see in these documents the proof of the efficiency of reforms. Others, in a minority, question whether the "innumerable statuses, regulations, laws and decrees" were ever "translated into action". What if it had only been a "paper reform", with no concrete application in terms of public policy[57]? Let us examine this discrepancy by means of two examples which mark the opening of the *Tanzimat* in different ways: the first as a turning point, the second as a new era.

1/ Following the signing of treaties between the Empire and several countries, between 1838 and 1841, a free trade system was established. Many of the obstacles to importing and exporting were lifted (namely exceptional taxes, which were particularly high in times of war). The regime of capitulations was relaxed and ensured great freedom of action for Europeans: on the one hand, import taxes were fixed at 5% and export taxes at 12%; on the other hand, although Ottomans continued to pay internal taxes of 8%, foreign merchants were exempt from these. It appeared that these measures produced significant effects. For two decades, the terms of trade rose (the ratio of the index of exported products in relation to the index of costs of imported products was positive). External commerce quadrupled between 1830 and 1870 and was multiplied by more than ten between 1840 and 1914. Between 1840 and 1914, the level of exports increased ninefold, and imports tenfold. Great Britain was the first to benefit, representing 40% of international trade in the country in the middle of the century. As for the Ottoman Empire, it took full advantage of the mid-century economic boom to develop its industrial sector.

56 B. Tezcan identified a military corporation struggling for the recognition of its status against the dynasty's absolutism which, with its constitutional components, shared some similarities with the British parliament (Tezcan, *The Second*, p. 5, p. 11, p. 30, p. 232).

57 Marc Aymes, "La lettre saisit l'esprit. Histoire probatoire d'un programme de réforme", *Cahiers du Centre de recherche historique*, 45 (2010), pp. 75-93, pp. 77-78.

2/ Let us now look at the imperial *Gülhane* rescript. Declaimed by the Grand Vizir on November 3rd, 1839, the text is solemn, dense, and precise. It begins with the observation that the Empire had been suffering from continual impoverishment for a century and a half. It sets out the principles of the political action to come in order to restore the State's prosperity: applying the law of Islam to ensure the safety of the subjects; guaranteeing the rights and property of the subjects of the sultan, regardless of their status or religious affiliation. It then enumerates the measures to be taken: abolishing leasing and establishing a centralised fiscal administration; establishing a system for conscription; instituting a new penal code to eliminate arbitrary measures; generalising the salary system for civil servants in order to reduce corruption. Finally, it calls upon the new councils and competent authorities to implement these dispositions. According to an abundant literature, the decree had a significant impact in the political field and beyond. It presented the framework for three processes which were initially convergent and gradually became inseparable: the modernisation of institutions, the secularisation of political ideology, and the Westernisation of cultural references as social customs. The concept of "Ottoman reforms" refers to all of this at once: the institutional field of a new category of elites, ideally receiving a regular salary instead of taking bribes, and considering themselves more as civil servants of the State than servants of the sultan-caliph; Muslims, Jews and Christians wanting to renounce the use of classical languages in favour of French.

In short, it is the history of "modernity" in action. The difficulty lies in finding indications of these changes and ranking them in order of magnitude. It is an arduous task to determine the degrees of application of the principle of recognition of the rights of non-Muslims defined in the ruling of 1839.[58] The hardest thing is to identify what never happened, an equality that was affirmed with the law of nationality in 1869, which instituted one category of subjects regardless of their religion. Research has established that this was never applied, especially in terms of access to military professions. Modernist historians therefore offer a way out. Rather than breaking one's back following the trajectories of an emerging modernisation, especially since it eventually failed, why not make the nineteenth century the "age of transformation"[59]? Yet this approach leads to two particularly difficult questions: How long did this age last? What were its main characteristics?

58 Aymes, "La lettre", p. 76.

59 Mahmoud Yazbak, "Nablus, Nazareth and Haifa: Three Ottoman Towns in an Age of Transformation, 1840-1914", *Essays on Ottoman Civilization. Proceedings of the XIIth*

Transformation: How far? How fast?

