

## In memory of Metin Kunt (1942-2022)

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On 3 December 2020, almost three years ago, Professor İ. Metin Kunt passed away in Cambridge. Several colleagues responded by writing about Metin as a scholar, mentor, and colleague: Halil Berktaş published a profoundly personal obituary in the online journal *Serbestiyet* on 8 December 2020; Tunc Sen followed suit a few days later in *Gazeteduvar*, Antonis Anastasopoulos by the end of the month on H-Net. Other brief notes appeared on the websites of institutions connected to Metin's career. In 2021 a book-scale tribute was presented by Seyfi Kenan and Selçuk Akşin Somel, who edited *Dimensions of Transformation in the Ottoman Empire from the Late Medieval Age to Modernity. In Memory of Metin Kunt* (Leiden, Boston: Brill 2021), an anthology presenting work by scholars connected to Metin, including a balanced appraisal of his work by the editors and a full bibliography. In all these texts, a view of Metin as a learned, gentle, patient, accessible, and modest mentor emerged. There is a sense of great personal respect and friendship here, in addition to the habitual listing of outstanding academic achievements.

What can I add to this improvised but remarkably harmonious symphony of respect and friendship, after a time lapse of almost three years? Let me state first that I am deeply honoured and pleased to have been offered the opportunity to write about Metin in this journal. I am honoured because I cannot rank myself as a specialist in Ottoman history and am invited as an outsider with a deep interest

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Metin Kunt and Cemal Kafadar deliberating on the Project of the History of Ottoman Thought (İSAM in Istanbul, 2010)

in the field. I am more profoundly pleased and touched because Metin truly was a friend and mentor to me. I shall not repeat here Metin's achievements and positions – they can be found in the publications mentioned above, most extensively in *Dimensions of Transformation in the Ottoman Empire*. Let me briefly sketch my connections with Metin and then say a few words about his intellectual impact.

My friendship with Metin began because we shared an interest in elite households. As a student of the courts in Vienna and Versailles with a broad interest in comparison, I had encountered his work. Metin apparently had heard of my work: in 2003 he invited me to come to Istanbul for a lecture at Topkapı Palace and teaching at Sabancı. Metin's hospitality started a lasting co-operation and friendship. I have the fond memories of our walks through Istanbul, punctuated with Metin's digressions about all sorts of details: persons, *lieux de mémoire* and historic sites, the Ottoman state of mind, all sorts of contemporary issues. This clearly was a special character, a colleague of the type I wanted my family to know about and meet. I also enjoyed the setting of Sabancı, the easy contacts there with fellow-teachers and students alike. My impression of Metin at this point was one of an intellectual cosmopolitan, rooted in Ottoman history and in Istanbul; a scholar with a sovereign view of world history moderated by a characteristically mild understanding of the human condition.

With Metin and Tülay Artan, I started thinking about a conference on royal courts. These plans would soon become part of a wider comparative venture on

tributary empires funded by Europe, COST-Action A36: <https://www.cost.eu/actions/A36/>. We served as members of the management committee which included several other notable Ottomanists: Halil Berktaş, Antonis Anastasopoulos, Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, and Suraiya Faroqhi. Between 2005 and 2009, the project entailed the organisation of ten conferences. The second conference of the series, held in June 2005 and organised together with Tülay Artan again brought me to Istanbul and Sabancı – this was becoming a regular habit. The comparative project was initially concentrated mostly on Rome, the Ottomans and the Mughals – but it gradually extended to comprise specialists on most greater empires, notably also including East Asia. Metin was active in broadening the scope in place and time, but equally effective in focusing discussions. Typically he was in the background at these meetings, but at some point would make a decisive observation or raise a question that would determine our agenda. A substantial number of volumes has appeared, bringing together contributions of these conferences with the work of invited specialists – among these *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires* (open access at Brill), a volume I co-edited with Metin and Tülay. The co-operation in the tributary empire project generated numerous meetings and discussions, and entailed other initiatives; I came to Istanbul in 2008 for the dissertation defence of Zeynep Nevin Yelçe at Sabancı. Metin advised me about future comparative projects, and stepped in as supervisor for one of the researchers in my Eurasian Empires project (2011-2016, <https://www.nwo.nl/projecten/317-51-010-0>). In 2016, I visited Metin and his wife Laura in Cambridge and enjoyed a home-cooked dinner with Metin as cuisinier. We kept in touch after that date, but Metin's health complicated travel, and so this proved to be the last personal meeting.

There was a certain imperturbable composure in Metin. I have seen it dented only in passing when Metin mentioned Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj's strangely inimical response to *The Sultan's Servants*. During our numerous contacts between 2003 and 2020, Metin re-educated me in matters related to the Ottoman Empire. Frequently, conversations with him about the problems of comparative research primarily involved Ottoman practices and the mindset of the Ottoman governors he knew so well. Still there was a more fundamental issue at stake: finding a middle way between the sweeping generalisations of historical sociology and the demands of regionalised philological precision. Metin acted as a sparring partner in this field, and I am profoundly indebted to his cosmopolitan wisdom as well as to his practical insights. Academics are known first and foremost through their publications. An impressive academic track record, outlined in detail by Seyfi Kenan

and Selçuk Akşin Somel, has earned Metin recognition as an authoritative writer and specialist whose influence will persist. The personal statements in the published obituaries underline that Metin as a teacher, mentor, colleague and friend will have an equally lasting and profound impact. All earlier authors of obituaries have stated this explicitly and have thus highlighted the wide scope of Metin's personal influence. I can underscore their words by underlining his powerful role in my making as a global comparative historian. His rigorous intellectual support for comparison, aversion of overstated intellectual gesturing, and keen eye for human detail have guided me since our 2003 walks through Istanbul. I deeply regret the passing of a soft-spoken yet sharp-witted friend and, like many others, will benefit from his example and counsel for years to come.