

The World of Mehmed Murad: Writing *Histoires Universelles* in Ottoman Turkish

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Bir Tarih-i Umumi Yazarı olarak Mizancı Murat

Öz ■ Bu makale, Osmanlıların ondokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarına doğru yazdıkları dünya tarihlerini inceleyerek, dönemin dünya çapındaki insanlık tarihi kitapları arasında yer alma çabasını ve bu çaba üzerinden yazarların Osmanlılar'ı dünya medeniyeti içinde nasıl konumlandıklarını ele alır. Bu dönemde başka ülkelerde yazılmış dünya tarihleri, hızla modernleşen o toplumların bu yeni dünyada yerlerini alma çabasının yansımaları olarak düşünüldüğünde, Osmanlı umumi tarihleri, diğer dünya tarihlerinden çok farklı değildir. Öte yandan Osmanlı umumi tarihleri de, Aydınlanma Çağı sonrasında gelişen insanlık ve medeniyet tarihi anlayışı üzerine, kendilerine özgü ve dolayısıyla kendi içlerinde değerlendirilmesi gereken düşünceler katmışlardır. Özellikle Mehmed Murad gibi son dönem Osmanlı aydınları tarafından kaleme alınan bu tarihler, Osmanlı Devleti'nin modern dünyanın nasıl bir parçası olduğunu ve bunun tahayyülünü yansıtıyordu. Mehmed Murad'ın *Umumi Tarih* adlı eseri aynı zamanda yeni açılan yüksek öğrenim kurumlarının ders programında yer alan tarih derslerinin ihtiyacına da cevap veriyordu. *Mizan* gazetesini de çıkaran Mehmed Murad, Yahya Kemal'in deyimiyle 1870'lerde yazdığı bu son derece 'modern' altı ciltlik *Tarih-i Umumi* ile dünya tarihini bir Osmanlı disiplini haline getirmişti.

Osmanlılar'da da örnekleri hiç de az olmayan bu umumi tarihlerin Osmanlı tarihini dünya tarihi içinde göstermeyi hedefleyen yeni bir yazım türünün habercileri olduğu kanaatindeyim. Dünya tarihi yazmak, aydınlara Osmanlılık, tarihsellik ve kamu eğitimi hakkındaki fikirlerini beraberce işleme fırsatını verdiği ölçüde akademik, tarihi, entelektüel üretimin ne denli geniş bir yelpazesi olduğunu da gösterir.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Umumi tarih, Osmanlı Dünya Tarihleri, Mehmed Murad, Mekteb-i Mülkiye, Osmanlı entellektüel mirası, insanlık ve medeniyet tarihi, II. Abdülhamit dönemi, Rankeci tarihsellik, milliyetçilik, modern küresel bilinç, modernizm.

Goodrich prefaced his seminal dissertation back in 1968 outlining the uniqueness of *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*, an Ottoman Americana in the sixteenth century, as a text heavily based on European narratives before the prevalence of such works in the nineteenth century.¹ Indeed, it was in the nineteenth century that many intellectuals some of whom also taught history at the newly found universities joined in the universal fashion of writing the history of “mankind and civilization,” perhaps laying out the foundations of today’s global history. One such author was also a teacher at the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*, the School of Public Administration: Mehmed Murad was like many others of the day a bureaucrat-politician, a journalist, an academic in the span of one life. His six volume world history provides a valuable opportunity to delve into the Ottoman intellectual production in a unique context: these writings entail a new understanding of history as a social science discipline as well as deeper insight into Ottoman history writing in the conventional form of chronicles. Moreover they connect the Ottomans to the world at large and embody their view of the rest of the world as well as their place in it. Mehmed Murad’s view of history in general and world history in particular amply attests to the global outlook of Ottoman history writing in the last years of the nineteenth century:

“Tarih-i umumi bütün alemin ve hususiyle insanların geçmiş ahvalinden bahs iden büyük bir fendir.”²

These words that characterize history as a science began one of his textbooks for *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*. His universal history is the fruit of this conviction, which, according to Babinger, he prepared using French and Russian sources. His oeuvre includes an Ottoman History (*Tarih-i Osmani*) volume as an addendum to his universal history, and an incomplete account of the late nineteenth century which periodically corresponds to his own life time, *Tarih-i Ebu’l-Faruk*. Almost autobiographical in spirit, this attempt at a philosophy of history specifically for Ottoman political culture received great attention when it was first published.³

1 Thomas D. Goodrich, “Sixteenth Century Ottoman Americana or A Study of *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*,” Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 1968), abstract.

2 Mehmed Murad (hereafter MM), *Muhtasar Tarih-i Umumi* (Istanbul, 1306/1891), 1.

3 Franz Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig, 1927), 425-6.

I aim to look at his universal histories to ultimately relate these texts with the intellectual practices of the day, not only with those in the Ottoman Empire but with those in the world as well. The Ottoman intellectual world of the nineteenth century is somewhat studied in its own right. In one of the latest overviews of this intellectual legacy, Elizabeth Özdalga discusses the competition of the “variety of ideas and streams of thought” which nonetheless ended up reproducing authoritarianism.⁴ While it is of great value to deem Ottoman intellectual world as a world of varieties, to line these varieties in a single path to modernity is not all that different from earlier and still extant evaluations of westernization in literature. Orhan Okay, for instance, also sees this westernization as the end result of the “confrontation of existing cultural values with newer ones originating in the west.”⁵ While there is no doubt that the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century “found itself in an era of European time and confronted by a European discourse of progress,” recent studies analyze the Ottoman interaction with the west in a mode beyond mere imitation.⁶ Indeed, it is now well established that the Ottoman Empire underwent a ‘struggle and adjustment’ in establishing itself as a legitimate political entity in the international arena during the Hamidian era. This adjustment also entailed a process “to create a modern secular state using religious motifs and vocabulary.”⁷ The Ottoman self-image of the time displayed at world fairs reflected this struggle to be very similar to those of other multi-ethnic empires’ policies and even to the value systems of the west: “Yet European paradigms were not simplistically appropriated; they were filtered through a corrective process, which reshaped them according to self-visions and aspirations.”⁸ How much of this was true for historians?