Contemporary historians have answered the first question in different ways. At times an extension of the modern era, transformation is described as "continual" or "gradual". It is sometimes condensed to "the age of revolutions" (late eighteenth-early twentieth century),[60] or reduced to a single year (1923, "the transformation of Ottoman subjects into Turkish citizens"[61]). The second question has yielded more convergent proposals. The "socio-economic" transformation (late sixteenth-early seventeenth century), whether infrastructural or total, is considered to have been so "profound" by some that it marks nothing less than the transition from a patrimonial empire to a "second Ottoman Empire".[62] These authors emphasise its breadth and spectacular nature,[63] identifying key places, and foremost the cities,

Congress of the Comité International d'Études Pré-Ottomanes et Ottomanes (Prague, 1996), pp. 395-410.

60 Donald Quataert, "Ottoman History Writing and Changing: Attitudes Towards the Notion of 'Decline'", *History Compass*, 1 (2003), pp. 1-9, p. 4; Albert Hourani, "How Should We Write the History of the Middle East?", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23 (1991), pp. 125-136, p. 128; Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 20; Johann Büssow, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem, 1872-1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 436; Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

61 Fatma M. Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p. 244, note 12.

62 Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: State University of New York, 1989), p. 27; Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 32; Tezcan, *The Second*, p. 10.

63 According to the authors, it was "huge", "immense", "dramatic", etc. See Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9; Huri Islamoğlu, "Modernities Compared: State Transformations and Constitutions of Property in the Qing and Ottoman Empires", Huri Islamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue (eds.), *Shared Histories of Modernity in China and the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 353-386, p. 385; Gül, *The Emergence*, pp. 1-4; Emrence, "Imperial", p. 301; Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 32; Dror Ze'evi and Ehud R. Toledano, "Social Transformation and the State in the Middle East", Dror Ze'evi and Ehud R. Toledano (eds.), *Society, Law, and Culture in the Middle East: "Modernities" in the Making* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 1-14, p. 6 ; Göçek, *The Transformation*, p. 26; Ayşe Ozil, "Ali Yaycıoğlu ile Yeni Kitabı Üzerine Söyleşi", *Toplumsal Tarih*, 270 (2016), pp. 48-55, p. 48; Kılınçoğlu,

which transformed to the point of being unrecognisable: "Istanbul in the middle of the nineteenth century was chaotic, overcrowded, lacking sewage, badly administered, without an efficient transport system. A century later, the city was a metropolis with wide avenues, post-war modernist architecture and urban blocks. A large part of its road system and its urban form as a whole had been altered".[64] As if these changed were uniquely due to the application of urban planning – the fires that devastated the capital, in 1876 and 1911, also had a significant impact. Showcasing the "transformations of imperial political culture",[65] cities turned out to be the "laboratories of modernity" *par excellence*.[66] Moreover, urbanisation was read as "a reliable indicator of social transformation".[67] Transformations of urban morphologies demonstrated, accompanied, or prepared changes in status: a port becomes modern, a city becomes a capital, a capital becomes another capital.[68]

This unanimity is part of the job. Many historians specialised in the nineteenth century, in search of proof of modernisation, examined increasing numbers of sources, which were more accessible than those available to specialists of the *Early-Modern Ottomans*. When, in turn, they seized on the concept of transformation, they had an advantage over their colleagues: they had maps and plans, and more precise numerical data. It must be recalled that the first individual censuses were carried out in 1829-1831 and the first reliable results began in 1881-1882, whereas the census registers known as *tahrir defterleri* stopped being kept from the end of the sixteenth century. Historians of the nineteenth century also benefited from the resources of photography, which enabled them to take stock of the changes and to describe, for example, "the explosion of the city [Istanbul] beyond its historical centre".[69] Decline, which was moral, could be read. Modernisation,

Economics, p. 16; Shirine Hamadeh, "Ottoman Expressions of Early Modernity and the 'Inevitable' Question of Westernization", *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 63/1 (2004), pp. 32-51, p. 45; Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), p. 25.

