

INTRODUCTION

TOCQUEVILLE'S GHOST

Distracted by the call to prayer that echoed across Divan Yolu from the mosque at Sultan Ahmad, the guard did not notice as Alexis de Tocqueville, the historian of the old regime and the scholar of modern government, slipped quietly past and entered the Prime Minister's Archive.¹

He strode briskly along the corridor and up a short flight of stairs, then he turned left toward the reading hall. Heading toward the last row of desks at the back of the room, he seated himself. The previous researcher had left at the desk a pile of red-bound registers. Curious, Tocqueville opened the uppermost document (Fig. 1). He bent over to get a better look at the unfamiliar handwriting before realizing that what lay before him was a ledger of contracts issued on village revenues in a remote province. Scrawled over its pages were notations that spanned nearly a century, between 1697 and 1793.

As he peeled back the pages, tattered by time and use, Tocqueville contemplated the profound changes in the style of the chancellery: unlike the clear and comprehensive registers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the ancien régime's records seemed a patois of script, cipher, and haphazard numbers.² He sighed, thinking of the "clarity and intelligence of the men" who compiled the first cadastral records of the early sixteenth century. These "obscure, ill ordered, incomplete, and slovenly" pages did not bode well for the eighteenth-

¹ Quotations are from *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1955). When meaning is unclear, I have also checked *L'ancien régime et la Révolution*, ed. J.-P. Mayer (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1967), and François Furet and Françoise Mélonio's new edition of the complete text and Tocqueville's notes, translated by Alan S. Kahan, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Also see J.-P. Mayer, ed. *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951-) 12 vols.

² For samples, see Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili (Diplomatik)* (Istanbul: Kubbealtı Akademisi Kültür ve San'at Vakfı, 1998).

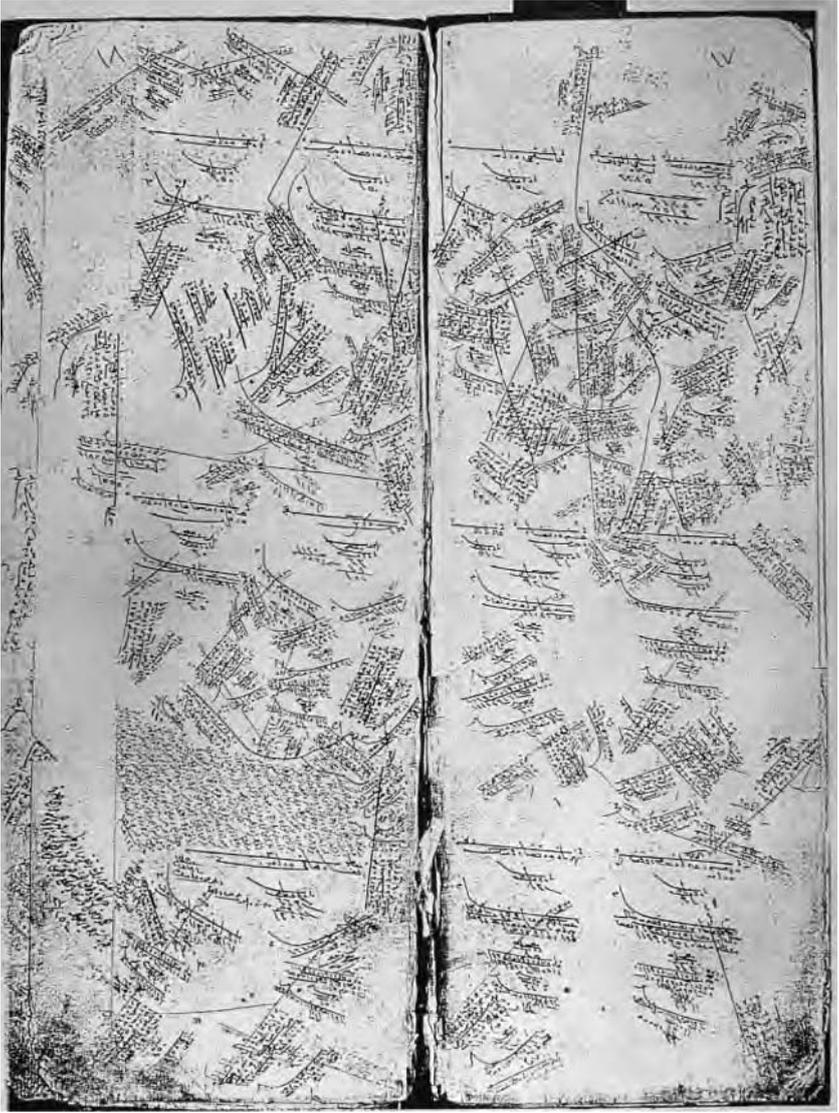


Fig. 1. A double page (reduced) from a *malikâne mukataa* “master” register for the province (*eyalet*) of Diyarbekir (MMD 9518:17–18). On the right hand side there are six entries; on the left, five. The transactions between contractors, connected by flourishes of the pen, span nearly a century. By permission of the Başbakanlık Arşivi.

century empire. They conjured up an image of a great power teetering on the edge of an abyss.³

The Ottomans, he mused, once dominated the Mediterranean and West Asia. Their neighbors regarded their political institutions as a marvel of statecraft. The sultan's civil servants formed tight administrative cadres, hierarchically organized, hardworking and honest. His soldiers possessed an incomparable *esprit de corps*. What had happened to this great state? The fierce janissaries laid down their muskets for pushcarts. Administrators, shunning their duties, distributed liberties and immunities far and wide. The sale of agricultural tithes, internal tariffs, and offices impoverished the peasantry and handicapped the merchant. Even the most powerful viziers and generals owed their political fortunes to Istanbul's Christian and Jewish bankers.

Tocqueville felt as if he had entered a hall of mirrors: the semblances between prerevolutionary France and the Ottoman old regime were uncanny. There was the strange synchrony of rise and fall, reform and centralization that punctuated the eighteenth Christian and the corresponding twelfth Islamic centuries. Administrative consolidation had begun under the absolutism of the Sun King, Louis XIV, as well as under the reign of his contemporary, the "Hunter-Sultan," Mehmet IV. Similar to the fiscal reforms carried out by the Bourbon minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (d. 1683), the imperial program was pushed forward by a succession of *Körpülü* viziers (1656–1683) as well as by Sultan Ahmed III's Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha (r. 1718–1730). As in France, years of dramatic innovation were followed by decades of prevaricating, borrowing, special favors, and venality. Stunned by the outcome of military engagements and the financial crises they wrought, the administrators of both regimes threw themselves into a program of fiscal reform in the last quarter century which culminated in the founding of a central treasury in

³ "The progressive decay of the institutions stemming from the Middle Ages can be followed in records of the period . . . In the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century registers I examined, I was much impressed by the skill with which they were drafted, their clarity, and the intelligence of the men compiling them, In later periods, however, there is a very definite falling off; the terriers become more and more obscure, ill ordered, incomplete, and slovenly" *The Old Régime*, 16. Echoes of Tocqueville ring through Bernard Lewis' account of Ottoman decline (*The Emergence of Modern Turkey* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, 3d ed., 2002]), 23.

France (1788) and the “New Order” fisc (*İrade-i Cedid Hazinesi*) in Istanbul (1793). Yet this defensive centralization only hastened the downfall of the ancien régime and sealed the fate of both sovereigns, Louis XVI in 1790 and Selim III in 1807.

Tocqueville suddenly grew disconcerted by his discovery: if the policies and institutional patterns of the old regime were so similar in character and so close in timing why did their paths suddenly divide? Why did France cohere and the Ottoman Empire fall apart?