Unfortunately we still know very little about the potentially different directions and orientations in late Ottoman history writing, what distinguished them from their own earlier history traditions and contemporary European discursive apparatus, and, if any, how their educational use contributed to

4 Elizabeth Özdalga, ed., *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London, 2005), 2.

5 Orhan Okay, “Turkish Literature during the Period of Westernization,” in Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, ed., *History of the Ottoman State and Civilization*, vol. 2 (Istanbul, 2002), 125.

6 These words that capture the Ottomans in a universal modernity belong to Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107 (2003): 778.

7 Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains, Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London, 1998), 166.

8 Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley, 1992), 10-11.

their distinction. When we know more we perhaps can delineate a multiplicity of Ottoman historical/intellectual/academic genres, independent from other intellectual currents of the day such as Ottomanism, from contemporary European historical visions, from state-service oriented higher education policies, and finally from community-oriented ethno-histories. Universal histories offer a venue, if not a genre: the very term indicates a study of the past and the entirety of humanity; in short, a discipline of history in Ottoman Turkish tremendously concomitant with the nineteenth century rise of Rankean history as a discipline in Europe. But this historicism has often been evaluated as the result of mere adaptation, feeding the conviction that the history of Ottoman modernization can only be understood as a linear development of positivistic westernization, without any input of its own. These ideas seem to have been pervasive in the few early works on history writing of the Ottoman reform age. Since as early as 1940, a powerful motif of transformation in Ottoman history writing toward the standards of objective and documented historicism has been identified.⁹ Some twenty years later in 1962, late Ottoman historiography has again been discussed as a refashioning along European lines within the context of the Tanzimat era.¹⁰ Some twenty years ago Michael Ursinus has related the development of a corpus of Ottoman Turkish works between 1870 and 1920 dealing with Roman and Byzantine history to the “westernizing trends in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire over the same period.”¹¹

In short, methodology wise, the conventional view of the nineteenth century historical works remain within the paradigms or duality paradigm of the Tanzimat: Works of history as either composed in the old-fashioned custom or in a completely modern mode.¹² In between this dichotomy of traditional and modern is the understanding that this historical literature, which is devoid of any methodology and/or philosophy, at best only mystifies the imperial past.¹³ Surely we can no longer talk of a modernization in which historical

9 M. H. Yınanç, “Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Kadar Bizde Tarihçilik,” in *Tanzimat* (Istanbul, 1940).

10 E. Kuran, “Ottoman Historiography of the Tanzimat Period,” in *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (London, 1962), 422-9.

11 Michael Ursinus, “From Süleyman Pasha to Mehmet Fuat Köprülü: Roman and Byzantine History in late Ottoman Historiography,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988): 305.

12 E. Kuran, “Ottoman Historiography,” 422.

13 İlber Ortaylı, “Basic Trends in Ottoman Turkish Historiography,” in his *Ottoman Studies* (Istanbul, 2004), 63.

production is devoid of a methodology or philosophy, and the modernity of these works can rightfully add to our current overall understanding of Ottoman modernization, no longer buried in absences.

But the pendulum swings to two sides: This modern mode has also been interpreted as an actual summation that re-considers the Ottoman dynastic past as the locus of a stable ‘national identity.’ This reconsideration is often identified as stemming from a romantic vision of history.¹⁴ Yet establishing late Ottoman history writing as modern does not take us to a more comprehensive understanding of Ottoman society beyond positivistic linearity, even though it may move us further from the dichotomous analysis of nineteenth century change within the framework of modernists and traditionalists (reformists or reactionaries).

Still, Christoph Neumann argues that setting the late Ottoman production of history in a more complicatedly controversial context (similar to setting early modern Ottoman historiography in a conflictual context) takes us to an Ottoman nationalist historiography increasingly based on ‘Turkishness’ whose authors were civil servants.¹⁵ Ursinus had also argued that the entry of pre-Islamic Turkish history into Ottoman history works set them in an increasingly nationalistic and even secular tone. Indeed, such universal history works of, for example, Ahmed Midhat and Mehmed Arif, largely based on western sources, also repeated common contemporary and negative views of Byzantium.¹⁶ Furthermore, in cultural history, the “refashioning along more romantic and nationalistic lines” resulted in the representation of art and architecture “as a beneficial instrument for rendering a more tangible and convincing vision of the remote past.”¹⁷

14 Ahmet Ersoy, “On the sources of the ‘Ottoman Renaissance’: Architectural revival and its discourse during the Abdülaziz era (1861-76), Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 2000), 21-2.

15 Christoph K. Neumann, “Bad Times and Better Self. Definitions of Identity and Strategies for Development in Late Ottoman Historiography (1850-1900),” in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, eds. S. Faroqhi and F. Adanır (Leiden, 2002), 57-78. I make the parallel between the modern context of a “controversial’ age in Neumann to the early modern context of a ‘conflictual’ age in Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, 2003).

16 Michael Ursinus, “Byzantine History in Late Turkish Historiography,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 10 (1986): 218-19.

17 Ahmet Ersoy, “Architecture and the Search for Ottoman Origins in the Tanzimat Period,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 123.