64 Gül, *The Emergence,* p. 1.

65 Carter V. Findley, "The Tanzimat", Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. IV: *Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 11-37, p. 25; Neumann, "Political", p. 57; Bouquet, "Is It Time".

66 Hanssen, *Fin de siècle*, p. 226.

67 Karpat, "The Transformation", p. 274.

68 Hanssen, *Fin de siècle*, p. 17.

69 Edhem Eldem, "Istanbul: From Imperial to Peripheralized Capital", Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 135-206, p. 202.

which was metaphysical and institutional, needed to be conceived. Transformation, which was geographical and materialised, could be seen. Nevertheless, the question remained: if everything changes, what really does change?

Issues and research perspectives

Transformation affected the Ottoman order in its entirety. Nothing seemed to escape it. Rather than attributing a definition, or observing it through targeted practices, most historians have approached transformation with the help of more or less elaborate supporting concepts. I identify four below.

1/ The pragmatic management of dysfunction.[70] If the Ottoman Empire continued to exist, it was because it adapted to the needs of the time.[71] In the eighteenth century, for example, the extension of the fiscal network to include farms supported local forces and laid the foundations for centralisation policies in the nineteenth century. All things considered, the *ancien regime* was a success. Unlike in France, the rulers and local powers managed to preserve maximum prerogatives.[72] Only later did the State fall victim to its own centralisation policy, having excluded the possibility of a partnership with Muslim provincial elites at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[73]

2/ The decompartmentalisation of socio-political categories of analysis.[74] Important distinctions were imposed by the sources and their regulations: Muslims were different from non-Muslims; *askeri* (tax exempted state servants) were separated from *reaya* (tax-paying subjects), at least until the eighteenth century; military personnel were distinct from ulema hierarchy. These separations continued to be taken into account. Yet the "social boundaries" were neither "rigid" nor "impermeable",[75] and society was "less segregated than in

70 Barkey, *Bandits*, p. X.

71 Salzmann, "An Ancien", p. 394.

72 Salzmann, "An Ancien", p. 411.

73 That said, unless I am mistaken, there has been no in-depth study to this day that has established how the dismantling of the provincial relays was the result of "centralisation" policies. My thanks to M. Aymes for the reminder.

74 Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 8.

75 Başaran, *Selim III*, p. 8.

ancient, feudal times".[76] Maybe so. The problem is that no group study enables us to measure this permeability (or its absence). At which level did it operate? We imagine a shimmering of plural societies, until we recall the separations between neighbourhoods and the infrequence of interfaith marriages. In this "empire of differences", identities and affiliations were articulated according to imperial policy. It was less a question of domination than of integration, less of constraint than of flexibility, less of negotiation than of imposed norms.[77] Yet everything that was not flexible was therefore left to a different history: one of violence, conflict, and massacre. In the same way, the "social control" exerted by the State became the alter ego of a perpetually negotiated policy making. The central administration managed the "adjustments" of the military machine.[78] Peripheral powers managed the disruption of protest and the consequences of revolt.

3/ The analysis of crises. In view of the number of defeats, depositions, rebellions, massacres, famines and epidemics in Ottoman history, there is no shortage of topics: from the demographic crises of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries to the Eastern Question (crisis in the Lebanon, Armenian crisis…[79]), by way of the intellectual crisis at the end of the sixteenth century[80] and the agrarian and/or ecological crisis in the seventeenth century (the "crisis century" *par excellence*, on the model of a European historiography).[81] Up until the 1980s, each area of crisis

76 Abou-el-Haj, "Theorizing", p. 16.

77 Barkey, *Empire,* p. 22; Pamuk, "Institutional", pp. 228-229; Gábor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 192.

78 Virginia H. Aksan,"Locating the Ottomans Among Early Modern Empires", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 3/2 (1999), pp. 103-134, p. 115.

79 Selim Deringil, "The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-1882", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 24 (1988), pp. 3-24; Selim Deringil, "The Study of the Armenian Crisis of the late Ottoman Empire, or 'Seizing the Document by the Throat'", *New Perspectives on Turkey,* 27 (2002), pp. 35-59.