Tocqueville straightened his waistcoat and closed the ledger. Rising from his seat, he turned his back on the reading room and walked deliberately down the stairs, past the guard’s station and into the street. A thin figure in quaint attire disappeared among the throngs of tourists milling in the gardens and the teahouses of the Hippodrome.

Alexis de Tocqueville did not, of course, visit Istanbul or its archives. Yet despite such imperious intellectual indifference to France’s former ally, Tocqueville’s ghost haunts the social scientific imagination of the Ottoman past.⁴ It is found in the model of the modern state, whose genesis is encapsulated in his classic *L’ancien régime et la Revolution*.⁵ As the popularizer of one of the most influential accounts of state centralization his thoughts about power and society

⁴ For a selection of his writings on Ottoman Algeria, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la colonie en Algérie*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1988); and Tocqueville, *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). For one of the most sustained reflections, Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3 pt. 1:129–253.

⁵ On his life and works, see André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography*, (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1988); Cheryl B. Welch, *De Tocqueville* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). As Edward Shils notes (“Tradition, Ecology and Institution in the History of Sociology,” in *The Constitution of Society* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 359), the revival of Tocqueville in sociological theory owes to Raymond Aron. See Raymond Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique. Montesquieu. Comte. Marx. Tocqueville. Durkheim. Pareto. Weber*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), and “Tocqueville retrouvé,” *Tocqueville Review* (1979): 8–23. I was grateful for the opportunity to hear Cheryl Welch, “Tocqueville between Two Worlds: France and Algeria,” and Joyce Appleby, “Does It Matter That Tocqueville Got Some Things Wrong?” at the special colloquium on Sheldon S. Wolin’s *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), held at the Institute of French Studies of New York University on April 19, 2002.

in eighteenth-century Europe are still refracted across the canon of political science and sociology.⁶ As an explanation for the rise of liberal government, his analysis rests on a “uniquely” European template of social and cultural institutions from which the prophets of modernization have derived many of their most cherished theories and policies.⁷ Extracting Europe from the interactive meridian of territorial states and oceanic empires and establishing the exceptionalism of the French political culture, the Tocquevillean model has also misrepresented the nature of historical change—the modern state could be implanted in foreign soils only through acculturation, capitalism, or colonialism.

There is, however, a paradox here. As our imaginary Tocqueville discovers, France had no monopoly over the institutional features of the ancien régime. In rereading Tocqueville’s classic through the filter of a growing body of early modern European, Middle Eastern and South Asian historiography, we find abundant contradictions, equivocations, and, at times, what seem to be willful misreading of the past. As our understanding of the historical record broadens and gains greater geographic equilibrium, so too the Islamic A.H. twelfth or, alternately, the Christian A.D. eighteenth centuries come into new focus, highlighting trends, processes, and phenomena that previous scholars once relegated to the margins. Comparison is not only possible,⁸ it is also absolutely necessary to make sense of political change in the past as well as to appreciate the peculiar stresses and strains of regimes in transition.

⁶ The assumption that the state under the ancien régime achieved a high degree of institutional centralization appears to filter from Tocqueville through Marx to modern social science, as David Waldner notes in *State Building and Late Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 31. See also Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 178–179. For Durkheim and the concept of centralization, Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum, *The Sociology of the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 12; and Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” 64, in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Idem (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁷ The list is long. For some well known representatives in historical and political sociology, see S. N. Eisenstadt, *Modernization: Protest and Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966); and Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, eds. *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). See also Seymour Drescher, *Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1968).

⁸ Michael Mann (*The Sources of Social Power* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University

Far from rendering his study of the old regime obsolete, Tocqueville's encounter with the Ottoman Empire might further our inquiry into the inner workings of the early modern state while helping us to exorcize a nineteenth ghost that still stalks the social scientific imagination.

In Search of an Archive

Like the *terriers* that provoked the real Tocqueville's exasperated assessment, the registers and loose documents of the Ottoman ancien-régime archive have disappointed and baffled many researchers. Yet this seeming unintelligibility or purported opacity is also a modern affect, a result of the physical and ideological clean sweep of the historical record during the early nineteenth century. The selective purge of history began well before the French Revolution and would become part of the colonial project as well. During the Enlightenment, advocates of statistical knowledge tied numerical precision to the very image of state power.⁹ Napoleon's conquests in the Mediterranean put these radical alterations to collective memory into effect. Revolutionary engineers transformed the urban plan, beginning with the razing of ghetto walls; and bureaucrats reshuffled the contents of archives, from Papal Rome to Mamluk Cairo.¹⁰ By the early nineteenth century, historians too entered the fray, claiming the archives

Press, 1986] 1:502–503) insists: “Comparison fails . . . Consider for a moment one obvious additional case, Islamic civilization. Why did the Miracle not occur there? . . . One distinctive feature of Islam has been tribalism; another, that religious fundamentalism recurs powerfully, usually from desert tribal bases . . . The comparative method has no solution to these problems, not because of any general logical or epistemological defects it might have but because, in dealing with the problems we simply do not have enough autonomous, analogical cases.” For one response, see Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). For some important qualifications of the comparative method, see R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of the European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁹ On the “statistical” school of Göttingen University, see Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23. August Ludwig von Schlözer was an early student of the Ottoman Empire and an exponent of the new “scientific” method.

¹⁰ On the impact on Italy, see Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

as their own. Some, most notably Leopold von Ranke, who directed the Prussian state archives, even busied themselves with reworking the very raw materials of their craft.¹¹ Already a symbol of the sovereignty of the modern nation state, industrial might and colonial domination allowed the European archive to subsume the world's past.¹²

If revolutionary fervor remade the past, as Tocqueville's own disclaimer acknowledges ("... [W]hen great revolutions are successful their causes cease to exist and the very fact of their success has made them incomprehensible"), modern historians have had an even freer hand in rewriting the history of states that failed to make the late eighteenth-century transition.¹³ This is not simply because the historicist rewriting of the Ottoman past came from implacably hostile and religiously-biased corners of the globe.¹⁴ Rather, the distortions of the Ottoman past, owe first and foremost to the empire's loss of sovereignty over the raw materials of memory. Unlike the defeated colonizing nation-state—such as France, which covered its retreat from North America in 1763 and two centuries later from Algeria,¹⁵ clutching the fig leaf of its "archives de souveraineté"—Ottoman archival materials were spoils that fell to the great powers or the new states of the Balkans.¹⁶ After World War I, the Ottoman past

¹¹ George G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Hanover, N.H.: University of New England, 1984), 19.

¹² E.g. Leopold von Ranke, *The Ottoman and the Spanish Empires, in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845). This is not simply a question of ignoring the world's history, but effectively of putting "history" itself on separate and unequal empirical and methodological tracks. Ranke justified very different methods for classical, biblical, and non-Western history. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography*, 15–17.

¹³ Tocqueville, *The Old Régime*, 5.

¹⁴ On the impact of orientalism on Ottoman history, see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman history: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and for a critique of historicism on Indian historiography, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ While robbing other peoples of their past, European states seem to have considered the return of archives to be part of the gentleman's rules of war. Article 22 of the treaty concluding the Seven Years War specified the return of French administrative documentation. Zenab Esmat Rashed, *The Peace of Paris, 1763* (Liverpool: University Press, 1951), 212–229.

¹⁶ İsmet Binark, ed., *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi* (Ankara: Turkish Republic Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 1992), 14–34.

was unceremoniously stripped away in colonial mandates. Just as in the nineteenth-century Balkans, these materials would become the contested inheritance of nation-states and the nations without states. As many, often competing, national narratives superseded it, archival dismemberment reinforced a partial and self-serving vision of the features of a multicontinental and multiethnic state.¹⁷

Given the dispersal of the remains, the prospect of writing a comprehensive study of this Ottoman century, one that unifies the disparate threads of provinces and center seems daunting indeed. Although there is rapid growth in this field, the historiography devoted to the eighteenth century still falls far short of research carried out on the empire's earlier centuries.¹⁸ Together, the monographic research devoted to the Ottoman past constitutes but a fraction of the accumulated studies on early modern Europe.¹⁹ Mindful of the long road ahead and fully appreciating whence we have come, the task I propose is a very different one.