A process of historicizing, or, put differently, an empire historicizing itself, was clearly evident in the historical literature. Romanticism in history hailed with this historicism. But surely it was coupled with another complementary and simultaneous discursive tool, that of Ottoman orientalism. The historicism of Ottoman imperial imagery also allowed for a discourse of subordination which served the central state to ‘carry civilization’ to ‘backward’ peripheries such as the Arab lands. The Ottoman orientalist discourse – different from European orientalism, especially in its usage of Islamic symbolism – is indeed what places late Ottoman historical writing in a more complex mode than a simple reflection of modern historicism. After all, the very discourse of Ottoman orientalism is a “dialectic between European Orientalism’s insistence on a stagnant Orient that had to be colonized by Europe and Ottoman orientalism’s riposte that the empire was not stagnant but independently moving –and dragging all Ottoman subjects- toward modernity.”¹⁸ This ‘de-orientalizing the Empire by Orientalizing its peripheries’ places the Ottomans in modern global consciousness, which put its faith in the enactment of the progress of mankind from the moment all sorts of depictions of global visioning alongside actual people travelling and living all over the world marked the world fifteenth century onwards. These came in multiple contingencies. For example, one of the contingencies of this global visioning was the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*. Before the age of orientalism, the early modern world meant such complexity and heterogeneity that transcended the west and non-west dichotomy. Modernity erased these complex and heterogeneous identities and molded a new global consciousness that very much involved self-positioning of any society in the world society. It is in the self-positioning of the Ottomans that we can position Ottoman orientalism and imperialism, setting the empire in a more active mode than straightforward reflection in its encounter with modernity. Surely, the mode is global but its enactment is Ottoman made. Analyzing universal histories as a modern global act helps such an understanding of Ottoman modernity.

There is no doubt that there is a great connection between the rise of the modern world and the concept of the history of the mankind. Indeed there lies the difference between early modern narratives such as the Ottoman Americana and Ottoman world histories.¹⁹ Narrative historiography went

¹⁸ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 772.

¹⁹ Other early modern examples of universal histories are worth inclusion in this distinction; see Tamara Griggs, “Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4/2 (2007): 219-47.

hand in hand with the rise of modern global consciousness and a distinct notion of global space. All this undoubtedly goes back to the eighteenth century where, according to Tang, anthropological and socio-theoretical history of mankind created a global history of specific conceptual formations, discursive strategy and narrative conventions.²⁰ Indeed what set modern globalism apart from early modern globalism were these specific concepts, discourses, and conventions that emanated from both the new social sciences, their specific semantic markers, and the experience of colonialism. Global interdependence as an idea already formulated in the German enlightenment of the second half of the eighteenth century embodied such key semantic codes of the transition to modern global society. According to Tang, this also involved on the part of the European society, first, to reflect on its position in an increasingly integrated world society. This world society is characterized by both Europe and colonialism, sharply contrasting a theological universal history.

Tang sets this transition à la Koselleck, who sees it as one from hierarchically differentiated to a functionally differentiated society as modern society involves functional differentiation whose semantic apparatus includes positioning Europe in a global context.²¹ The absence of the global context as such in early modern history writing can be observed in Ottoman early modern semantic apparatus which involved a self-positioning against its own golden past and not anywhere else either spatially or temporally. This was overwhelmingly the decline paradigm that informed the so-called advice literature.²² As the transition to modern began to take place, the self-positioning turned toward the world. The modern self-positioning is the discursive site of both (first) colonialism and (then) orientalism. Tang associates this self-positioning with an act and discourse of observation of a particular society as well as of world society. Self-observation of a society involves locating its position in human society which in turn requires the concept of global consciousness, i.e. unity of human society.²³ It is this concept of global consciousness and the discursive apparatus of observation that “joins European society and the rest of the world society into a continuum in spite of, or

20 Chenxi Tang, “Writing world history: the emergence of modern global consciousness in the late eighteenth century, 1760-1790,” Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 2000), 9-10.

21 Ibid.; also see Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, 2002).

22 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*.

23 Tang, “Writing world history,” 10.

rather because of, their difference.”²⁴ Then it follows that each society has a different global consciousness. We can easily extend this to Ottoman imperialism and orientalism that also serve as the discursive site of modern global consciousness.

This is indeed evident in Ottoman universal histories imbued with modern global consciousness but distinguished for Ottoman social self-positioning vis á vis world society and further set unique through their various historians coming from the same narrative conventions of global history specified by the individual usage of modern global discourse.

For professing world history in an age of world history writing and hence claiming part and parcel of the global modern is also about the individual writer/historian and his oeuvre.²⁵ The value of the single voice is precisely in its hybrid rendering of modern global consciousness and its discursive apparatus that also carries historicism beyond being a mere artifact of modernity leading to dominant singular grand narrative of the history of the modern nation-state. For trying to get at the intellectual practice of universal history writer Mehmed Murad is not about deciphering a grand system but rather about delineating the self-positioning of Ottoman historical vision in modern historical narrative.

Framed in this context, Mehmed Murad’s universal history helps us globalize the Enlightenment instead of repudiating it as a meta-narrative. This Ottoman consciousness of modern globalization may very well be the only venue not to turn our “backs on the persistent material and cultural problems created by the globalization of capitalism” today.²⁶ As argued by Arif Dirlik, the refusal of meta-narratives in post-colonial frameworks “serve(s) not to subvert contemporary forms of power but provide(s) an alibi for their operations.”²⁷ Mehmed Murad’s universal history never disguises the hegemony of modernity, instead interacts with it in order to place Ottomans in this hegemony.

24 Ibid.

25 The best example of this new historicism is Stephen Greenblatt, see Sarah Maza’s discussion in “Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism and Cultural History, or, What We Talk about When We Talk about Interdisciplinarity,” *Modern Intellectual History* 1/2 (2004): 249-65.

26 Arif Dirlik and Vinay Bahl, “Introduction,” in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, eds. Dirlik, Bahl, and Peter Gran (New York, 2000), 7.

