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Révolutions de Constantinople

France and the Ottoman World in the Age of Revolutions

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To the Gezi Parkı protestors
[Istanbul, May 31, 2013]

> There are no states that have not been subject to great revolutions.
> —Antoine Futerière, 1690

In his book *Révolutions de Constantinople* (1819), Antoine Juchereau de Saint-Denis (1778–1842), a French émigré and military engineer employed by the Ottoman state as an expert in fortification and artillery, narrated the stormy events that he observed in the Ottoman capital in 1807 and 1808. During three *révolutions*, as Juchereau defined them, two sultans were deposed and executed, several statesmen were beheaded, poisoned, or lynched, and thousands of ordinary Ottoman men and women became victims of violence and terror. Perhaps more important, Juchereau maintained, these revolutions resulted from a battle between the reform program of the New Order—a military and administrative reorganization agenda under the Ottoman sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807)—and the general public, led by the guards of the old

order, the Janissaries, and *ulama* (learned hierarchy). When Juchereau composed his book in 1819 he wrote in the genre of early revolutionary history-writing in France, with similar themes and topoi, such as the struggle between corporate bodies of the old order and reform of enlightened rulers, and the role of the crowd and public opinion.[1] Juchereau's book thus provides insightful perspective on the experiences of a contemporary observer—and victim—of the Age of Revolutions beyond the conventional boundaries of Europe. Moreover, *Révolutions de Constantinople* is an illuminating text for historians of Orientalism, or Western knowledge about the East, since it reflects how a French intellectual depicted the Ottoman world in the Age of Revolutions, when not only political systems but also knowledge about these political systems was radically transformed.[2]

For a long time, historians have agreed that the Age of Revolutions, the stormy period between the 1770s and the 1810s, was a trans-European phenomenon. In 1959, R. R. Palmer argued that the American and French Revolutions were not insular events. The transatlantic Enlightenment and its radical manifestations in political culture triggered the connected revolutions in America and Europe.[3] This perspective later gave birth to Atlantic World studies, which became one of the major fields in early modern and modern history. Following Palmer, several historians, such as J. G. A. Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, and Patrice Higonnet, defined different aspects of the Atlantic context in the Age of Revolutions.[4] In another vein, Franco Venturi, in his massive survey *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768–1776*, argued that the seeds of revolution were first planted not in western Europe but farther east, on the kaleidoscopic Ottoman-Russian-Polish frontiers, in the entangled Hellenic, Slavic, and Islamic cultural zones. Venturi masterfully illustrated that connections between Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Poland were so profound and lively in the late eighteenth century that it is impossible to write their histories on separate pages.[5] Recently, some historians, for example, C. Bayly,[6] David Armitage, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, have proposed a wider scope of analysis and have exploited the possibilities of a global or plural Age of Revolutions.[7]

A central question in this discussion is whether we can give similar

meanings to what happened, say, in Warsaw in 1772, Kazan in 1773, Philadelphia in 1777, Paris in 1789, Sichuan in 1796, Cape Town in 1806, and Istanbul in 1807–8. While we should resist the temptation to globalize historical events and cultures to the extent that their specificities lose meaning, we can appreciate connections, interactions, and similarities between different corners of the world in an age when the movement of individuals and information dramatically intensified. In this regard, one important aspect of the Age of Revolutions was the growing number of people living in foreign lands and writing about these places. Emigrants, migrant workers, adventurers, refugees, merchants, missionaries, and diplomats wrote about the countries in which they lived while struggling with epistemological dilemmas that resulted from what they had learned about these foreign lands in their homelands and what they personally experienced. Recent studies on the literature of Orientalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in western Europe by Srinivas Aravamudan, Humberto Garcia, and others show that Western writing on the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world is far more complicated and diverse than what was previously thought.[8] While many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors cultivated stark ontological and epistemological boundaries, others bridged the differences between the West and the Islamic world. Juchereau was one of these men. A Frenchman educated in France and England, he ended up in Istanbul during a crisis, observed an extraordinary episode, and wrote about it. Did the horrors he witnessed in Istanbul when many of his Ottoman friends, architects of the New Order who were executed by the crowd, remind him of the horror he experienced when his father was guillotined in the Jacobin Terror? Although we cannot know the answer, it is hardly absurd to think that the revolutions in Paris and Istanbul were related for Juchereau, beyond the stark epistemological boundaries that divided Europe and the Ottoman world.

This essay is an attempt to make sense of Juchereau's *Révolutions de Constantinople*. In the first section I will discuss some of the phases of interaction between the French and Ottomans worlds. This section also provides context for Juchereau's life and the events he witnessed and described. In the second section I focus on Juchereau and his book and

examine how a Frenchman analyzed the Ottoman order and narrated the episode of 1807 and 1808 in Istanbul.