80 Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 235-307.

81 On the study of Celâlî rebellions as resulting in large-scale migrations and a decline in agricultural production, see Akdağ, *Celâlî İsyanları*; William J. Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion, 1593-1611* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1983). Also see Linda Darling, "The Ottoman Finance Department in a Century of Crisis" (doctoral dissertation), University of Chicago, 1990; Maria Todorova, "Was There a Demographic Crisis in the Ottoman

was seen as the reflection of a general crisis. Since then, crises have appeared as the products of domains of activity that had become dysfunctional, from currency to the exercise of power (political crises or crises of succession[82]). What the analyses have in common is shedding light on the overall system, in which seeds of discord or obvious problems compromised the equilibrium of a fragile political form, in other words the State.[83]

4/ The vocabulary of "novelty". The theory that attributed all positive change to modernisation/Westernisation has been done away with. At odds with the cultural "bifurcation"[84] that spawned two divergent trajectories (progress, reaction), a "progressive" conceptual framework of "novelty", "hybridity" and innovation, in architecture as in poetry, has a vocabulary and an ideological framework that are not the result of "a sudden inclination towards Westernisation".[85] Stone buildings, gas heating, reading novels, the spread of European languages or new table manners: markers of a "modernity package"[86] are not in short supply. But ought they to be seen as indicators of an essence particular to the "West"? The continued adherence to the *telos* associated with Westernisation is articulated logically in curves ("trajectories of modern transformation"[87]) and endpoints ("towards the centralisation of the State" [88]). But we must consider the moral intention (*Gesinnung*) behind the project of reform: then as now, the "transformation of cities" is still the expression of a "desire to adopt Western ideas".[89] Indeed, if such a desire

Empire in the Seventeenth Century?", *Études Balkaniques*, 2 (1988), pp. 55–63; Oktay Özel, "Population Changes in Ottoman Anatolia During the 16th and 17th Centuries: The 'Demographic Crisis' Reconsidered", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004), pp. 183-205.

82 Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 21, p. 83, p. 106; Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le sérail ébranlé: Essais sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans (XIVe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), pp. 90-91, p. 170.

83 Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial*, p. 154; Vatin and Veinstein, *Le sérail*, p. 79.

84 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: Mc Gill University Press, 1964), p. 106.

85 Hamadeh, "Ottoman", p. 45.

86 Ze'evi and Toledano, "Social", p. 8.

87 Islamoğlu, "Modernities", p. 386; Cem Emrence, "Imperial Paths, Big Comparisons: The Late Ottoman Empire", *Journal of Global History*, 3 (2008), pp. 289-311.

88 Barkey, *Empire*, p. 266.

89 Gül, *The Emergence*, p. 2; Bouquet "Is It Time".

exists, along with its opposition, we must remember that desire does not necessarily lead to change, which itself is fuelled by other things.[90]

The State, once again

The State was no longer in control of an "unequivocal transformation towards a 'more modern' society".[91] Historians must take into account the "negotiations", "recalibrations" and "adjustments" of the State-society pairing, examine society *per se* as a place of "societal change", and give prominence to new social and identity constructions.[92] This stated intention is only partially applied.

All reflection continues to start with the State, or to come back to it. In Ottoman studies, the State has never needed to make a comeback, since it always dominated historiography. Since the 1980s, its importance has been increasingly highlighted. It is the common thread of transformation, the main operator of most imperial situations. The problems that arose in the middle of the nineteenth century also arose in the middle of the eighteenth century: the State started too many wars, which cost money; it reduced its territories and fiscal resources; it saw its share in international commerce dwindle. The problems were the same, but they kept getting worse. And the transformations intended to resolve them remained insufficient and incomplete.[93] Paralysed by tradition, patronage and corruption, the State failed to modernise enough. Taken in by the game of imperialism and issues of globality, the Empire did not transform itself sufficiently, or not in the way that it should.