27 Dirlik and Bahl, “Introduction,” 9.

Mehmed Murad: The Ottoman

The beginning point of such an analysis is obvious: who was Mehmed Murad? Where and how he was trained goes a long way in explaining the specific intellectual origins of formulations in both his *histoire universelle* and other histories. Perhaps accessibility to Russian and Russian sources was Mehmed Murad's signature mark more than anything else. He came from Dagestan, where he was born into a local family of ulema. Until the age of ten, he received traditional education after which he went to a Russian school in the provincial capital. The next step in his education was a lycée in Stavropol sponsored by the Russian government. At an early age, he began to publish in Russian papers and periodicals where he demonstrated his interest in French thinkers like Montesquieu and Rousseau. In these same years he seems to have kept a self-narrative of sorts, a *defter-i hatırat* in Russian.²⁸

In 1872 when he was eighteen, Midhat Pasha's promotion to vizier and the death of his best friend, prompted him to come to Istanbul, an early childhood dream realized. He relates his first encounter with Midhat Pasha which took place in French as Mehmed Murad spoke no word of Turkish.²⁹ Within a year he was secured a place in the household of Şirvanizade Mehmed Rüşdi Pasha to whom he remained loyal and refused a military post offered by the Grand Vizier Ahmed Esad at the instigation of Midhat Pasha. This loyalty first began his Ottoman career through an apprenticeship in the *Matbuat Kalemi* at the Foreign Ministry. The refusal of a military post and being satisfied by an apprenticeship at the risk of offending the grand vizier is an early sign for his interesting career moves. Certainly his penmanship had something to do with it, for which he did not hesitate to decline the protection of a grand vizier. Equally important was the way he was treated by Şirvanizade, in his own words he fared no less than the son of the head of the household where he also learnt Turkish.³⁰ It is highly doubtful that he had foreseen the following removal of Ahmed Esad from grand vizier to be replaced by Şirvanizade. In the end, however, his loyalty to Şirvanizade paid off as this new grand vizier made Mehmed Murad his private secretary until 1874. After that Şirvanizade was also dismissed leaving Mehmed Murad with no choice. His own testimony for the post-1874 is telling in describing a per-

28 Michael Ursinus, "Mizandji Mehmed Murad," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second ed., vol. 7, 205-6.

29 Birol Emil, *Mizancı Murad Bey: Hayatı ve Eserleri* (Istanbul, 1979), 22-26.

30 *Ibid.*, 60.

sonal crisis for a few years.³¹ In 1877 he got married and became a lecturer at Mülkiye teaching history –both universal and Ottoman– as well as geography, which made him, according to Yahya Kemal, the man who “made world history an Ottoman discipline.”³² This is when he writes his volumes of world history the first of which is the History of the Romans, a first time endeavor in Ottoman historical writing. This Roman history later becomes the second volume of his universal history. As he becomes a historian, Mehmed Murad also embarks on a career, albeit minor, in the educational system for about a decade. Unable to climb up in the educational bureaucracy he resigns in 1886 and remains a history teacher but also begins publishing his infamous journal *Mizan*. It is his writings in this journal that places him in a tide of political positions with the regime of Abdülhamid as well as with the Young Turks and later the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Before 1890 already, his comments on the Armenian question and promotion of the abolition of tax privileges on Sultan’s estates gets the journal suspended a few times. The first gap in the publication of *Mizan* until its final demise in 1908 lasts five years between 1890 and 1895. He continues to teach at Mülkiye but is constantly eager to get back in the good graces of Abdülhamid which bears fruit in a year with a post as a commissioner of the Public Debt. Administration. This, it seems, was only part of an attempt to get a high-ranking post which he hoped for until his death in 1917. He manages to secure a personal audience with the sultan in 1895 and not only fails to procure a higher post but also loses his position at the Mülkiye as the curriculum no longer includes history.³³

Once again we have a disillusioned Mehmed Murad who then decides to take a European tour by way of Crimea. He travels from Kiev to Vienna and Paris where he meets Ahmed Rıza of the Society of Union and Progress and decides to re-establish *Mizan* in Cairo under British protection.³⁴ This trip on a Russian steamer feed into suspicions that he is a Russian spy; he is then sentenced to death in absentia.

The two years of *Mizan* in Egypt is the most radical years of the journal and probably the real reason for the death sentence. His time in Egypt proves difficult as he once again succumbs to personal crisis far away from his family to which he was quite attached. He also openly exhibits a kind of paranoia of being abducted by agents and put to death. His behavior prompts new

31 Ibid., 77-9.

32 Ursinus, “Mizandji Mehmed Murad.”

33 Taner Timur, *Osmanlı Çalışmaları* (Ankara, 1989).

34 Michael Ursinus, “Mizandji Mehmed Murad.”

accusations about his mental instability, perhaps also reflecting the growing unease with the *Mizan*. This is all the more apparent as the Ottomans began to pressure the British and Egyptian governments for his extradition. So he leaves once again for Paris in 1896 and there becomes the leader of the CUP despite some reservations. But this does re-establish *Mizan* as *Meşveret*,³⁵ the print organ of the CUP.

This peak in his political career against the Hamidian regime, however, does not last. His relationship of tension with Ahmed Rıza does not change, and within a year he quits the CUP leadership. His activities in Paris are closely watched by the Hamidian regime as proven by his meeting with Ahmed Celaledin, head of Abdülhamid's intelligent service. Ahmed Celaledin lays down conditions of pardon to Mehmed Murad. Clearly he accepts these conditions as he returns to Istanbul in 1897 only to find himself under surveillance. Interestingly, he is also offered a post in the intelligence service but he declines. Even though he was not recruited, the Hamidian authorities must have deemed him less dangerous in Istanbul than in Paris. He then finds himself a post in the financial department of the *Şura-yı Devlet* (state council), instead of a legal position. He keeps this position until 1908 and after the constitutional revolution he starts *Mizan* again for the fourth and final time.

As Ursinus correctly puts, the *Mizan* was an opposition journal par excellence as it now turned against the CUP an act which proved as detrimental as those against Abdülhamid: he is arrested in October 1908 and *Mizan* is shut down. After a few months of freedom, he finds himself in trouble once again during the counter-revolution of March 31 (April 1909), having been accused of collaboration with the anti-revolutionary political reaction. This time he is sentenced to life in a fortress in Rhodes where he begins his *Osmanlı Tarihi*. After spending 2 years there and another in Lesbos, he is pardoned in 1912 and returns to Istanbul. Upon which he embarks another European tour with his son, for medical treatment. He is back in Anadolu Hisarı to his residence where he dies in 1917.