This study does not pretend to reconstruct the Ottoman Empire's political history as such. Rather, it seeks to construct a series of interpretive frames derived from the current state of Ottoman historiography that might scrutinize Tocqueville's legacy while reexamining the paradoxes of power that obscure the past and remain an imped-

¹⁷ The literature continues to reinforce this divide by focusing on either provincial social and political history or on central-state institutional studies. For a sampling of studies that try to surmount this frontier, see Abdul-Karim Refeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723–1783* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966); Stanford Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789–1807* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988); T. Naff and R. Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1977); Robert W. Olson, *The Siege of Mosul and Ottoman-Persian Relations, 1718–43* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975). One of the most comprehensive studies to date on Ottoman fiscality is Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi XVIII Yüzyıldan Tanzimat'a Mali Tarih* (Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1986).

¹⁸ Leaving to one side Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen's outdated overview of the "Arab provinces," (*Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East*, 2 vols. [London: Oxford University Press, 1950 and 1957]) an introduction to the last generation of eighteenth-century studies may be found in Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayan," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 637–743; and Robert Mantran et al., *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

¹⁹ A point well taken by Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*, 6.

iment to understanding modern political paths. By filtering one of the classic narratives of socio-political change and revolution through an unfamiliar lens, the Ottoman ancien régime prods historians to turn questions of socio-organizational change both inward and outward: inward, toward the complex social and economic relationships between a center and its many peripheries; and outward, toward ever greater integration of historical polities within and among adjoining, converging or colliding, cultural and political systems.

Even by reducing the scope of this inquiry and taking advantage of a wide range of sources, both archival and published, this study has required more than a decade of empirical and conceptual spade-work. It began in 1986 with a study on the economic history of the province of Diyarbekir, located in the Kurdish southeast of today's Republic of Turkey. Only a year into that project, my focus began to change. As I peered deeper into the Ottoman past and questioned the received wisdom of European political theory, I was drawn into the larger puzzle of the eighteenth-century state. Realizing that it was impossible to understand a part without a better grasp of the mechanisms of the whole, I persevered in the archive. Repeatedly, I have returned to Istanbul and Ankara to conduct research, to consult with colleagues, and to explore newly catalogued sources.²⁰

The dissertation, "Measures of Empire: Tax Farmers and the Ottoman Ancien Régime,"²¹ reassessed the role of fiscal and administrative decentralization in early modern state formation. Conceptually and methodologically, it was built on the foundation laid for eighteenth-century political economy by Mehmet Genç. Addressing the large question of economic development from an Ottoman vantage point, Genç devised a method for using Ottoman archival documentation for quantifying change in the empire's domestic market.²²

²⁰ Despite casting my net wide, I have scraped only the surface of many of the new collections in the Başbakanlık Arşivi in Istanbul. In 1994, I was able to consult the Ottoman judicial court records (*şer'îye sicilleri*) for eighteenth-century Mardin and Diyarbekir that had been transferred to Milli Kütüphane in Ankara. For more on the local court records found in the Republic of Turkey, see Ahmet Akgündüz et al., eds., *Şer'îye Sicilleri*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Türk Dünyaşi Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1988).

²¹ Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1995.

²² Mehmet Genç, "A Study on the Feasibility of Using Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Financial Records as an Indicator of Economic Activity," in *The Ottoman Empire in the World Economy*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu-Inan (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 345–373.

By adapting what had long been regarded as the quintessentially old-regime type of revenue contracting, the quasi-proprietary, lease-for-life *malikâne* contract to this end, he also furnished students of the old regime with an acutely sensitive tool for retracing social relationships and political organization. Recognizing its promise for social history, Jean-Pierre Thieck, who was working on a monograph on Aleppo before his untimely death in 1990, cracked another key part of the old regime puzzle.²³ He employed tax-farming documentation to reconstruct the economy and polity of northern Syria. By tracing connections between town and country through rural tax farms and by identifying gentry-contractors, he illuminated a government of the urban gentry forming in the shadow of the state's policies of extraction and redistribution.

Applying these conceptual and methodological insights to new data and bringing an outline of the central-state's redistributive structure together with the evolving administrative system in the provinces, my research pointed to concomitant processes.²⁴ First, as the web of contractual relationships emanating from contracting identified the actors and interests that cemented the old-regime elite, I observed that sectoral investments distinguished the state elite from non-investors such as the religious establishment, as well as from more ordinary contractors, members of what we might call the third estate, whose portfolios were restricted to small scale agricultural holdings. Even as this system of contracting networks grew more distended in space, I speculated, the state's monetary policy and regulation of credit markets assured Istanbul's continued dominance over many of the key imperial actors.²⁵

²³ Jean-Pierre Thieck, "Décentralisation ottomane et affirmation urbaine à Alep à la fin du XVIII^{ème} siècle," in *Mouvements communautaires et espaces urbains au Machreq*, ed. Mona Zakaria et al. (Beirut: Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, 1985), 118–168. For an expanded version of this seminal article as well as the journalistic writings of "Michel Farrère" see Gilles Kepel, ed., *Passion d'Orient* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1992).

²⁴ See Ariel Salzmann, "An Ancien Régime Revisited: Privatization and Political Economy in the 18th Century Ottoman Empire," *Politics & Society* 21 (1993): 393–423.

²⁵ For more on Istanbul's arbitrage policies, see Halil Sahillioğlu, "The Role of International Monetary and Metal Movements in Ottoman Monetary History, 1300–1700," in *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. J. F. Richards (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), 269–304; and Şevket Pamuk, "The Recovery of the Ottoman Monetary System in the Eighteenth Century," in Kemal Karpat, *The Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 188–211.

Second, by studying the devolution, transfer, and partnerships of shareholders of tax farms, I noted that premodern “privatization” did not necessarily contribute to economic and political disaffection with the state. Instead, it fostered a distinct form of sociopolitical integration: vertically, as the *ricâl-ı devlet*, the Ottoman aristocracy of service and courtiers cultivated extensive networks across the empire in order to manage their assets; and horizontally, as gentry (*eşrâf ve ayân*) invested in smaller-scale tax farming as a means for creating spheres of influence within cities and the countryside. Not “indirect rule” or the solvent of an imperial structure, tax farming should be considered state formation by other means.

The dissertation, which offered an alternative model for eighteenth-century Ottoman sociopolitical history, lent itself toward further quantitative and qualitative research. Rather than continue to quantify these aspects of the imperial structure, the present work explores several of the more misunderstood facets of old-regime rule and governance. Thankfully, I did not have to start from scratch. Although much of the material in chapter 1 is substantially new, the core of my dissertation research, including a quasi-monographic account of the political economy of an Ottoman province, provided raw materials for the present essay as well.