We are no longer in the time of the Eastern Question, which, together with the policies of the main European powers in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Balkans between 1774 (Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca) and 1923 (Treaty of Lausanne), long considered "the sick man" within a geopolitical arena. Developments in Ottoman societies are now exposed in the light of more clearly identified factors. Amongst them, taxes, the stumbling block of the centralisation project: unlike French or British administrations, the Ottoman State was

90 Regarding the debates on the Westernisation of Ottoman society in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Erdal Kaynar, "Occidentalisation", François Georgeon *et al.* (ed.), *Dictionnaire de l'Empire ottoman* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), pp. 871-873.

91 Mardin, *Religion*, p. 87.

92 Beşaran, *Selim III,* p. 7.

93 Hourani, "How", p. 128.

unable to centralise life-leases, in part because the tax farmers were reluctant to give up their local powers to become employees in the service of the sultan. Their continued existence marked the victory of the notables over the central administration, whose only margin of manoeuvre was the power to create new taxes and increase sources of revenue that were already centralised. In this case, as in others, it was as if the interest shown in the "paradigm of State formation" (mainly informed by the reading of T. Skocpol, J. A. Goldstone or C. Tilly) should result in the conception of a "thesis of [its] transformation".[94] Hence, with regard to mercenaries and bandits or minors, it was a question of the State's control, or lack thereof.[95] In reality, there are very few theses in social, economic or cultural history where there is no question of the imperial State.[96] We would like to believe that globalisation in the nineteenth century produced "vast social transformation",[97] but where, and to what degree? As long as "society" is undefined, transformation effectively remains a presupposition, whereas in the oft-mentioned "cultural sphere", unless I am mistaken, there is very little interest in concepts of appropriation, circularity or cultural transfer, if indeed they are known to the specialists.[98] Like *microstoria* before them, subaltern studies are left out.[99] At best, a few historians have examined the legitimacy of so-called "top-down", or conversely "bottom-up" perspectives.[100]

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94 Barkey, *Empire*, p. 23; Darling, *Revenue*, p. 12, p. 301; Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1999), pp. 3-22.

95 Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coaldfield, 1822-1920* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 1-3; Barkey, *Empire*, p. 176; Islamoğlu, "Modernities"; Ze'evi and Toledano, "Social".

96 As an example of historical sociology in the nineteenth century, see Cem Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East: Modernity, Imperial Bureaucracy and the Islamic State* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

97 Kasaba, *The Ottoman*, p. 5.

98 The usefulness of these perspectives for the history of Ottoman architecture in the eighteenth century has nevertheless been highlighted (Shirine Hamadeh, "Ottoman", pp. 48-9; with reference to the works of R. Chartier and C. Guinzburg).

99 Vangelis Kechriotis, "Postcolonial Criticism Meets Late Ottoman Studies", *Historein*, 13 (2013), pp. 39-46.

100 Büssow, *Hamidian Palestine*; Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.), *Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII. A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9-11 January 2009* (Herakleion: Crete University Press, 2012).

Decline had its potbellied and slouching pashas. Modernisation had its men escaped from Plato's cave, agents of the encounter between the West (travellers and diplomats) and the East (reformers and minorities). These figures were generally seen from afar, by way of the institutions that they weakened, in the first case, and revitalised in the second. Modernisation involved a small but growing number of actors: in B. Lewis' schema, it was "Ottoman Christians and a few Turks [who] started to form a new society in the capital",[101] then new elites, and new professions. In comparison, populations marked by transformations are certainly more numerous.[102] Yet they make up groups without identified boundaries, "a newly flourishing national secular middle class".[103] There are, of course, socio-professional categories, but the figures are vague: "thousands of travelling salesmen, shopkeepers, small bankers, as well as the more important tax collectors, merchants and bankers".[104] In short, transformation has yet to identify its men and women.