At first sight, there is nothing all that surprising in this Ottoman career or lack thereof as many like Mehmed Murad changed allegiances daily to secure a position in a tumultuous empire during turbulent years. It is also said that he was influential in the preparation of the 1876 constitution. Yet in the beginning years of his Ottoman life, he was known as a strong Abdülhamid supporter, having taken his place among the circles of the *İttihad-i İslam*, or the

³⁵ Ibid.

Union of Islam. Only after his newspaper got him in trouble he left to Europe to work with the Young Turks. *Mizan* became an important voice for them, but soon after he resigned from the Society of Union and Progress. That is to say, he never became a strong CUP member. As we have seen, Mehmed Murad directed his opposition against the ruling party after 1908 and further infuriated the CUP when he accused them for their involvement in the massacres of Armenians in Adana. He was thus labeled as an important Turkish historian by Armenian circles and sources. Yet through all these changes he sticks to one activity which he takes to heart: writing in *Mizan* and writing history.

Professing world history

I believe that these *umumi tarih*s of the nineteenth century, the early examples, are fully developed historical constructs aiming to place Ottoman history within general histories. Mehmed Murad began his textbook for *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* (an abridged version of his *Umumi Tarih*, universal history) by stating that history is a science. But there is more: This science serves a variety of social and political functions. Service to the state is the most important – for history is a source of morality which will lead to better administration: “Because history makes us disgusted with bad people and stirs us to good people by talking about every aspect of people past, it thus reforms our morality and actions. Civil servants are the ones who benefit most from history. For history shows us the ways for good and bad government as it mostly talks about the administration of countries.”³⁶

Besides instructing the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* civil servants-to-be, this is also most definitely a message to the contemporary administration. It is also racist and orientalist: the need for the previous production of history means that the only race that has accomplished that so far in written form, the white race, has had the capacity to write history: “Because this history covers only the Caucasian peoples’ past in the last two or three thousand years of the whole of human past, that is, the past of the white people out of numerous

36 “Çünkü tarih geçmiş ademlerin her ahvalinden bahs iderek fena ademlerden iğrendirir ve iyi ademlere özendirir ve bu vechile ahlak ve edvarımızı islah ider. Hükümet memurları tarihten herkesden ziyade istifade ederler. Çünkü tarih en ziyade memalikin idaresinden bahs iderek hüsn idare ile sui idaresinin yollarını gösterir;” Mizancı Murad, *Muhtasar Tarih-i Umumi*, 1.

ances.”³⁷ This general outlook however is not void of a sense of the methodological underpinnings of history writing. According to Mehmed Murad, history is fed by many sources and representations: ”There are three kinds of vestiges that are extremely important to history. Firstly, written relics such as books; secondly, oral traditions such as folk stories told from one generation to the next; thirdly, ancient ruins such as edifices and weapons only civilized ancient peoples could have left behind.”³⁸

I believe this is a very good example of Ottoman historical writing equipped with Rankean standards of historicism with a heavy emphasis on political history. But it also is part of the romantic vision of history as seen in other literary works and novels of the era. For Mehmed Murad or Mizancı Murad not only taught history and wrote universal history books, but he also wrote romanesque novels as well as essays of criticism on romanticism and realism.³⁹

Mehmed Murad began the sixth volume of his *Umumi Tarih* with Western Europe and what he called New Great States.⁴⁰ Since these histories are chronologically ordered, to place Europe in the last volume was common. However the volumes on Europe are never organized in the same way, both thematically and chronologically they differ. Mehmed Murad seems to be the only one who starts the discussion with the British Commonwealth: he starts it in 1656 with the beginning of the strengthening of the constitution. Here the detailed description of the parliamentary system is noteworthy, set almost as a message to the Ottoman Empire and Abdülhamid and affirming powerfully the efficiency of the operation of the parliament: Clearly a reverence to Anglo-Saxon liberalism.⁴¹

This tone is nearly totally transformed in his rich portrayal of India: the British encroach upon India like a conniving snake. Here the British receives treatment as the whole of Europe that has since the Romans followed the strategy of divide and rule: this is their civilization, to which Mehmed Murad

37 “Bunun içündir ki tarih dünyaya gelmiş bunca akvamdan yalnız Kafkas cinsinin –yani renkleri beyaz olan insanların ahvalini ve geçmiş bunca zamandan yalnız iki üç bin senelik vukuatı şamildir;” *ibid.*

38 “Tarihçe bu kadar mühim olan asar üç nevidir: Evvela – Asar-ı mazbuta –mesela kitaplar gibi, seniyyen – asar-ı menkule – mesela ağızdan ağıza nakil olunagelen hikayeler gibi, salisen – asar-ı atike – mesela eski zaman ademlerinden kalma binalar ve silahlar ancak temeddün etmiş kavim bırakabilir;” *ibid.*

39 Michael Ursinus, “Mizandji Mehmed Murad.”

40 Mizancı Murad, *Tarih-i umumi*, 6 vols. (Istanbul, 1297-99/1879-80 to 1881-2).

41 Mizancı Murad, *Tarih-i umumi*, vol. 6, third impression (Istanbul, 1328), 1-10.

draws attention as he, without an exception, writes the word “civilized-medeni” in such quotation marks, a discursive tool historians still use. “‘Civilized’ Europeans displayed an example of their civilized treatment in India, which they have always exercised against ‘Asian Barbarians.’” They began, through all kinds of tricks and “friendly services” seemingly in the name of assistance but in truth making them dependent as if they are instruments to use them in the way they wished.”⁴² Interestingly, it is in this discussion of shrewd colonialism that Britain is treated as the whole of Europe whose historical legacy is situated in the Roman Empire, not before: since the Romans, the Asians are barbarians as “we all know that in the eyes of the European civilizations, mercy, safeguard, and righteousness are not traits that Asian barbarians possess.”⁴³ What is worse, according to Mehmed Murad, this perception that Europeans, including the Russians, held against the East can be put to use by a company like the British East India Company. “The well known tool of civilization made use of in India by the British and French, in central Asia and Caucasia by the Russians, actually in all the east by all Europeans has been employed in India. A commercial company could invade the immense Indian land with a population of 200 millions.”⁴⁴