Despite its distance (approximately 1400 kilometers from Istanbul), Diyarbekir was tethered to the imperial system in a peculiar logistical, social, and economic fashion. Like northern and central Syria, northeastern Anatolia, and many of the Balkan provinces,²⁶ political relationships in Diyarbekir exemplify the old regime compromise. By contrast, as recent monographs on eighteenth-century Cairo, Mosul, Baghdad, Basra, and southern Syria/Palestine have shown, outer-ring Asian and African provinces were simply too far removed to exhibit the more characteristic aspects of vernacular government under the old regime. As Tocqueville himself found for France’s southernmost provinces, the so-called *pays d’états*, these outlying zones testify to the territorial limits of the early modern state: during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their actors responded to the strategic concerns of the frontier or the opportunities afforded by a competitive interstate system.²⁷

²⁶ For another example, see Michael Robert Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

²⁷ See, in particular, Richard van Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebanon*:

If benefiting from earlier choices, the present study has presented new documentary challenges. Ideally, I would have hoped to have stumbled upon a rich cache of documents, such as the *cahiers de doléance* or the diaries of provincial elites, that might help better explain the political ideas of the gentry or the quotidian cultural and social relations within and between a provincial city and the Sublime Porte. Although I did not, there is every reason to believe that the patient and creative researcher will yet find them.²⁸ But the records I have used, although all too often drafted in Istanbul itself, do help me reconstruct no less compelling features of the polity of the old regime. In addressing issues of space, hierarchy, and government, I have tried to diversify the witnesses and media of documentation, teasing information from documents left by palace scientists, artists, court historians, judges and bureaucrats. Despite efforts to broaden my witnesses, readers will note many absences and silences. Few subalterns and no women, with the exception of a rare cameo appearance, are to be found within these pages.

While preoccupied with managing the scale of this endeavor, it is no less true that even the most determined attempts to provide a synthetic overview of an as yet unintegrated historical landscape will fail without attention to more specific regional realities. To the extent possible, I have tried to accomplish this by maintaining a critical distance from the unparalleled but inherently biased vantage point offered by the registers, edicts, orders, and reports of the Sublime Porte. In addition to another round of research in the eighteenth-century court records for Diyarbekir and Mardin, I have gleaned information from monographs on the provincial history of neighboring regions to build a composite picture. İbrahim Yılmazçelik's fine study on Diyarbekir's late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth-century capital district and city of Amid, a monograph that relies almost

The Khazin Sheikhs and the Maronite Church (1736–1840) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Household in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazadağlı* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Thabit A. J. Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks, and Murder: The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth-Century Basra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and provincial society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁸ For Arabic sources, see Reinhard Schulze, "Was Ist Die Islamische Augklärung?" *Die Welt Des Islams* 36 (1996): 277–325.

exclusively on provincial documentation and narrative sources otherwise unavailable to me, keeps the provincial story from faltering.²⁹

If the Ottoman Empire challenges students of the old regime in an acute fashion, it is not simply a consequence of documentation. The difficulties of reading and interpretation are part and parcel of modern notions of sovereignty.³⁰ For modern sovereignty entails not only a notion of a monopoly of powers and the mutual recognition of its members within a “club” of nation-states, but also predisposes the investigator to adopting a particular perspective within the polity itself. As such, an interpretation of the Ottoman past has invariably demanded that researchers choose a central point of perspective and, by it, to predetermine the gravitational center of power between a state elite and the populations of its many peripheries. By beginning this study with a map in which the empire itself is embedded in larger geopolitical landscape of Eurasia, I hope to remind myself as much as my readers, that the picture I paint would be very different had I limited my perspective to Belgrade, Cairo, Istanbul or Baghdad. As historians and social scientists recover diverse facets of a common past, it is will not be enough to revise narratives or simply scrap the dominant paradigm; we must also re-site historiography itself.

The Old Régime through an Ottoman Lens

The Ottoman Empire, the sociological axiom goes, is not a state; it is an empire, to be exact, as Talcott Parsons would have it, an “intermediate empire.”³¹ This classification conveys a preordained course: a “youth” of precocious, albeit despotic centralization,

²⁹ Dr. Yılmazçelik kindly provided me with a copy of his dissertation, “XIX. Yüzyılın ilk Yarısında Diyarbakır, 1790–1840,” (Firat University, 1991) 2 vols., during my visit to Elazığ/Harput in 1992; given discrepancies in documentation, I cite from both the dissertation as well as the resulting monograph, XIX. *Yüzyılın ilk Yarısında Diyarbakır, 1790–1840* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995).

³⁰ On revisions to the classic notions of sovereignty, see John Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,” *International Organization*, 47 (1993): 139–74; and Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, eds., *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³¹ S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 17–23. For an early critique, see Norman Izkowitz, “Eighteenth Century Ottoman Realities,” *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 73–94.

middle years of social stasis, followed inevitably by institutional decay and violent collapse. As new studies disabuse such generalizations, Ottoman scholars are increasingly reluctant to accept the received wisdom of nineteenth-century historiography and social science or to reflexively segregate a Eurasia and African state from the course of modern political history.³² In fact, a healthy degree of skepticism with regard to the authority of the Western canon has become an indispensable tool of our trade.

Ironically, a student of Ottoman history who might peruse *The Old Régime and the French Revolution* today no longer sees in the budding “state” of Western Europe an alien, impossibly distant entity. Quite the contrary, she finds herself at home in Tocqueville’s description of the twists and turns in the old-regime plot and smiles with familiarity at the recurrence of the comparable tropes. Tocqueville’s celebration of Louis XIV’s role as the grand architect of French absolutism (borrowed from Voltaire) begs for comparison with the glorification of Süleyman the Magnificent (d. 1566) in the historiography of Ottoman statecraft or the line of continuity traced between the programs of “Westernization” of Ahmet III and those of his grandson Selim III (r. 1789–1807).³³

Although the Ottoman historian might sympathize with an author who tries sustain his central thesis despite the contradictory evidence he examines, we can no longer ignore the ideological blinders that fundamentally obstructed his field of vision. Addressing the French Revolution’s sharpest critic in his introduction and proposing to trace its roots to the genetic structure Western institutions and the specific socioeconomic conditions of old-regime France, book 1 steers readers away from the territorial state system and the world economy.³⁴ Outside of space, European institutional structures appear primordial.³⁵ Teleology replaces contingency. Whether we call them paths

³² See Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*.

³³ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime: A History of France, 1610–1774* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 72, 266–267, 273, 630–635; Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar eds., *Süleyman The First and His Time* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993) and Cornell H. Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” *In Soliman le Manifique et son temps: actes du colloque de Paris Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais 7–10 Mars 1990*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales, 1992), 159–77.

³⁴ *The Old Régime*, bk. 1, ch. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10–11. François Furet (*The Old Regime*, vol. 1, 99) voices frustration over Tocqueville’s lack of concern for the wars of religion.

or modes of production, only the nations “des confins de la Pologne à la mer d'Irlande” that arise from post-Roman, Christian “Europe” plot a common course that leads through “feudalism,” parish communities, and aristocracy toward private property, capitalism and modern government, irrespective of the interactive, interdependent Eurasian and African state systems. In subsequent chapters we realize the significance of these abstract claims: as the rudiments of the modern state emerge from absolutist monarchy in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is Christian civilization, the bonds of the rural parish, and the residue of an autonomous aristocratic hierarchy which guard European absolutism from lapsing into pure despotism (one assumes of an “oriental” variety).³⁶

Even if we accept a grain-of-truth argument about the political constitution of medieval Europe, the peculiarities of the French clergy, and the specificities of culture and cultivation, the fact remains that Tocqueville's strongest interpretative arguments about the institutional and social structure of prerevolutionary France are at odds with the findings of most social historians.³⁷ Despite Tocqueville's insistence, claims that old regime laid the basic foundation for further centralization in areas of taxation, military recruitment, and justice, that Paris became “maitre” of the nation, or that the cultural identity of its populations grew increasingly homogeneous ring hollow. France of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries more closely resembled the classic definition of an early modern “empire” than a nation-state.³⁸ It was a composite of regional governments and near city-states, which zealously defended local languages, legal codes and customs.³⁹ Half of its revenues derived from indirect methods of finance and revenue collection, including tax farming and the sale of thousands of venal offices.⁴⁰

³⁶ The Old Régime, 27; bk. 2, ch. 11.