Failure, always

On the other hand, the transformation paradigm has produced an increasing number of statements of principle. Some are not without panache:

> "The Ottoman transformation in the age of revolutions was not a linear transition from the old order to the new, from a decentralized to a centralized state, from Eastern to Western institutions, and from premodern to modern society. Rather, it involved both intersecting paths and dead ends, offering a rich repertoire of possibilities to be followed, reinterpreted, or forgotten".[105]

Transformation proved to be a liberating, synthetic and integrating concept. History was conceived of as distinct from its final act, according to the following sequence: the seventeenth century was a century of crisis and transition. The eighteenth century became the century of the first reforms. On the other hand,

101 Lewis, *Islam*, p. 63.

102 Palmira Brummett, "Gender and Empire in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Caricature, Models of Empire, and the Case for Ottoman Exceptionalism", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 27/2 (2007), pp. 283-302, p. 285.

103 Göçek, *The Transformation,* p. 26.

104 Kasaba, *The Ottoman*, p. 85.

105 Yaycıoğlu, *Partners,* p. 239.

the nineteenth century was no longer seen as the antechamber to the collapse of the Empire in the twentieth century, the prelude to the formation of the Turkish nation-state or the advent of the Republic in 1923.[106] We act like it never ended, as if the (incomplete) modernisation and (superficial) Westernisation were processes to be taken into account amongst others (urbanisation, secularisation, feminisation). And yet, the profession is still torn between fascination for the imperial long-term and the interpretive archaeology of failure.[107] "*What went wrong?*": B. Lewis suggested the wrong answers to a question which continues to be asked.[108]

Moreover, Ottoman historiography now dances differently, but it still follows a three-beat rhythm: "The Ottoman Empire first engaged in the project of modernity at the end of the eighteenth century. The transformation that followed ended up contributing to its demise. The imperial subjects of the Empire experienced violence and trauma".[109] There are still recurrent etiological debates between those who consider that the sultan State succumbed under the weight of its own dysfunction, those who think that it was unable to survive its successive military defeats, and those who refuse to answer the question, arguing that reflection on the extinction of the Empire amounts to a teleological approach.[110] In most cases, a consensus is reached: imperial political society was unable to find the means to integrate and resolve the increasing dualities in the exercise

106 Yonca Köksal, "The Application of the Tanzimat Reforms in Bulgaria: State Building in the Ottoman Empire (1839-1878)", electronic publication of Kokkalis Program, Harvard University, 1999. http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW1/GSW1/11%20Koksal.pdf.; Abou-el-Haj, "Theorizing", pp. 8-11.

107 Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 225; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6; Kılınçoğlu, *Economics*, p. 1; Emrence, "Imperial", p. 289; Pamuk, "Institutional"; Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 203-211; Isa Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878-1918* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2003); Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity, Human Agency and the Imperial State* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Erik Zürcher, "The Ottoman Empire 1850-1922 - Unavoidable Failure?", *Leiden Project Working Papers Archive*, Department of Turkish Studies, Leiden University, 2004; Kuehn, *Empire*, pp. 205-218.

108 Darling, *Revenue*, p. 7.

109 Göçek, *The Transformation*, p. 130.

110 Darling, *Revenue,* p. 7.

of justice or the administration of the police.[111] One historian suggested the following interpretive sequence: "The ideal of an overarching Ottoman identity clashed with the increasing autonomy of religious communities within the empire; bureaucratic centralization conflicted with political fragmentation; the ideal of participation came up against the principle of top-down reform; the conservative spirit that gave rise to the Majalla contradicted the progressive drive to emulate the French penal code; new civil courts coexisted uneasily side by side with the traditional sharīʿa courts; a modern university with old medreses, an academy of modern sciences with the ulema gatherings of the past".[112] The list of oppositions could be continued almost indefinitely: centralising bureaucratic hegemony/consultation at the provincial level and constitutionalism; Jacobin nationalism/pan-Islamic policies; fiscalism/free trade. These multiple contradictions gave rise to a kind of polarisation, partly tempered by the Turkish War of independence (1919-1922) and the foundation of the Republic. The Kemalist experience then led Turkey to seek out development models that were officially distinct from the imperialist past, but which remained part of the continuity of a practice of state reform.