Mehmed Murad then explains in detail the way in which the East India Company penetrated into India. The interesting part of his discussions of the resistance to the Company is that his examples are those of the Muslims in India but not the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire is almost entirely absent from this colonization but smaller Muslim powers such as the Raja in Mysore of Haydar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan are praised for stopping the Company at least for some time. The successful colonization of the Deccan by Tipu Sultan, which is partially a result of taking advantage of the weakness of other kingdoms and the Mughals against British incursions, according to Mehmed

42 “‘Medeni’ Avrupalılar cem-i zamanda ‘Asya Barbarlarına’ karşı izhar edegeldikleri medeniyetkarane muamelenin Hindistan’da dahi bir numunesini göstermişler Her nevi entrikalar ve ‘dostane hizmetler’ vasıtasıyla zahiren tazim ve hakikat halde ise kendilerine bend iderek alet gibi istedikleri yolda istimal etmeğe başlamışlardır;” *ibid.*, 12.

43 *Ibid.*, 13.

44 “İngilizler ile Fransızların Hindistan’da, Rusların vusta-yı Asya ile Kafkasya’da, velhasıl umum Frenklerin şarkda daima istimal etmekte oldukları “sivilizasyon”-u usul-u malumesi bahusus ol vakit Hindistan’da icra eylemiştir. Bir ticaret kumpanyası 200 milyonu mütecaviz nüfusu havi olan Hindistan kıta-ı cesimesinin zabturatını temin edebilmiştir;” *ibid.*

Murad, earned him the title of ‘Frederick the second of India.’⁴⁵ Interestingly, the context of this Muslim power’s success in India does not include any other from India’s own history, or even the Mughals, but identifies it within the European history during the rise of Prussia.

I believe here we can begin to delineate an Ottoman historical/academic/intellectual genre reflecting simultaneously Ottomanism, European historicism, and public education. The history used as a textbook at Mülkiye, refers frequently to the Ottoman context. When the 1857 Great Mutiny in India is discussed, it is situated against the backdrop of the Crimean War. The *sepoys*, the cavalry involved in the Mutiny, is described to the Ottoman reader as the *sipahi*, now a common practice in global history textbooks, despite great dissimilarities.⁴⁶

This kind of ambivalent or maybe even dubious treatment of British history continues in the explanation of their naval supremacy juxtaposed against the rise of America, and the question of slavery. First the migrations from Europe to Americas and their reasons are treated in the context of both the new continents and European history.⁴⁷ All the wars, George Washington, Franklin, the American Revolution and the establishment of the Republic are all discussed in this large context. The republican system and the constitution are again revered, without omitting a severe critique of the approval of slavery by the same system. Overall however, American history is treated as part of European history for the discussion ends with a short paragraph on the Civil War and the declaration that the United States of America thus became one of the greatest, if not the greatest, states of the world.⁴⁸

The order of the contents of Mehmed Murad’s history with Prussian history in the next chapter, followed by Russian history is also what sets his work apart from the others.⁴⁹ These, except that of Americas, are in a way dynastic histories prior to the French Revolution for the French Revolution receives treatment after a general analysis of the eighteenth century followed by a country by country theme of transformation in terms of Britain, France, and Germany. Not surprisingly, the French Revolution, called the Great Revolution, took up four chapters.⁵⁰

45 Ibid., 15.

46 Ibid., 12-18.

47 Ibid., 19-23.

48 Ibid., 24-32.

49 Ibid., Chapters 2 and 3.

50 Ibid., Chapters 6-8.

At the heart of the discussion of the general circumstances leading up to the Revolution is feudalism.⁵¹ Mehmed Murad describes the eighteenth century as being loaded with the expectation of reform primarily to alter the feudal system. But here he contrasts the expectant ‘public opinion’ with the fearing dynastic state.⁵² Neither the feudal system nor the concept of public opinion as opposed to the state is analyzed except for severe serfdom in Prussia. But it is the kings and their favorites that exploit the French more heavily with their excessive spending. Having been saved from scholasticism, which he declares as the culprit – he calls it the cage of humanity, education and the intellectual oeuvres help the formation of this public opinion that refused the conception of humanity as mere apparatus for the service of the state.⁵³

The most important matter in this discussion is given to the financial situation together with an analysis of the commercial and agricultural problems where taxation receives most attention. He starts with the financial background inherited from Louis the XIV: “Actually Louis the XIV had left the finances under much devastated circumstances. The debt was two billion franks. Incomes could not even meet the interest.”⁵⁴ This continues during the reign of Louis the XV, when the people were left in want of any security in the absence of private and civil laws. Clearly, good government necessitates just legislation. But here Mehmed Murad emphasizes law in the service of people which for him infers officials who are not corrupt but cannot receive salary. Civil service and due salary payment is always of utmost importance to Mehmed Murad, no doubt also a personal difficulty: “The income of the country did not suffice even to meet the expenses of the administrative council who dwelled in a life of excessive extravagance. The remainder of the civil servants including the judicial officials could not receive their salaries.”⁵⁵

Next in question is the great degree and extent of corruption with which the French lived. One sign of this corruption had to do with internal customs, which he calls ‘kara’ (black) customs: “During the revolution, black customs

51 Ibid., 57-58, 159, and 172-6

52 Ibid., 159.

53 Ibid., 157-8.

54 “Zaten Louis the XIV umur-u maliyeyi pek perişan bir halde bırakmış idi. Borç iki milyar Frangı mütecaviz idi. Varidat yalnız faiz için bile yeterli değildi,” *ibid.*, 173.