³⁷ Charles Tilly, “State and Counterrevolution in France,” *Social Research*, 56 (1989): 72–73. For references in *The Old Régime*: on the influence of Paris over the provinces, 35, 65–72; on the destruction of the nobility, 27, 72–79; on the centralization process, 34–38, 65 131, 204; on conscription, 104–105; on the rule of the intendants, 36–38, 134–135, 180.

³⁸ George Rudé, *Europe in the 18th Century: Aristocracy and the Bourgeois Challenge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 85, 117–119.

³⁹ For the provincial dimension, see Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and more recently, Pierre Deyon, *L'état face au pouvoir local: un autre regard sur l'histoire de France* (Paris: Editions Locales de France, 1996).

⁴⁰ George T. Matthews, *The Royal General Farms in Eighteenth Century France* (New

Despite his renewed popularity among certain schools of French historiography,⁴¹ Tocqueville's archival database for the *The Old Régime and the French Revolution* was exceedingly shallow. While appreciating Tocquevillian sensitivity toward the interplay of state and society, we must recognize that his method of analysis is frequently contradictory and his conclusions are often inconsistent with his own evidence.⁴² Causality is elusive: in one section Tocqueville might attribute the catalyst of change to the pressures of increasing state centralization; pages later, he will point to the role of forms of decentralization in mounting social tensions. In fact, struggles for what we might define as social and political rights do not necessarily owe to confrontations with central authority. Rather, following the texts of the Enlightenment, Tocqueville cites the arbitrary exercise of power, the failure to pay creditors, the promiscuous sale of offices, and the granting of immunities as the kindling that ignited intellectual dissent and inter-estate conflict.

The Old Régime, despite its author's insistence, does not sustain his argument for a linear social and organizational progression from absolutism to revolution and the modern nation-state. Moreover, the institutional features of the old regime that he identified are not unique to France, but are found in other settings, including the Ottoman Empire. Yet, these contradictions should not detract from what this essay did accomplish, if largely impressionistically. For even as Tocqueville reinstated the old regime as an important stage in modern political development, he was forced to grapple with the paradoxical nature of the processes that characterized eighteenth-century political transformation overall. Thus, unlike many of his later interpreters, he remained keenly aware of the very tentative nature of the "infrastructural power" of early modern polities and relevance of the concessions made en route to consolidation:

York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 3–16; Isser Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 114–118; and Eugen Joseph Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁴¹ François Furet (*Penser la Révolution française* [Paris: Gallimard, 1978]) was one of the main proponents of the Tocquevillian turn; see also Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); compare, George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionists* (London: Verso, 1987).

⁴² Compare, Theda Skocpol, "Introduction: Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research" in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. T. Skocpol, Peter Evans, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21.

While the central government was gradually taking over all the powers of local authorities and coming more and more to monopolize the whole administration of the country, some institutions which it had allowed to survive and even some new ones created by itself tended to check this centripetal movement . . . it had no very clear idea of the extent of its power. None of its rights was firmly established or unequivocally defined, and though its sphere of action was already vast, it had to grope, so to speak in the dark and exercise much prudence.⁴³

Of the features Tocqueville describes, fiscal and administrative decentralization remains one of the more intransigent components of the old-regime paradox.⁴⁴ It is ironic that precisely because of an error-ridden social scientific paradigms on “empires,” decentralization, along with its attendant state involution, have long taken center stage in eighteenth-century Ottoman studies. Over the past quarter century, new political and socioeconomic investigations have shed the anachronism and reductionism of functionalist sociology, furnishing early modern historiography with a far more complex analysis of an evolving institutional structure.⁴⁵ Approaching the problem of decentralization from different points on the Ottoman map, Albert Hourani and Halil İnalçık have been at the forefront of this reassessment of the old regime.⁴⁶ Although neither scholar addresses Tocqueville directly, their creative interpretation of Ottoman realities actually helps us reconsider his classic account of state formation in the eighteenth century. For example, Hourani’s characterization of Istanbul’s

⁴³ *The Old Régime*, 108–109.

⁴⁴ See Ian Copland and Michael R. Godley, “Revenue Farming in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on Taxation, Social Structure and Development in the Early-Modern Period,” in *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, ed. John Butcher and Howard Dick (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 45–68. Helen Nader, *Liberty in Absolutist Spain: The Habsburg Sale of Towns, 1516–1700* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); Gabriel Ardant, “Financial Policy and Economic Infrastructure of Modern States and Nations,” in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 164–242; Susan Mann, *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); and Murat Çizakça, *A Comparative Evolution of Business Partnerships: The Islamic World and Europe with Specific Reference to the Ottoman Archives* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1996).

⁴⁵ Note Virginia H. Aksan, “Locating the Ottomans among Early Modern Empires,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 1–32.

⁴⁶ Albert Hourani, “The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century,” *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957): 89–122, reprinted in Hourani, *A Vision of History* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1961), 35–70; and Halil İnalçık, “Centralization and Decentralization Ottoman Administration,” in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, 27–52.

authority over old-regime Arab cities demonstrates that what Tocqueville calls Versailles' "tutelle administrative," did not subvert the power of urban elites so much as complement it.⁴⁷ The uneasy domination of the court over the provincial bourgeoisie, feudal lords, and priests would be better considered within Halil İnalcık's dialectical framework, which posits an ongoing tug-of-war between the Sublime Porte (*Bab-ı Âli*), commanders in the field, and particularly the provincial gentry.⁴⁸

Conscious of the larger historical context, studies on Ottoman history have also refined our understanding of the questions that Tocqueville summarily discarded, such as the impact of the world market on state formation.⁴⁹ Rescuing Ottoman economic history from the anecdotal or unidimensional accounts that had filled in a vast, undetermined space in world history, Mehmet Genç reconstructs a trajectory of economic growth during the first three-quarters of the century.⁵⁰ His research demonstrates the intimate relationship between global financial trends and state development, as well as between Istanbul's policies of military command and the relative resiliency of Ottoman industry. Genç's studies also reveal the fact that the state's ability to grant immunities and privileges expanded and contracted with wars and fiscal exigencies.

By reimagining the space of the early modern state, recent studies shed light on the complexities of socio-organizational change in the provinces and in the imperial capital. Research on Syria by Jean-Pierre Thieck and Karl Barbir points to the fact that Istanbul might decentralize, even devolve military authority unto provincial agents, while simultaneously building new nodes of state power throughout the empire. Policies of decentralization were no less important for the cohesion of the ruling elite. Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj documents how

⁴⁷ Hourani, "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent," 100.

⁴⁸ See İnalcık, "Centralization and Decentralization."

⁴⁹ For representatives of this school, see Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, ed. *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a superb new monograph, see Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

⁵⁰ Mehmet Genç, "Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Şavaş," *Yapıt* 49 (1984): 52–61, Tables 49: (1984): 86–93; Genç "Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikâne Sistemi," in *İktisat Tarihi Semineri*, ed. Osman Okyar and Ünal Nalbantoğlu (Ankara: Hacetepe Üniversitesi Yay., 1975), 231–96; and Genç, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda: Devlet ve Ekonomi* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2000).

a bureaucratic and military “aristocracy”, lacking hereditary title or property, reproduced itself as an estate by extensive political households or patronage networks.⁵¹ As we will see in chapter 2, prime access to information and resources, particularly fiscal favors, was essential to sustaining these networks. The Istanbul “aristocracy of service,” took advantage of a distinctly old-regime type of insider trading or what the economist Joseph Stiglitz calls in a modern context “asymmetric information.”⁵²

Ottoman historians have another advantage in a critical rereading of the Tocquevillean account of institutional change in the eighteenth century. As an ancien régime writ large, Ottoman history has demanded a complex and often fragmented approach to its parts; indeed, it has never really been possible to investigate a polity, which at one time encompassed lands from Yemen to Hungary, using a single unit of analysis. Although modern notions of sovereignty (just as the ideology of absolutism and “reason of state” in the past) might require that political scientists maintain this fiction,⁵³ there is no reason for the historian to accept the category of the unitary state at face value.