The French and Ottoman Worlds in the Age of Revolutions

More perhaps than any other place in Europe, it was in France that discussions of the nature of the Ottoman order created intrigue among reading circles.[9] By no means did this fascination produce a standard conception of the Ottoman Empire (or the Islamic Near East), but rather a range of narratives and theories persisted. Overall, however, we can point to two competing views. Conventionally, the Ottoman regime appeared as Oriental despotism, characterized by the arbitrary and abusive rule of the sultan and blindly obedient subjects who did not enjoy the rule of law, the possibility of public opposition, or security of property and life. As Montesquieu systematized this theory, the Ottoman order (like its Asian counterparts, which were depicted as illegitimate and outdated) was incommensurable with Enlightenment Europe.[10] This totalistic argument, however, met challenges from counter-interpretations, which were consolidated in the second half of the eighteenth century, as a result of booming French-Ottoman diplomatic and commercial relations.[11] Thinkers like Constantin François de Chassebœuf (comte de Volney) and Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron suggested that in fact the Ottoman regime was not naturally different from regimes in the West.[12] It was not more despotic than other monarchies, perhaps even less so, because several groups, public rebellions, and Islamic Law had profoundly curtailed sultanic authority since the seventeenth century. According to Thomas E. Kaiser, in pre-revolutionary France, discussions of the Ottoman Empire belonged to domestic debates about the ancien régime.[13] Those who promoted Ottoman-French diplomatic and commercial relations sought to illustrate that the Ottoman regime was not a source of evil despotism and that the Ottoman Empire and France could thrive as economic and diplomatic partners. This agenda coincided with a fascination with *turquerie* in French polite society and translations of major Islamic texts, such as *One Thousand and One Nights* by Auguste Galland.[14] However, republicans who wished to show that the French monarchy was as despotic as

Ottoman rule, or even worse, argued that European royal regimes did not entirely differ from the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans were familiar with France and the French, more acquainted even than the French in France with the Ottoman world. French subjects living in Istanbul and the port cities, known as the *échelles du Levant*, constituted a distinctive commercial community, the result of multiple trade agreements that dated back to the sixteenth century.[15] In the eyes of Ottoman administrators, they proved the most favored commercial community, since France was considered a natural ally against the Hapsburgs. Gradually, the Ottoman French began intermingling with Christian and some Muslim segments of the Ottoman elite in the transcultural milieux of Istanbul and other port cities. This coincided with an increase in the number of French military experts joining the échelles.[16] Alexandre de Bonneval, who became Muslim and took the name Humbaracı Ahmed Pasha, and Baron de Tott, the Franco-Hungarian military expert and diplomat, were the best-known in this group. Many wrote memoirs, some of which became best-sellers in Paris.[17] In fact, the vibrant exchange of information between France and the Ottoman Empire, mediated by the échelles, gave birth to what Ian Coller calls the "East of Enlightenment," namely, the lively intellectual interaction within French commercial and diplomatic circles and other groups clustered around them in the Ottoman world. The East of Enlightenment shaped ideas about the Ottoman world in Europe, but it also became instrumental in disseminating European ways into the Ottoman Empire.[18]

We should understand the East of Enlightenment in relation to other enlightenments in the Ottoman world. In the eighteenth century, Greek and Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire, which tied together the European and Ottoman markets through diasporal connections, developed their own trans-imperial republic of letters. A vivid learning culture, known as the Greek Enlightenment, flourished under the patronage of the notable Greek families of Istanbul, known as Phanariotes, who were linked to Vienna, Paris, and Padua with centers in Istanbul, Iași, Izmir, Athens, and Jerusalem.[19] The massive translation campaign from European languages into Western Armenian by the Mekhitarists,

the Catholic Armenian network, spread across the Armenian intellectual community in the Ottoman Empire.[20] But it was not only diasporal networks that experienced the vibrant intellectual and political climate of the Age of Enlightenment. Recent discussions of eighteenth-century logics, cosmology, cartography, geography, mathematics, and engineering among Muslim intellectual circles, as well as the proliferation of libraries and publication activities, have pushed some historians to reconsider the rigid boundary between the Western Enlightenment and Islamic traditions.[21] They reject understandings of the Enlightenment as a linear history of a particular secular tradition of radicalism and instead, according to David Sorkin, propose a broader depiction of variously connected and/or concomitantly secular, religious, or scientific propagations—in other words as plural enlightenments.[22] From this perspective it makes sense to define the cultural, intellectual, and scientific vitality of the Ottoman eighteenth century, with all its variants, as the Ottoman Enlightenment.

The Ottoman central establishment also became a part of this atmosphere. Popular accounts by Ottoman diplomats in European centers were not simply observations of Western ways, but veritable reform pamphlets.[23] Not surprisingly, Ottoman interest in the Western—and particularly the French—way, or Ottoman Occidentalism, soon transformed into a genuine political agenda. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, we observe the formation of a political movement, a party of Ottoman statesmen who were profoundly inspired by the French (as well as Prussian, Russian, and Austrian) military and administrative reforms that preceded the revolution. The leading figure of this group, known as the New Order, was the young prince Selim. The sultan-in-waiting exchanged letters with Louis XVI and asked the French monarch for advice as he sought to formulate his reform projects. Selim became sultan only three months before the storming of the Bastille in 1789, and he unleashed his reforms following a general assembly of bureaucrats and intellectuals who presented reform proposals.[24]

After the storming of the Bastille, thousands of French citizens in the échelles experienced the tempestuous days of the revolution in the relatively calm cities of the Eastern Mediterranean. In Istanbul's

French community, some joyously celebrated the news, while others anxiously protested the events shattering France. The tricolor cockade became a familiar sight on the streets of Istanbul and a few other Ottoman cities, and occasionally members of other communities, Muslim or non-Muslim, participated in these celebrations and protests.[25] While the Ottoman public became familiar with the revolution, the Ottoman central administration could not predict the far-reaching implications of events in France. In fact, since the 1770s, radical changes, popular rebellions, toppling of regimes, and partitions of countries frequently occurred in the Ottoman Empire and thus no longer surprised the Ottoman elite.[26]