55 “Ahali hukuk-u şahsiye ve medeniye ile her türlü emniyetden mahrum kalmıştı. Memalikin varidatı safahat ve şaşaya dalmış olan heyet-i idarenin masarifini tesviyeye kafî geleliyordu. Sair memurin-i devlet ile beraber memurin-i adliye dahi aylıklarını alamıyorlardı;” *ibid.*, 180-1.

were established in 1200 locations only of northern France which were detrimental to French commerce. So much so that a commodity sold for five and a half franks in one place could go for as high as 62 franks elsewhere. One oxen cart carrying merchandise could pass through as many as fifty customs a day.”⁵⁶ Next came the concessions in crippling French finances. Like most of these customs fees, much other commercial activity was granted out in concessions: “There was no limit to grants of concessions by the government.”

For instance, “any person or company could be granted a concession to transfer cereals to the gate of the city, another to export it to the shops, a third to take it to the mills, a fourth to the ovens.”⁵⁷ Obviously tax exemption was also an important matter for Mehmed Murad, as he notes that “all the possessions of schools and seminaries in Paris were exempt from taxation.”⁵⁸ He also recorded the power of the aristocracy and the religious classes together with their exemption from taxation: “the aristocratic classes were exempt from nearly all taxes. The religious classes not only owned much of France but sometimes also received the tithe over the produce.”⁵⁹

He then identifies the French taxation system which served no benefit although supposedly it was designed to save agriculture from serfdom.⁶⁰ Tax farming replaced serfdom but essentially continued heavily burdening the agricultural producing classes. Tax farming was such that “certain taxes accruing an income of fifty or sixty millions would be farmed out to twenty millions.” As a result “agriculture, commerce, and even industry were under severe threat.”⁶¹

56 “Rüşvet ve irtikab nihayet derecede idi. İhtilal esnasında yalnız cenubi Fransa'nın 1200 mahallinde kara gümrükler mevcut idi. Kara gümrükler Fransa'nın ticaretine pek ziyade sekte vermekte olup ez cümle Fransa'nın bir mahallinde 5,5 franga satılan bir malın diğerinde 62 franga satıldığıнын emsali görülmekte idi. Bir öküz arabasının günde elli gümrükden geçtiği işidilmiştir;” *ibid.*, 184-5.

57 “Hükümet tarafından verilen imtiyazatın hesabı yok idi. Mesela şahsın veya kumpanyanın birine zahireyi şehir kapusuna kadar götürmek, diğerini mağazaya idhal etmek, üçüncüsünü değirmene götürmek, dördüncüsünü dahi furunlara satmak içim imtiyaz ita olunur idi;” *ibid.*, 185.

58 “Paris'te bulunan mektebler ile manastırlara mahsus olan emval ve eşya resimden muaf idi;” 185.

59 “Sınıf-ı mümtaza hemen vergilerden muaf idi. Sınıf-ı ruhani Fransa'nın büyük bir kısmına malik olduktan maada bazen mahsulatın öşrünü alırlar idi;” *ibid.*, 185.

60 “Fakat hürriyetleri mevhum olup hakikat halde esaretin resmen lağv olunmasından bir semere hasıl olmamış idi;” *ibid.*, 186.

61 “50-60 milyon varidat verir bazı vergiler 20 milyona iltizam olunur idi... ziraat ile beraber ticaret ve sinai dahi tazyik-i tehditte idi;” *ibid.*, 187.

Despite this detailed discussion of the economic situation before the revolution, the ideas of the Enlightenment and the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century do not receive thorough treatment, as if they bear no need for analysis, they are presented simply as givens. A few remarks about the philosophes are still worth mention. For example the American impact on the French Revolution is not absent: “When the youngsters who participated in the American wars and thus observed the influence of republican administration in America, having lived under it, came back to their homelands and met with the terrible situation of France began to argue for the establishment of a republican regime as the only amelioration. These published new ideas that were nothing but malicious in the eyes of the people, still provoking them.”⁶² Beyond this the encyclopedists are mentioned only in passing, even Voltaire gets very cursory mention through not any work he had written but a letter he penned to a member of the aristocracy: “I no longer doubt that the Revolution is to take place. My only regret is that I will not get to see it. Our youth shall! At least they should.”⁶³ Of course since none of these works come with citations and/or footnotes we have no way of knowing where Mehmed Murad found these words of Voltaire, if they exist. But the point is the perception of the French Revolution in the mouth of Voltaire, someone he had long admired and studied since his years in Russia. Mehmed Murad continues to refer to Voltaire in the last sentence of this section entitled “the Internal Situation that paved the Way for the Revolution” (*İnkılab-ı Mucib olan Ahval-ı Dahiliye*) by calling the revolution “the beautiful days” Voltaire referred to, quickly adding that they nonetheless caused much “ugly” destruction.⁶⁴

The absence of the analysis of the intellectual background to the French Revolution is a key element in Mehmed Murad and other *umumi tarihs*. In Mehmed Murad, however, this is not a simple omission, as he gives ample

62 “Amerika muharebelerinde hazır bulunan Amerika’da cumhuriyetin suret-i tesirini görmüş ve cumhuriyet idaresi tahtında bulunmuş olan delikanlılar vatanlarına avdetle Fransa’nın perişan halini müşahade edince Fransa’da dahi ortalığa ıslah için cumhuriyet usulünün ihdasından başka bir çare-i selamet olmadığını iddia etmeğe başlamışlardı. Bunlar ahali beyninde fesaddan hali olmayan bir takım efkâr-i cedide neşr ediyorlar, halki galeyana getiriyorlardı;” *ibid.*, 193.