As an anthropologist of law, Sally Falk Moore reminds fellow social scientists that even the contemporary state is an “organization of organizations” whose integration (and disintegration) over time occurs through competition and negotiation.⁵⁴ To put this in an early modern context, we might say that despite the growing concentration of coercive powers, autonomous behavior, and increased agility in coordinating its parts, the pre-modern state, as Tocqueville conceded

⁵¹ “The Ottoman Vezir and Pasha Households, 1683–1703: A Preliminary Report,” *JAOS* 94 (1972): 438–47.

⁵² Compare, Philip T. Hoffman, Gille Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, “Information and Economic History: How the Credit Market in Old Regime Paris Forces us to Rethink the Transition to Capitalism,” *The American Historical Review* 101 (1999): 69–94.

⁵³ Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992), esp. Introduction. See also J. P. Nettl, “The State as a Conceptual Variable,” *World Politics* 20 (1968): 559–592. On the morrow of WWI, Harold J. Laski (*Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917], 1) rendered it thusly: “Hegelianwise, we cannot avoid the temptation that bids us make our State a unity. It is to be all-absorptive. All groups within itself are to be but the ministrants to its life; their relativity is the outcome of its sovereignty since without it they could have no existence.”

⁵⁴ Sally Falk Moore, *Law as Process: An Anthropological Approach* (London: Routledge, 1978), 1–31.

above, operated within a limited range and with varying degrees of efficiency. Rather than a monopoly of powers in the Weberian sense, the absolutist sovereign relied on a plurality of force: the early modern state ruled, but it did not govern.

In disaggregating the early modern state, the experience of Ottoman historiography also warns us about repeating the error of merely splitting a large territorial polity along what appears to be its most obvious sociological and spatial seams. Instead, it is the very irregularities of rule that give us some idea of the complex division of organizational and administrative labor, or of the “split capacities” between center and periphery, as well as between cities and the countryside. As Tocqueville himself conceded, this was not a zero-sum game in which the center perpetually gained the upper hand as peripheries surrendered powers. The governmental capacity of the province might grow alongside the expanding powers of the central state. These powers might be adjunctive or complementary; on other occasions local powers came into direct competition with the central state.

Taxation remains one of the more sensitive economic and socio-organizational indicators of the gradual process of state consolidation which also helps to map this division of labor in space. There is a fair degree of congruence among the old regimes of Europe and Asia in the timing of the first direct taxes. Although both the French and Ottoman centers introduced a variety of taxes from the sixteenth century onward, fiscal obligations and rents (whether deemed state or private) were still, in large part, diverted into local coffers. Officially or unofficially, this seepage was part of the equation of rule. Even as statesmen attempted to impose more “direct” methods of taxation, they were forced to devolve other facets of government to local actors in order to forge alliances. Ironically, rather than closing the power gap, increasing obligations also made for new opportunities for exemptions. In both France and the Ottoman Empire tax farming increased apace with direct taxation. The paradox remains: although tax farming dispersed state capacity, it also established uniform terms of contract between sovereign and a certain stratum of the subject population; it standardized an important political relationship.

New research on questions of privilege and property within Europe suggests that we should look to forms of decentralization and devolution of power to help us better appreciate the rise of modern gov-

ernment and changing political claims of subjects.⁵⁵ Such agreements were not merely economic transactions. Although privileges and immunities were not rights in the classical sense, they were far from ephemeral. In the Ottoman case, tax farming implicitly or explicitly entailed a redefinition of obligations and privilege, hence of political status. On a more abstract plane, long-standing privileges, like property, established new boundaries between state and society. Cumulatively, revenue contracting and venal offices often constituted veritable forms of governance. Moreover, these privileges or contractual relations established a baseline from which subjects might make new demands of central authority or, alternately, erect barriers against the further state encroachment on local authority.

By better appreciating variation within a single polity, disaggregating the premodern state also allows us to gauge the synchronicity and the contingency of state formation across the European and Asian meridian of territorial states as well as appreciating multi-lateral relationships with respect to other territorial states.⁵⁶ This reorientation is particularly critical for states like the Ottoman Empire, not only because of scale but also because of its geopolitical coordinates at the intersection of different regional systems.⁵⁷ As the “hinge” of Eurasia,⁵⁸ the Ottoman state responded to diverse forms of warfare, the pulse of discrete trade networks, and a multiplicity of administrative forms. In the West, the Ottoman state remained a critical guarantor, with France, of the balance of power within the

⁵⁵ See Philip T. Hoffman and Kathryn Norberg, eds. *Fiscal Crises, Liberty, and Representative Government, 1450–1789* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ See Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); and Otto Hintze, “The Formation of States and Constitutional Development: A Study in History and Politics,” in *The Historical Essays*, ed. Felix Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 157–178. Edward W. Soja (“Re-Presenting the Spatial Critique of Historicism,” in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Read-and-Imagined Places* [Malden, MA and Oxford: M.I.T. Press, 1996], 164–185) takes discursive analysis to task and Hayden White’s approach in particular, for de-territorializing the same contexts they pretend to historicize.

⁵⁷ The conflation of so-called empires with the colonizing nation-states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only further obscures the contrasts and similarities between historic polities. See Ariel Salzmann, “Toward a Comparative History of the Ottoman State, 1450–1850” *Archiv orientální* (Oriental Archive) 66 (1998), special issue, Supplementa VIII, 351–66.

⁵⁸ Compare, William Hardy McNeill, *Venice: The Hinge of Europe, 1081–1797* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) and McNeill, *Europe’s Steppe Frontier, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

European state system until the end of the Seven Years War.⁵⁹ It was also an active participant in a very unstable West Asian system of states.

If the empire was the hinge, then Iran might well be considered the geopolitical epicenter of early modern European and Asian history. The protracted post-Safavid civil wars raged intermittently between 1720 and the final assumption of power by the Qajars after 1790. Spilling over into the Caucasus, Iraq, Central Asia, and India, the wars of the Iranian succession facilitated Russian and British expansion in Asia. The Ottoman Empire's own increasing territorial vulnerability during the last quarter of the eighteenth century was an indirect product of Nadir Shah's invasion of the Gulf and Mughal India and a direct consequence of the new global parameters of power after the Seven Years War. By the late eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire had lost a French counterweight to Britain in the Indian Ocean and to Russia in eastern Europe. Lacking a viable framework for a West Asian order, it also remained isolated from the emerging central European coalitions.⁶⁰

Taking as a given the compound makeup of most premodern polities and the multiplicity of geopolitical contexts in which such entities operated, territorial scale becomes a historical, rather than an institutional, ethnic, or demographic question. Whether we consider the multiple divisions of Poland, the relatively lax colonial regime in North America or the administrative decentralization in pre-revolutionary France, new lessons were learned on the relationship of state building and the degree of administrative consolidation in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. To put the modern state in historical perspective demands that we recognize that in both

⁵⁹ See Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Thomas Naff, "The Ottoman Empire and the European State System," in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. H. Bull and A. Watson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 143–170.

⁶⁰ There have been several attempts to come to terms with the early modern "Euro-Asian" (Frank Perlin's term) and African state system. See, for example, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. Vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 31 (1997): 735–762; and Victor Lieberman, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 463–546, among others.

France and the Ottoman Empire the first blow to the old regime was not ideological agitation or mass mobilization but fiscal crises, induced by prior military commitments.⁶¹ Yet both reached an impasse. Ottoman vulnerability to fluctuations in financial markets was exacerbated by a political apparatus soldered by credit. As it began to retract privileges and reached more deeply into provincial pockets, Istanbul confronted resistance at many levels.