Since the 1770s, the Ottoman Empire had been a theater for various radicalisms. The Greek uprising in Morea in 1769, which Russia's involvement intensified, almost resulted in the disintegration of the Ottoman Balkans. The Ottomans kept the Balkans intact but lost Crimea to Russia. Crimea was one of the most strategic and symbolically significant provinces, and it had been transferred to the Ottoman Empire from the patrimony of the Mongolian Empire.[27] The Russian annexation of Crimea in 1782 became an important phase for Catherine the Great's large-scale project to create an enlightened Byzantium in the Black Sea basin. Ottoman central elites developed a profound awareness of such radical projects inspired by certain dicta of the Enlightenment. In fact, this awareness encouraged Ottoman diplomats to vigorously struggle against the partition of Poland, which fell victim to radical projects to redesign Europe. In the early 1790s, it remained unclear how the French Revolution would affect the geopolitics of the Ottoman Empire.[28]

Despite the unpredictable implications of the revolution, between 1789 and 1798 the administrations of the Ottoman Empire and French Republic continued to foster diplomatic and military relations. During the Ottoman wars with Russia and Austria, the Ottomans and the French were natural allies. After the war, when Selim III unleashed his military and fiscal reforms in the name of the New Order, French experts participated in these projects. French became the language of instruction in new military schools. At the same time, studies in Ottoman languages and cultures were institutionalized in French academia. In

1795, the École nationale des langues orientales vivantes was founded in Paris. Now most French diplomats sent to Istanbul were more thoroughly acquainted than ever with Ottoman languages like Turkish, Greek, and Arabic as well as Ottoman political manners. In 1793, the Club de la société républicaine was founded with branches in Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo. The *Gazette Française de Constantinople* and a printing press, under the supervision of the French embassy, were established to "spread the affairs of the Republic to the Ottoman communities." Revolutionary ideas, sponsored by the French government, found their way to the Ottoman world.[29]

Bernard Lewis, in his renowned article "The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey," from 1953, argued that members of the Ottoman elite were indifferent to revolutionary ideas and regime change in France.[30] While the Ottomans saw the impact of the French Revolution in terms of its geopolitical effects on European diplomacy, Muslim intellectual repugnance toward the secular ideas of the Enlightenment summed up the ideological response. According to Lewis, the waves of the French Revolution did not breach the religious barrier between Europe and the Islamic world. Although civilizational boundaries drawn by Lewis and others no longer limit historians' intellectual horizons, the 1953 article still needs to be rigorously appraised. The reception of the revolution in the Ottoman world seems to be more complicated than what Lewis depicted. In fact, the Ottoman establishment's reception did not dramatically differ from responses by ruling elites in Europe or Russia. Secularism and anticlericalism defined some reactions, mainly articulated by Muslim and Greek Orthodox authorities. The mainstream Ottoman critique, however, focused on the revolutionary principles of equality and liberty. Jacobin republicanism, the Ottoman observers maintained, resulted in the elimination of a regime of notables, and in the handover of "the public administration to the populace."[31] In this conservative reading of the revolution, in fact, the term *yakoben* signified the spokesmen of the rebellious urban crowd, which destroyed not only the established order but also security of life and property.[32]

The Ottoman depiction of the yakobens invoked the popular Janissary revolts, which since the seventeenth century had periodically

destabilized the Ottoman political order.[33] If the French Revolution broke out as a response to the fiscal policies of Louis XVI, it was the military and fiscal policies of the New Order that provoked popular reaction that concentrated around the Janissaries. The administration took steps to close down public gathering places, such as coffeehouses, which served as loci for the popular opposition.[34] Emphasizing the affiliation between the people and the Janissaries' claims, some members of the ruling elite wrote pamphlets against the role of the populace and mob in political life.[35] We should note the warm relations between some Jacobin French diplomats and the Janissaries. When Ruffin, the French chargé d'affaire, was taken to the famous prison of Yedi Kule after the French expedition to Egypt, a Janissary team honorably escorted him through the streets of Istanbul. An observer noted that when a woman from the crowd approached to insult him, the Janissaries prevented it, protecting Ruffin's dignity.[36] Did this happen because of an ideological kinship between the Janissaries and the Jacobins? Probably not! But friendship between a group that claimed to protect the rights of the populace and the representative of a regime of the people would not be surprising.

The Ottomans saw ideas of *serbestiyet* (liberty) as a threat to imperial integration for potentially pushing different communities living under the imperial umbrella closer to separatism. The Ottoman conception of serbestiyet, which denoted the fiscal and administrative immunity of certain tax units, gained new meaning during this time. The term now referred to collective immunity, or communal independence, from the authorities.[37] Early signals of such collective tendencies in different communities, especially in the Greek-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire, had emerged since the 1770s. However, concerns about the spread of serbestiyet grew in October 1797, when the Treaty of Campo Formio enabled the French to annex Venetian colonies in the Adriatic. In the Ionian Islands and some coastal towns neighboring the Ottoman lands, the Venetian regime was abrogated and revolutionary sister republics were established, with the collective participation of urban masses. The Greek Orthodox Church, acting against revolutionary propaganda spreading from the French sister republics to the Ottoman

west, mobilized its clerical network in the provinces to discredit the anticlericalism, separatism, and egalitarianism of the French Revolution. The church's alliance with the Ottoman state gave birth to the *Dhidhaskalia Patriki*, a moral text written by the patriarch of Jerusalem, refuting revolutionary ideas that circulated among Greek communities.[38]