63 “Artık inkılabın vuku bulacağına şüphem kalmadı. Yalnız o inkılabi görmek şerefinden mahrum kalacağıma müteessifim. Gençlerimiz görecektir! Varsın bari anlar görsünler;” *ibid.*, 188.

64 “Voltaire’in dediği ‘güzel günler’ filhakika verud etmiştir. Şu kadar ki ‘güzel günler’ gayet ‘çirkin’ olan bir çok cinayata meydan vermişlerdir;” *ibid.*, 188.

space to the discussion of constitutional regimes. Without discussing the intellectual legacy behind the French revolution, he revolves his entire history around this culmination point. For the Ottoman Empire has not gone through such an eighteenth century but is at the time of his writing ripe and indeed long due for the constitution. So the volume is very much geared toward Ottoman readers. For them he easily foregoes European historical methodologies and linear historicism, and instead offers constitutionalism and parliamentary regimes as the legacy of these universal histories for the late empire. The discussion of the causes of the French revolution also includes mention of the abolition of the French Parliament along with a few members' arrests, for the parliament was still a check to the monarchy. Because there was nothing left in the French administration to be called state administration except the protests of the parliament that took upon itself some social responsibility against some administrative actions in the name of the state.⁶⁵

There is no simple Eurocentrism here: In fact, this late Ottoman history writing depicts a more comprehensive understanding of Ottoman society beyond positivistic linearity. Grasping their historicism may indeed allow us to critically view the late Ottoman political practice in its various configurations of domination. In this political modernity alterities do not go unnoticed but neither can a clear-cut dichotomy of tradition versus modern be demarcated. If there is any, the most apparent methodological underpinnings of Mehmed Murad's history is the absence of such a dichotomy. The following depiction of the nineteenth century together with a summary covering earlier periods country by country including Belgium, Spain, Austria, and Italy, further illustrates the varieties of political domination.⁶⁶ In the age of imperialism itself, when the Ottoman Empire could also very well be considered a colonizer, Mehmed Murad's understanding of political modernity points to his appreciation of the complexity of world historical trajectories, even though he espouses one final outcome for all.

Then the last part of the book is set aside for Asia where Japan, China, India, Afghanistan, and Iran are treated in great detail.⁶⁷ Africa and Aus-

65 "Fransa idaresinin bir idare-i devlete benzer yeri kalmamış. Rezalet derecesine varmış idi. Yalnız Paris parlamentosu biraz cemiyet-i asari göstererek devletin münaf-ı umumiyesi namına hükümetin bazı hareketine karşı protestoya ceraat etmekte idi"; *ibid.*, 179.

66 *Ibid.*, Chapters 12-18.

67 *Ibid.*, Chapters 21-26.

tralia receive treatment as continents and rather cursorily.⁶⁸ The author explains this negligence by the limited contribution of these countries to the *umum medeniyet* – which this time he does not refer as European. We know that Africa will be treated in greater detail in his Ottoman history. The last two chapters of the six volumes are also very interesting: A discussion of civilization as was at the time of the writing of his oeuvre, the end of the nineteenth century, followed by an homage paid to the achievements and thinkers of this civilization.⁶⁹ His favorite is the constitutional system. He then credits the idea of liberty for paving the way to different ideologies, mostly Romanticism.

Concluding Remarks

The universal history writings of Mehmed Murad help us locate differing voices of modern global consciousness and enrich our understanding of political modernity. The framework of modern global consciousness as the locus of Ottoman history writing as in this example also helps us go beyond locating an alternative voice, and even perhaps, beyond epistemologies of postmodernism and postcolonialism. If these epistemologies are crucial to understanding political modernity, we can confront them by placing the Ottomans in the colonial and orientalist as well as historicist narrative conventions and discursive strategies instead of a disavowal of history. Thus history education and historical production in the late Ottoman Empire can mean a different kind of political modernity like that of colonial contexts to which modern European thought has a complex relationship.

This is not only necessary to situate the Ottoman Empire between the loom of encroaching imperialisms and those it itself enforced. For we also need to appreciate Ottoman products of historicism within the tapestry of political and intellectual roles that their authors emerged from. Surely the controversies these roles created cannot be solely based on the perception of an inevitable historical unfolding toward the Turkish nation-state as widely argued, as neither can they be simple emulators for a modernity they had much awe for but not much understanding of.

68 Ibid, Chapters 27-28.

69 Ibid., Chapters 29-30.

The World of Mehmed Murad: Writing Histoires Universelles in Ottoman Turkish

Abstract ■ In this article, I analyze Ottoman world histories written in the late nineteenth century and contextualize the Ottoman world of universal history texts as part of a global endeavor of self-positioning through the study of the past of humanity. Ottoman universal histories fared no less in this very global milieu of world history writing as reflections of rapidly modernizing societies on their positions within this new context. Late Ottoman world history writing produced narratives in their own right and articulated the ideas about the history of mankind and civilization that emerged in the post-Enlightenment era. These universal histories, most particularly the work of intellectuals such as Mehmed Murad, represented the self-positioning and imagining of the Ottomans within the same modernizing world. His *Umumi Tarih* first written for the history curricula at the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* also responded to the new need for texts of history to be used in higher education in the late nineteenth century. Mehmed Murad turned world history into an Ottoman discipline while publishing a newspaper named *Mizan*, wrote in the 1870s a six volume *Tarih-i Umumi* with a distinctly 'modern' character.

I believe this and other universal histories embody what I will -for now- call a new genre aiming to place Ottoman history within world histories. Writing world history provided Ottoman intellectuals the tools to weave ideas of Ottomanism, historicism, and public education together, and thus signaled a multiplicity of Ottoman historical/intellectual/academic genres.

Key words: Universal history, Ottoman world history writing, Mehmed Murad, Mekteb-i Mülkiye, Ottoman intellectual legacy, Ottoman History, history of 'mankind and civilization,' Hamidian era, Rankean historicism, nationalism, modern global consciousness, modernity.