Summoning the will, neither the Ottoman Empire in 1793 nor France in 1788, could call upon the political, coercive, administrative or legislative means to enforce it. Even a relatively compact state, such as France (with a land mass that comprised a territory smaller than even the Ottoman “core” in Asia Minor) came up short at the end of the century. Although revolutionary mobilization in the context of a European-wide war overwhelmed the opposition and counter-revolution, the gap between the state apparatus and local government in the Ottoman Empire could not be filled by the emerging unitary state.

A rereading of the Tocquevillean investigation of the emergence of modern government and correction for its myopia in matters of geopolitics and world economy, suggests that the reasons for the parting of political paths between Europe and Asia can be explained only by considering the common conundrums of power left by the nearly simultaneous dissolution of the old regime political order. In all cases, the transition was rocky and protracted. Some states, Venice and Poland, to name only two, fell by the wayside. The old regime sputtered to a close over the course of four decades in the Ottoman Empire. Interruptions and detours in state programs of fiscal centralization after 1793 allowed provincial elites and local governments ample time to regroup and dig in their heels. With its many exposed territorial edges and the fluid geopolitical situation of the Napoleonic Wars, provincial powers were able to renegotiate their relationship with the central state with outside support. In sharp contrast to the care with which statesmen crafted and restored “Europe,” including

⁶¹ Among many studies on this subject, see Larry Neal, *The Rise of Financial Capitalism: International Capital Markets in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 180–214; and Frank Perlin, “Financial Institutions and Business Practices across the Euro-Asian Interface: Comparative and Structural Considerations, 1500–1900,” in *The European Discovery of the World and Its Economic Effects on Pre-Industrial Society, 1500–1900: Papers of the Tenth International Economic History Congress*, ed. Hans Pohl (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), 257–303.

the offending French state after 1815, was the refusal of the Great Powers to extend equivalent recognition to Ottoman sovereignty or to guarantee its territorial integrity. This summary dissolution of the old-regime order and the expulsion of the Ottomans from the modern state system were rendered in a convenient euphemism: “The Eastern Question.”⁶² In the decades that followed every successful “exit” from the Ottoman Empire, including that of Greece in 1830 and Egypt after 1840, was mediated by foreign powers who not only conferred the laurels of sovereignty on local leadership but also militarily imposed new territorial divisions.⁶³

Vocabularies of Early Modernity

Tocqueville might have learned much from the Ottoman old regime had he removed his geographical and cultural blinders. Yet he still would have been stymied for lack of a suitable lexicon. Indeed, one of the greatest handicaps for those who attempt comparative investigations of the early modern world, a world before the crude stamp of colonialism and the nation-state took its toll on the diversity of cultures and reduced the variations of political organization, has been the absence of a common historical vocabulary.

For a handle on the premodern polity, we might borrow Tocqueville’s own all-embracing notion of the “ancien régime” (or old regime)⁶⁴ as a short hand for an amalgamated or, what Michael Hanagan would call, an “unconsolidated” state found in both Europe and Asia. If this term allows us to gather disparate facets of politics, society and economy under one historical umbrella, it also blurs the distinction between capacities that were dispersed in space. Rather than coining new terms, it might be best to modify existing terminology to acknowledge the inherent disjuncture of powers within the

⁶² Compare, Biancamaria Fontana, “The Napoleonic Empire and the Europe of Nations,” in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, U.K. and Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), 116–138.

⁶³ Consider, Albert O. Hirschman’s *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁶⁴ For the history of the term, see D. Venturino, “La Naissance de l’Ancien Régime,” in *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 11–40.

premodern “state” and to emphasize the protracted and uneven historical process involved in their realignment in space and sociologically into what we now know as the modern state.

For the purpose of this inquiry, I use the term state in a relatively narrow sense: it corresponds to a limited set of institutions and individuals within a territorial policy; it refers to actors who ruled primarily from or through the capital city and via politywide institutions (e.g., the dynasty/palace/court, the judiciary and formulation of imperial law, administrative and military hierarchies, the regulation of internal and external trade). During the early modern period, even though domestic challengers remained, the autonomy of state centers grew as a result of competition in an interstate arena. States were armed with unprecedented stockpiles of weapons and standing armies; they dressed each other in identifiable cultural uniforms on the battlefields and established patterns of alliances through an expanding web of diplomatic exchanges. Advancing at times and retreating at others, socio-organizational elements of the state during the early modern period permeated the periphery and were reproduced in cognate forms, among and between them.

Having narrowed the sense and reference of the premodern “state,” it is no less important to rename those dimensions of rule that escaped its direct cultural, coercive, and socio-organizational reach. Rather than conflating the notion of those who rule with those who govern, we might reserve the terms governance or government specifically for the complex of distinct provincial capacities: the quotidian acts of administration, adjudication, and enforcement. Not only was old-regime governance institutionally separate from many of the official organs of the state, it was also highly localized.⁶⁵ At the same time, it assured a peculiar form of standardization owing to the fact that government retained (in the case of the Ottomans) or gained (in many European contexts) elements of an overarching state “syntax.” This partial capacity, constituted of fragments of standard idiom amid diverse languages of power, made each government a hybrid, a “vernacular.”⁶⁶ Less inhibited by the officially constituted and chartered

⁶⁵ My sense of the “local” differs importantly from Clifford Geertz’s (*Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* [New York: Basic Books, 1983], 167–234) concept of “local knowledge.”

⁶⁶ By vernacular I appeal to the relationship between the Latinate languages and

hierarchies of the center, vernacular governments could act through a variety of agents, including formally constituted bodies such as urban parliaments and advisory councils. In other cases, governmental agency was vested in individuals drawn from the “third estate” under special patents; or, in the absence of stronger claimants legitimized by the state, governmental powers were seized by rural lords, religious leaders, or revenue collectors.

In addition to the reminting of two concepts, readers will find an eclectic mix of historical idioms. For instance: in place of the traditional, often reified, dyad, *askeri/reaya* (military order/subject), I invoke the notion of the second and third estates. My intent is to highlight the central importance of privilege and fiscal immunity in the definition of status under the old regime, qualities that distinguished the Ottoman religious establishment, or *ulema/ilmiye* and its “aristocracy of service,” the *rical-i devlet*, no less than their French counterparts.⁶⁷ So too the non-class-based social umbrella conveyed by the notion of the “third estate” is eminently serviceable in the Ottoman context for the tax-paying *reaya*, a category that in theory designated gentry, bourgeoisie, and peasantry alike. By drawing out similarities, I can also better clarify what I regard to be the key differences between the European nobility and the Ottoman “aristocracy of service.” It is precisely the inability to guarantee their patrimony from one generation to the next that gave rise to an extensive intra-generational form of accumulation (“corporate patrimonialism”) through networks and fungible assets, like tax-farms.⁶⁸

Latin during the Medieval period. Contrast, Jenny White, *Islamicist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), esp. Introduction.

⁶⁷ Gail Bossenga (“Society,” in *Old Regime France*, ed. William Doyle [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 76) comments that “The legal system of the old regime had its roots in a far more personal and paternalistic society that failed to distinguish explicitly between personal status, political rule, and rights of property.”