The Ottomans sensed that if the revolution hit the Ottoman lands, the first target would be Ottoman Greece. Bonaparte's arrival in Egypt in the summer of 1798 was a great shock to the Ottoman administration. After Crimea, Egypt was the second Muslim province of historical significance and geostrategic importance lost by the empire. The French eradicated the Ottoman-Mamluk oligarchy and established a new regime, an experimental Oriental republic. The expedition was colored by several episodes of collaboration and resistance of local Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The French assault inevitably pushed the Ottoman administration to establish an alliance with Russia and Britain. The British fleet, under the command of Admiral Nelson, and Ottoman land forces, including Selim's New Army, which was designed on the French model, would soon put an end to the French regime in Egypt. In 1800 the Ottoman-Russian alliance attacked and captured the Ionian Islands. By 1802, the Ottoman, Russian, and British coalition had halted the two overseas experiments that the French revolutionary regime set up in the Eastern Mediterranean.[39]

France initially presented justifications for the expedition to Egypt: to save Egyptian society from the tyranny of local oligarchs; to reestablish order by means of the rule of law; and to create a sister republic in Egypt as an extension of enlightened universalism, energized by the revolution in a Muslim land. But imperial ambitions prevailed over republican dreams. Gradually, the expedition was conceived as a phase of the French post-revolutionary strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean and as an effort to reconsolidate the French imperial presence in the Indian Ocean World, which the French defeat thirty-six years earlier in the Seven Years' War had laid low. This global strategy did not materialize. Nevertheless, the short experience in Egypt left traces in the French political and cultural imaginary. Fantasies and theories about the Orient, which were an integral component of public discussion in

pre-revolutionary France, were now reconfigured in the framework of Enlightened Orientalism. The republican project to create an Oriental republic in Egypt intermingled with the ambitious project to build a global empire premised on revolutionary principles. These efforts were synchronized with the systematic accumulation of geographic, ethnographic, and archaeological knowledge about the Arab world, and would form the antecedents of nineteenth-century Orientalism. The Egyptian bodyguard employed by Bonaparte emboldened his image as a global leader in the eyes of the European public. Less known were the Egyptian émigrés in France, who left their homeland and lived grim lives as members of a repudiated refugee community in early-nineteenth-century France.[40] The Age of Revolutions was also the age of refugees and emigrants.[41]

The Ottoman-Russian expedition to the Ionian Islands in 1800 was in many ways a response to the French expedition to Egypt. Since the sixteenth century, the Ottomans had tried and failed to capture these strategic islands, so this was a glorious victory. In addition to military success, the annexation of the Ionian Islands had ideological meaning. The Ottomans and Russians abrogated the French-style revolutionary Ionian republic. In its place, they drafted a Venetian-style republican constitution for the islands. Unlike French republicanism, the Ottoman-Russian republican design for Corfu and the other six islands was inspired by the pre-revolutionary republicanism popular among noble families on the islands, at the expense of representatives of the urban and rural plebs. It was an aristocratic republic with a flag featuring a lion of Saint Mark (the symbol of Venice) combined with seven arrows (representing Ottoman suzerainty) instead of ionic columns, the neoclassical insignia of the Ionian republic.[42] The creation of a conservative republic in the Ionian Islands was an Ottoman and Russianresponse to French radicalism.

A treaty between France and the Ottoman Empire in 1802 officially ended the war. From then until 1807, the Ottoman administration under the reign of Selim III and the New Order party tried to avoid active participation in either the Third Coalition led by Britain and Russia, or Napoleon's grand strategy to create an eastern bloc with Qajar Iran. When Napoleon was declared emperor of France in December 1804, the

Ottoman center faced a challenging development. In short order, the recognition of the emperorship of Napoleon with the title of *padishah* (a title that the Ottoman sultans claimed exclusively for themselves) by the Ottoman state became the hottest controversy in European diplomatic circles. This interesting episode illustrates how European and Islamic titular politics intermingled in the Age of Revolutions. Napoleon and Selim exchanged personal letters, in which Napoleon declared his commitment to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Selim, who called Napoleon "His Majesty, our very august friend, very sublime, very magnificent, and very affectionate friend," rather than emperor or padishah, wrote about his New Army, stating that he was proud of it, and described his other reforms and the contributions of French experts.[43]

All these exchanges fostered a new image of Napoleon in the Ottoman world. While poems about Napoleon circulated in coffeehouses, in Turkish and other Ottoman languages, sometimes cursing, sometimes honoring him,[44] engravings of the emperor's portrait became popular in Ottoman markets. Fascination with the image of Napoleon, or Napoleonism, in Ottoman popular culture, spread as women of Mani in Greece kept candles in front his portrait, as they did in front of icons.[45] Napoleon's career was a source of inspiration for several power holders in the Ottoman provinces during the period, from Ali Pasha of Ioannina to Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt. Ali Pasha of Ioannina, named the "Muslim Bonaparte" by Lord Byron, approached the British after having been disappointed by the French. However, his image as the Muslim Bonaparte added a new hue to British Orientalism.[46] Osman Pazvantoğlu of Vidin, a disobedient provincial magnate in Ottoman Bulgaria, proposed a radical plan to Napoleon; he presented his friend, Cengiz Mehmed Geray, a Crimean prince and descendent of Chinggis Khan, as a possible ruler to replace Selim III and the Ottoman dynasty. This surprising proposal, in which Napoleon and a descendant of Chinggis Khan appeared on the same page, illustrates broad horizons of the age's radicalism.[47] Meanwhile, some Greek republicans, like Rhigas Velestinlis, presented Pazvantoğlu as the new hero of revolutionary waves in the Ottoman Empire that, with the assistance of France, would encompass the Balkans.[48]