Conclusion

No doubt we must be wary of infighting, common enough in Ottoman history. Why, then, add one more article to the existing corpus, at the risk of being seen as a kind of judge evaluating paradigmatic circulations? Because, without wanting to compare the reordering of a cultural imperialism with freely peripheral formulations, it must be noted that although it is not yet fully-formed as a paradigm, transformation has its limits, both as a catch-all term for processes within the Ottoman domain, and as an axiological principle of a programme which all too often fizzles out. The study of the nineteenth century, which is connected to developments in the preceding centuries, does not stand out more as an historical period as a result of this framing. It was open to the long-term, but at the risk of overlooking tools for analysis which, though imperfect, are nevertheless useful. In fact, very often, once the "transitions" of the late eighteenth century are passed

111 Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts: Law and Modernity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Omri Paz, "The Policeman and State Policy: Police Accountability, Civilian Entitlements, and Ottoman Modernism, 1840–1860s", Ze'evi and Toledano (eds.), *Society,* pp. 104-120.

112 Hanioğlu, *A Brief,* pp. 104-105.

over, still marked by the omnipotence of the history of institutions, transformation becomes modernisation by another name.

Finally, the examination of several summaries of transformation only partly confirmed the hypothesised substitution suggested in the introduction. The existence of a homology between declinism and the historiography of transformation still needs to be established. For now, it would seem that, like the theories of decline, "transformationism" (if I may be so bold) similarly proceeds by hypostasis: "a superior reality of a principle of cohesion and intelligibility".[113] Yet unlike the treatment long reserved for modernisation – which is admittedly greatly favoured by specialists – the use of the concept of transformation does not aim to individualise an historical agent. In truth, transformation is worth what it is worth. Studied in its complex and contradictory forms, it is neither a projection in relation to an idealised norm (reference to the Classical Age), nor the blueprint for a *telos* to be achieved (Westernisation through modernisation). Where decline and modernisation marked a two-fold failure (imitation of the imperial past, imitation of the Western present), transformation has no model. Moreover, it has yet to become what decline or modernisation were in the twentieth century – a general-purpose "absolute trend",[114] nevertheless linked to a particular historical tradition. But no one is immune to "the temptation to reify an abstraction, to lend a word from an historian's pen the same causal role as things and men; even to considering that this abstract cause is not itself caused, that it is unshakeable and that nothing historical can happen to it".[115] At the rate that things are going, there is a good chance that those who made their academic reputation on the back of the former masters of their own masters will in turn be opposed by the generations which they will themselves teach. So it goes: under the pretext of a call for paradigmatic renewal, statements of principle reproduce the habits of the profession.

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113 Henri-Irénée Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (Paris: Seuil, 1954), p. 160.

114 Karl Popper differentiated between "trends which, like laws, do not depend on initial conditions, and which carry us irresistibly in a certain direction into the future", and "conditional scientific *predictions*" (*Misère de l'historicisme (The Poverty of Historicism)*, (Paris: Plon, 1956), French edition, p. 127).

115 Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 155.

From Decline to Transformation: Reflections on a New Paradigm in Ottoman History

Abstract ■ This article addresses transformation as a newly emerging paradigm in the field of Ottoman studies. It examines the relationship between two historiographical sequences: first, the decline theories widely supported by Ottoman studies of the 16th to 18th century conducted over the last three decades of the 20th century are criticised; second, the characterization of the 19th century as a new golden age of transformation in articles and books published in increasing numbers during the last twenty years is put under scrutiny. After questioning the novelty of this paradigm in light of dominant yet hackneyed themes, this paper proposes to measure its usefulness in terms of challenges and opportunities for research. Overall, it appears on the one hand that if *transformationism* differs from *declinism* in that it denies providing a comprehensive model of analysis, on the other hand it mimics it insofar as it still depends on two dominant traits which it directly claimed to avoid - the omnipotence of the history of institutions and a theory of modernization that dares not speak its name. In short, under the pretence of an appeal to paradigmatic renewal, this statement of principle only reproduces old historiographical habits.

Keywords: Ottoman studies; decline; transformation; modernization; paradigmatic renewal.

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