⁶⁸ Carter V. Findley (*Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980]) stresses the singular importance of the political household in the formation of the Ottoman state. Although I would not dispute the importance of networks in this or any political organization, the specific strategies that I describe in chapter 2 are not uniquely Ottoman. In fact, I believe that they are constitutive of the institutional changes that are associated with political modernization. See Gernot Grabher and David Stark, eds. *Restructuring Networks in Post-Socialism: Legacies, Linkages, and Localities* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Even in cases where the fit may appear more difficult, French or English equivalents have been used interchangeably with Ottoman terms for the purposes of fostering comparative reflection. (Indeed, the Armenian dragoman, Mouragea D'Ohsson [1740–1807] readily found French equivalents for Ottoman old-regime personnel and fiscal institutions throughout his multivolume opus.)⁶⁹ For example, the duties and origins of the chief, fiscal officer of a province, often called *voivoda* in Ottoman parlance might have differed throughout the Ottoman Empire and was clearly not a replica of his next-of-kin in old-regime France, the *intendant*.⁷⁰ However, there is broad enough congruence on the social origins of these actors (members of the third estate), the nature of these offices within the respective old regimes and, no less importantly, the increasingly strategic position they occupied in the historical evolution of government-state relations, to warrant this risky translation.⁷¹ In other cases, it seems only appropriate to swap Ottoman “buzz words” for terms with no less controversial baggage in their respective fields, such as the term “gentry” for the collective noun, *ayân-ı vilayet* and “judge” for *kadi*.⁷²

The occasional importation of terminology (mainly of European extraction) in this study does in no way minimize the specificity of the old regime in North Africa and West Asia. Yet some exchange of historiographical argot is necessary in order to furnish a medium for comparison. Even as I attempt to translate parallel social and political arrangements, I have also preserved terms that are of special import to the history of the Ottoman and the larger Islamicate

⁶⁹ *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l'une comprend la législation mahométane; l'autre, l'histoire de l'Empire othoman* (Paris, Imp. de monsieur [Firmin Didot] 1787–1820), vol. 3, 370–371. He translated *eyalet* as “government”; and the life-lease (*malikâne*) becomes “ferme fiscale”.

⁷⁰ Tocqueville (*The Old Régime*, 36) recounts a quip, made by John Law to the Marquis d'Argenson, to the effect that the administration of France rested in hands of two dozen intendants. For France, see J. F. Bosher, *French Finances 1770–1795: From Business to Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁷¹ In many instances, the reluctance to translate reveals an ideological unease with the consequences of equivalence rather than a penchant for historical specificity. See Frank Perlin, “Concepts of Order and Comparison, with a Diversion on Counter Ideologies and Corporate Institutions in Late Pre-Colonial India,” in *Feudalism and non-European Societies*, ed. T. J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia (London: Frank Cass 1985), 87–165.

⁷² See P. R. Coss, “The Formation of the English Gentry,” *Past and Present* 147 (1995): 38–64. On attempts to redefine the social sense and reference of these groups, see Deena Sadat, “Notables in the Ottoman Empire: The Ayan,” (Ph.D.

world (e.g., ulema, waqf, *timar*, *sipahi*, *malikâne*, etc.). These terms should form part of the growing lexicon of world and comparative early modern history. For general readers, in addition to the requisite glossary, I have tried cushioning the use of Ottoman terms with explanatory context to make them comprehensible or have provided a rough translation in parentheses. Finally, although I do from time to time make use of the Islamic calendar for the dating of documents or manuscripts, for simplicity's sake as much as to engage the standard, that is, Western, chronology of political change, I have employed a single, common-era dating system.

Vocabularies and calendars are some of the more obvious impediments to reconceptualizing the modern political time line. In the case of Islamic history, there has been a particularly insidious imbalance in the visual representation of the past, a veil over history created by the prolific output of nineteenth-century Orientalist painters.⁷³ In searching for a new way to narrate socio-organizational change in a distant time and place, over the past years I have made a concerted effort to locate new visual signposts. The result are the images that I have inserted within these pages. They should not be regarded as supplements to my text. Rather, these graphic references are an integral part of the narrative.

Sandwiched between two attempts to reappraise the historiographical legacy of Tocqueville, are three sketches of the Ottoman old regime. In chapter 1, questions of territoriality involve a dialogue with the cartographer and artist who produced one of perhaps three large polychromic maps on silk completed in the palace in Istanbul between 1727 and 1728.⁷⁴ Laden with both graphic and textual infor-

diss. Rutgers University, 1969); and Engin D. Akarlı, "Provincial Power Magnates in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham and Egypt, 1740–1840," in *La vie sociale dans les provinces arabes à l'époque ottomane*, ed. Abdeljelil Temimi, vol. 3, 41–56 (Tunis: Publications du Centre d'Études et de Recherches Ottomanes, Morisques, de Documentation et d'Informations, 1988).

⁷³ There is a wealth of new studies on this subject following Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) and Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East* (New York: Verso, 1998). See for example, Aslı Çirakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the 'Sick Man of Europe': Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁷⁴ Topkapı Sarayı Museum Library (TKSK) H. 447. The map reproduced here is a retouched photograph (by Paula Hible) of the outline published as an large folded insert by Faik Reşid Unat without commentary in *Tarih Vesikaları* 1 (1941)

mation, this unusual map helps modern visitors explore the dimensions of premodern territoriality and the historical and logistical meanings of state domination. By setting the West Asian portions of the empire amidst the space of Eurasia, it also helps to alternate an understanding of the geography of sovereignty that has largely been appraised from its Mediterranean shores.

Chapter 2's discussion revolves around the portraits of the revelers and participants in the pageant that preceded the circumcisions of the sons of Ahmet III in 1720. As an introduction to the masks of Ottoman absolutism, these portraits of courtly life contain oblique references to the actual workings of the state. Evaluating position and repetition of imagery we might discern the increasing concentration of powers, under the omnipresent figures of the grand vizier and the bureaucracy, the Sublime Porte. We might also consider the social characteristics of the first and second estates, such as the members of the religious establishment, or ulema, the military and the bureaucracy seated at the table of the sultan. Hidden from view, however, are the imperial circuits of distribution cemented by the burgeoning market in life-leases (*malikâne mukataât*) and the Islamicate nexus of finance capitalism that tied the ulema, courtiers, and gentry-officers to the Christian and Jewish bankers of Istanbul and the merchants of Marseilles.

In chapter 3, we reexamine one of those infamous tax-farming registers produced by the clerks of the ancien régime.⁷⁵ Adjusted for the parallax of modern expectations,⁷⁶ this document becomes an eloquent witness of the fluidity of state-government relationships and administrative changes within the province of Diyarbekir. Tracing the transfer of title from central-state to provincial actors reveals the shift in the balance of powers. Meandering notations

between pages 160–161. Thomas D. Goodrich provided much important bibliographic information and brought to my attention other copies of the map in Turkey and Austria. Permission for reproduction of the outline was provided by the Türk Tarih Kurumu.

⁷⁵ Photocopy (and permission) from Başbakanlık Arşivi for the reproduction of a page from register MMD 9518, “*Defter-i Mukataât-ı Malikânehâ-i Mezkûre der Eyâlet-i Diyarbekir*,” registering transactions on tax farms from 1697 to 1791. MMD 9519 spans the years 1792 to 1845 in the same province. Among the other examples, are Tokat, MMD 9543; Athens, MMD 9512; Mosul, MMD 9611; Damascus, MMD 9530, 9538; and Erzurum, MMD 9517.

⁷⁶ See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

across the page serve as an apt metaphor for the “creative destruction” of revenue contracting that dissolved the administrative boundaries between town and country laid down in the early centuries of the empire. Venal offices bring into relief the vernacular government of provincial cities and the role of the urban gentry, what Tocqueville might have called a “petty oligarchy,” in perpetuating rule.

After exploring these facets of the old regime in West Asia, this study returns to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and his Ottoman contemporary, the religious scholar and pro-reform statesmen, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha. In our conclusion, we consider one among the many possible sequels to the old regime in the Ottoman Empire while raising new questions about the nineteenth-century imperatives and prejudices which continue to haunt contemporary social scientific thought.