The year 1806 was a turning point in Ottoman-French relations. Horace François Bastien Sébastiani, the renowned French ambassador, appointed by Napoleon for an extraordinary mission, almost convinced the Ottomans to join a coalition against Russia and Britain. While Selim and the pro-French party in the Ottoman administration were inclined to leave the alliance with the Russians and British, which had been in place since the French expedition to Egypt, the British fleet passed through the Dardanelles, anchored in front of Istanbul, and threatened to bombard the city. The fleet left Istanbul; however, the New Order under Selim III fell in May 1807 as a result of an uprising in Istanbul. This episode triggered a series of incidents and turmoil until the autumn of 1808. The fall of Selim and the New Order was followed by the consolidation of the anti–New Order restoration government under Mustafa IV, Selim's nephew. Another coup would topple the restoration government within a year, this time at the hands of some New Orderists under the leadership of a provincial power holder, Mustafa Bayraktar of Ruse. Bayraktar restored the New Order and had himself appointed grand vizier by Mahmud II, whom he made sultan. However, in a short time the regime of Bayraktar would also fall to a coup initiated by Janissaries with the enthusiastic support of Istanbul's general public. Several European and Ottoman observers narrated this series of events, which took place during a short period of less than two years, as a single episode, a dramatic turning point in the Ottoman Empire with long-term and transregional repercussions. They presented it as a sister episode of what was transpiring in different polities in the blustery Age of Revolutions.

Antoine Juchereau de Saint-Denis and *Révolutions de Constantinople*

One observer of this episode was Antoine Juchereau de Saint-Denis. In 1819, more than a decade after the events, Juchereau published *Révolutions de Constantinople en 1807 et 1808, précédées d'observations générales sur l'état actuel de l'Empire Ottoman*, in which he narrated the 1807–8 episode in great detail, along with his general observations on the Ottoman Empire.[49] Juchereau was born in 1778 in Corsica to a French noble family. He was attending the École royale du génie in Mézières

when his father, a former colonel of artillery, was executed during the French Revolution. His uncle, who lived in Canada, took him in after this tragic event. After spending time in Canada, the young Juchereau went to London and attended the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, probably the best engineering school in artillery at the time. Juchereau returned to France after the Treaty of Amiens of 1802, which temporarily ended the revolutionary wars between the French Republic and the United Kingdom.

After a short stay in France, Juchereau went to Istanbul and accepted a position in the British service. In his book he noted his loyalty to his mission and testified that he acted "free from his political orientation."[50] Was this the statement of an émigré, who had abandoned any loyalty to nationhood, or that of an eighteenth-century professional cosmopolitan, who separated his political beliefs and military mission? Soon after he arrived in Istanbul, he entered the Ottoman service. When Selim III offered him the opportunity to be director and instructor of the new military school, he accepted the position. During this time, Juchereau was able to enter the inner circle of Selim III and the New Orderists. In 1806 he was asked to prepare feasibility reports about the fortification and artillery of the Dardanelles, Bosporus, and the city of Istanbul. During his stay in Istanbul, Juchereau was close to the British diplomatic mission. During the crisis of 1807, however, he broke with the British, joined the Ottoman-French-Spanish initiative, and played a major role in the fortification of Istanbul's defenses and the perfection of its artillery. After the Janissary revolt he remained in Istanbul for a while and witnessed dramatic episodes that he went on to describe in his book. Following the death of Selim III in July 1808, Napoleon called Juchereau back to France. He was sent to Spain, where as a military engineer he participated in the Siege of Cádiz (1810–1812) and the Battle of Bornos (1811). Later Juchereau served as colonel in the French army in Dalmatia and at Waterloo. Following the Restoration, he worked on his book *Révolutions de Constantinople* and published it in 1819. He then served the French administration in England and wrote a report on the steam cannon, which was under development in Britain. Juchereau's subsequent career included the expedition of Morea in 1828, during the

Greek War of Independence, and the expedition to Algiers in 1830, which led to his other important work, *Considérations statistiques, politiques et militaires sur la Régence d'Alger*.[51] Juchereau died in 1842.[52] After he died, his *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman depuis 1792 jusqu'en 1844*, which was an extended version of *Révolutions*, was published in Paris.[53]

L'état actuel de l'Empire Ottoman

In the first volume of *Révolutions de Constantinople*, Juchereau examines the structure of the Ottoman order. Looking closely at the Ottoman constitution, he analyzes the institutional structure of the empire, corporate groups constituting the Ottoman state, and the communities forming Ottoman society. This volume is written in the genre of constitutional study, which examines how power is exercised and limited in the institutional orders of various polities.[54] Juchereau briefly mentions earlier analyses of the Ottoman constitution, refuting previous literature that depicted the Ottoman Empire as a despotic polity of omnipotent sultans and obedient subjects, or solely from the perspective of legal codes. While mentioning several sources in European languages Juchereau specifies two well-known books: *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks* (1768), by the British diplomat James Porter, and *Tableau general de l'Empire Othoman* (1788–1820), by the Ottoman-Armenian dragoman Ignatius Mouradgea D'Ohsson.[55] According to Juchereau, Porter, while examining the power of the sovereign, ignores other forces that limited or balanced it. D'Ohsson, although informative about institutions, remains formalistic and anachronistic in his analysis. Ignoring political events, D'Ohsson writes as if only old laws and regulations shape people's behavior. Juchereau claims to examine not only the Ottoman constitution but also how different groups and people in general showed their "claims, ambitions, and power" to their sovereigns. To understand events in Istanbul, Juchereau largely relies on information he gathered during his years in the city. Most likely he did not speak or read Turkish but through his contacts in diplomatic circles had access to popular narratives. Juchereau mentions how *conteurs publics* (public storytellers) functioned as news outlets, telling detailed stories about current events in coffeehouses and mosques.[56]

Juchereau begins his book by comparing the two reformist rulers Peter the Great (r. 1682–1725) of Russia and Selim III (r. 1789–1807) of the Ottoman Empire. Both emperors, he argues, intended to change the old order through military and administrative reforms to end ignorance and increase prosperity in their realms. In doing so, they tried to crush the guards of the old order, the popular but unruly military classes, namely, the Strelets in Russia and Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire, along with religious oligarchies, namely the Orthodox Church in Russia and the ulama in the Ottoman Empire. Only by crushing these military and religious corporate powers, according to Juchereau, could these leaders reform their empires. Peter was successful, while Selim failed. Juchereau promises to explain to readers why and how the reforms in the Ottoman Empire collapsed.[57]

According to Juchereau, the legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty, which combined Islamic and Turco-Mongolian traditions, was not questioned. The Ottoman sultans were considered both sultans and caliphs. The absence of an aristocracy capable of challenging sultanic authority meant that only the sultans of the Ottoman dynasty could make legitimate claims to sovereignty. Juchereau, following in the path of most European commentators, notes as one of the main institutional characteristics of the Ottoman order the sultanic right to execute office-holders and confiscate their property without legal justification. But he argues that this does not mean that sultanic power was limitless and arbitrary. The Janissaries and the ulama were two corporate powers that often allied to balance sultanic might by exploiting their capacity to control military power and religious authority as well as mobilizing the populace. In fact, the Ottoman order was not despotic; since the sixteenth century, several popular rebellions (incited by the Janissaries and ulama) had prevented Ottoman sultans from consolidating absolute power. However, Juchereau contends, the Janissaries and the ulama used their capacity to limit sultanic authority not to increase liberty and prosperity but for their own corporate interests.[58] Their leverage over the Ottoman constitution, while preventing despotism, perpetuated "ignorance and barbarity."[59]

Juchereau uses archetypical notions of eighteenth-century

Orientalism, such as ignorance and barbarity, to define the Ottoman social order. But he diverges from classical Montesquieuian Orientalism, which envisioned the Ottoman Empire as a despotic order under an omnipotent sultan, a cruel despot using arbitrary power over his submissive people. Rather, he leans toward Volney and Anquetil-Duperron, who conceptualized the Ottoman regime as a constitutional order with several competing actors and corporate groups that challenged the sovereign on a regular basis. In Juchereau's view, this did not help the Ottoman people leave behind ignorance and backwardness. Reform would come not via ulama and Janissary limitations on sultanic power but from an enlightened sultan who would crush the old order and build a new one.

Establishing enlightened despotism was not an easy task. Both the Janissaries and the ulama were profoundly integrated into the Muslim public, which would resist such reform efforts. The ulama hierarchy, from the imams in the neighborhoods and villages to the judges and *muftis* (legal consultants) in Istanbul, constituted one of the most highly organized bodies in the empire. Its members were not to be touched by the sultans, thanks to the public's respect, owing to their monopoly of legal and religious knowledge and privileges they acquired over the centuries.[60] The implicit parallels Juchereau drew between the French clergy and the Ottoman learned oligarchy made him depict the ulama as a far more homogeneous corporate body than it was.[61] By comparison, his account of the Janissary corps is much more profound. He maintains that the Janissaries were deeply integrated with Muslim youth. For an ordinary young Muslim who was not born into wealth and status, joining the Janissary corps meant status and social security.[62] Juchereau depicts the transformation of the Janissary corps from a slave army with unquestionable loyalty to their sultans into an autonomous institution that claimed to represent the old laws and rights of the general public. The subtle connections of the Janissaries and ulama with the Muslim people enabled them to establish control over public opinion. The hegemony of these two groups over the Muslim public could only be broken if a ruler built a new army from "the heart of the people." This idea of a new "national" army founded by an enlightened ruler to

break the hegemony of existing corporations echoes the French revolutionary army and, later, the Grande armée of Napoleon. In great detail, Juchereau analyzes the new army, the Nizam-i Cedid, constituted by new conscripts from Anatolian Muslim youth, with a modernized artillery corps, military engineering, navy, and new military schools.[63] The reorganization of the Ottoman military under the patronage of Selim III was to be combined with fiscal reorganization.[64] Such a popular military force and centralized fiscal system would raise the enlightened sultan's hand against the guards of the old order and foreign powers, and enabled him to lead his empire to prosperity.

What is the Ottoman public? Juchereau's focus lies on the people of Istanbul, the political theater where the sultans and political elites were acclaimed or toppled. The provinces, which remained under the sway of obedient or unruly power holders, would not challenge the legitimacy of the sultan and the ruling party in Istanbul, but would often negotiate with the existing order in the capital. Second, in Jucherau's view, the Ottoman public consists of Muslims rather than non-Muslims. Juchereau examines Greeks, Armenians, and Jews as separate groups that were suppressed and lived under the Muslim yoke, but he does not grant them an important role as part of a larger Ottoman public. He anticipates a national revival for the Greeks, who had the capacity to start a process that could lead to the disintegration of the empire. The Armenians, on the other hand, naively continued their communal loyalty to their Muslim masters and participated in political life as minor actors, while the Jews proved indifferent to Ottoman politics.[65]

Juchereau's third point is that the Ottoman public was not limited to elites or reading circles in the form of a republic of letters. Rather, it was a predominantly Muslim urban crowd. Juchereau presents a subtle argument about a distinctive feature of Ottoman society. Due to the absence of aristocratic privileges based on inheritance, except in certain ulama families, Ottoman society was constituted not by families but by individuals. Since the early Ottoman conquests, the average Ottoman Muslim man had opportunities to ascend in the Ottoman order without the help of pedigree lineage, reaching high positions if he was lucky. Without nobility, the high level of social mobility increased the

importance of public opinion in Ottoman politics, since Muslim men saw themselves as essential components of the regime. In other words, social mobility and an active populace were the key elements of Juchereau's theory of the Ottoman social order.[66] The voice of the people proved particularly decisive in times of crisis, such as the revolutions of Constantinople, during which "the people alternatively became the subjects and the master."[67]

Histoire des Révolutions de Constantinople: May 1807–November 1808

The overview on the *l'état actuel* of the Ottoman Empire in volume 1 is followed by a narrative history of a chain of three revolutions, occurring between May 1807 and November 1808, in volume 2. Juchereau maintains that only by analyzing these extraordinary events can one understand the social dynamics of the Ottoman Empire, which were not obvious in times of peace and tranquillity.[68] During these revolutions, two sultans were deposed and killed, and hundreds of statesmen, officers, soldiers, and common people were executed, poisoned, or lynched. Behind the scenes, however, the real battle was between "an innovative government, which wanted to change the civil and military institutions," and general "resistance" to these innovations. Therefore, these revolutions were not just a momentary struggle between individuals or groups for self-aggrandizement. Rather, they were the consequence of an ideological struggle, with global connotations, between two political agendas: maintaining or changing the existing order; conservatism or reform; old or new; ignorance or enlightenment.

The first revolution was triggered by a diplomatic crisis, when Selim III sought to leave the British-Russian coalition and approach Napoleonic France. When a British fleet passed the Dardanelles and threatened the Ottoman capital, Juchereau was employed by Selim III as chief military engineer to lead a group carrying out the fortification of the artillery system in the Dardanelles and the Bosporus. During these days, Juchereau had observed the role of the populace in the Ottoman capital. "The popular ebullience changed the disposition of the ministers,"

he wrote, explaining the massive and enthusiastic mobilization of the people of Istanbul for the fortification. While initial panic gave way to collective heroism, the reluctant administration was carried along by the enthusiasm of the populace: "The fear of falling victim to the fury of the people was stronger than [the possible] shame of degrading their sovereign and the name of Muslim."[69] The British fleet failed to attack the city, thanks to the heroic mobilization of the people of Istanbul, as well as an unfavorable wind. But this crisis, which energized the public, activated popular prejudices against the New Order. As a result of a conspiracy, plotted by the grand mufti and deputy grand vizier, the Janissaries, who were deployed around artillery batteries along the Bosporus during the British assault, started to march to Istanbul. During the march, which lasted a couple of days, the crowd was able to recruit thousands of Janissaries and civilians and eventually ended up in the hippodrome of Istanbul, the historical locus of urban riots. Meanwhile, the crowd's leadership was established and mottos of the revolutions were formulated. A petty Janissary, Kabakçıoğlu Mustafa, who gave voice to the will of the populace and negotiated with ruling elites, became the heroic leader of the crowd. Selim III was unable to refuse the demands of the crowd. The New Army was abolished, and many leaders of the New Order were sacrificed and lynched in the days of terror that followed. Eventually, Selim III was pressured to resign due to mediation by the mufti, who was one of the conspirators, and leading members of the ulama.[70]

The abrogation of the New Order was followed by a restoration under a weak sultan, Mustafa IV, Selim's nephew, and a Janissary-ulama oligarchy. The restoration government found itself in the middle of a war with Russia. Meanwhile, another plot was organized, this time by a committee of leading Ottoman bureaucrats, who fled Istanbul during the earlier revolution, with a common political motivation: to restore the New Order under Selim III. The committee was protected by Mustafa Bayraktar, the provincial magnate in Ottoman Bulgaria and the central figure in the war against Russia on the Danubian front. Bayraktar was not well acquainted with imperial politics but soon would become a protagonist in the second and third revolutions. According to the plot,

the committee would convince the leading wings of the restoration government, whose members were at odds with Janissary oligarchs in Istanbul, to annihilate their opponents without making clear their real aim. The first stage of this plot was successful, when Bayraktar marched to Istanbul with the army backed by other provincial magnates from the Ottoman Balkans. The leaders of the earlier revolution, including Kabakçioglu, who held lofty positions in the restoration government, were assassinated. But when Bayraktar entered the palace he saw the dead body of Selim, who had been executed by order of the sultan. At the last minute, Mahmud II, the only heir of the throne, was saved from the same fate. By the end of the second revolution, Bayraktar and the committee deposed Mustafa IV and enthroned young Mahmud II. Bayraktar, who ascended from regional magnate to kingmaker, was declared grand vizier. Members of the committee occupied key positions in the Ottoman bureaucracy and started working to rebuild the reform agenda, while the severed heads of the members of the earlier regime decorated the corners of the city walls.[71]

Bayraktar started out well. He restored the New Army. He summoned his provincial notable peers to an unprecedented imperial assembly to legitimize his authority, but also to obtain support for reforming the unruly Janissary corps. In a short time Bayraktar "became a hero of the time and everybody's hope."[72] However, Bayraktar's swift rise from petty provincial notable to grand vizier went to his head. He became enchanted with his self-image as untouchable, an idea that set the stage for his tragic end. Bayraktar's credibility in the eyes of the public deteriorated in a couple of months, owing to his arrogance and imprudent policies. When he removed several grandees from the central administration, they disseminated negative information about the grand vizier to the public. Bayraktar's end came in November during Ramadan. In coffeehouses, some openly declared that this "infidel dog" should leave the capital. Flyers inviting people to exact revenge went up on walls. All night, coffeehouses filled with Janissary affiliates who warmed up for the upheaval. Bayraktar, drunk and tired from overindulging, would be caught in a mutiny at his palace. After several skirmishes between the New Army and the Janissaries, the pendulum of the revolution swung

in favor of the latter. When the Janissaries found Bayraktar's corpse in the ruins of his burned palace, they put it on display. At this moment, the populace turned against the New Army and joined the Janissaries. Mahmud II once again abrogated the New Order and promulgated an amnesty to protect the insurgents.[73]

In Juchereau's narration, the revolutions are oriented around three key protagonists: Selim III, Kabakçıoğlu Mustafa, and Bayraktar, or a sultan, a Janissary, and a provincial notable. Selim III was an enlightened sultan who appreciated the virtues of Western ideas about military and administrative reform and military sciences. When Selim III was leaving the throne to his nephew, as Juchereau told it, Selim said to him: "My nephew, God will make me descend from the throne. I wanted the happiness of my subjects. However, I irritated the people that I love and to whom I wanted to give back their glorious past. Since they do not want me anymore and I cannot do anything for their happiness, I quit the throne without any grief and I sincerely congratulate you on your ascendance."[74] Kabakçıoğlu, in contrast, was the man of the people. He was elected leader of the Janissary crowd during its march to Istanbul, thanks to his personal charisma. When he addressed thousands gathered in the Hippodrome, he "had the dignified tone suitable to the role he was assuming as interpreter of the national will."[75] The revolution transformed him into a Robespierre, a leader who became the virtuous translator of the collective will to end the New Order. If Kabakçıoğlu was a Robespierre-like figure, Bayraktar was a cross between Cromwell and Napoleon. Coming from the relatively humble background of the provincial gentry, he quickly climbed the social ladder. Juchereau depicted Bayraktar as someone who used his luck skillfully to become the leader of the revolution and kingmaker and grand vizier. During his short tenure, however, Bayraktar failed to grasp the dynamics of the imperial city. Juchereau persuades his readers by reproducing calls against Bayraktar that circulated in the coffeehouses: "A vile chief of a brigand became the lord of the Ottomans; our sultan became dependent to him. He persecuted two pillars of our empire, the Janissaries and the ulama, crushed religion and law, and wants to enslave us under the yoke of the infidels by assimilating us with them."[76] Once an enlightened

despot following in Selim's footsteps, Bayrakar is portrayed as an Oriental autocrat, intoxicated by his power, during the third revolution.

Although the three individuals failed, the pivotal actors in this story were the people of Istanbul. Juchereau shifts the emphasis from powerful figures to the public and its orchestrators, the Janissaries and the ulama. Sometimes by granting silent approval or disapproval, at other times by transforming into a violent crowd, the public determined the winners and the losers of the revolutions. If enlightened despotism acquired the public's tacit and active support, it could be successful. Both Selim and Bayraktar had failed to steal the public from the Janissaries and the ulama, and thus became victims of the revolutions.

How does Juchereau define the revolution? In his analysis of changes in the concept of *révolution*, Keith Baker illustrates the transforming meanings of revolution in eighteenth-century France. While in the earlier period, *révolution* was used generically to define dramatic and sudden events in the political order, it gradually came to mean *a single* dramatic event that brought down the old order and built the new one. This moment was singularized as the definitive turning point for the new regime that came about through an expression of the will of the public/nation and took on the significance of a world-historical event in the universal trajectory of history.[77] According to Juchereau, the term *révolution* corresponds to its conventional meaning, namely, political and social turmoil, sudden and dramatic events, and radical and violent governmental changes. The revolutions in Istanbul did not produce a cataclysmic social and political collapse of the old order and formation of a new one. Unlike the Glorious Revolution and the American and French Revolutions, the revolutions of Istanbul were not a singular event and were not celebrated as a reference point for the new regime. On the contrary, after a series of three revolutions, Juchereau maintains, the old order prevailed and attempts to create a new one collapsed. The Ottoman order persisted almost as if nothing had happened. After the revolutions,

> the old order was fully restored. The Janissaries and the ulama resumed their political influence. The government, recognized that

> abuses, which caused the decadence of the empire, and would cause its inevitable end, were too strong to be destroyed. . . . [The ruling elites] closed their eyes to the dangers, only talking about the past. They not preoccupied by the present, despite the future; and waited, without anxiety, for the process which was written in the book of destiny.[78]

The sequence of revolutions in the Ottoman capital did not produce *the* revolution. However, the historical context in which Juchereau situates Istanbul's revolutions explains why these episodes were not ephemeral and provisional, events that just happened de novo as a result of conventional and recurrent struggle in the Ottoman capital. Rather, these episodes belonged to a larger battle that mattered beyond the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, a battle between the forces of reform and resistance, transformation and corruption, and enlightenment and ignorance. In some polities reform was successful, as in Russia; in others resistance prevailed, as in the Ottoman case. In this trajectory of progressive and universal history, some countries were ahead, others behind. Juchereau's interpretation is based on tenacious binaries of old and new, corrupted regime and enlightened despotism, neglecting to leave room for the possibility of a third option.

Conclusion

Juchereau's reading of political crisis in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Revolutions provides us with a case for the limits and possibilities of universal and comparative history in early-nineteenth-century France. Juchereau's work intersects with French Orientalism and the genre of *histoires des révolutions* during the period. He refuses the conventional Orientalist thesis, systematized, among others, by Montesquieu, that the Ottoman regime, like its Asian counterparts, was composed of pure despotism, arbitrary rulers, and slavish subjects. Instead, Juchereau tries to understand the constitutional and political conditions limiting the power of the sovereign. Then, he situates the Ottoman Empire in the turbulent waters of the revolutionary and Napoleonic ages, where just about everything was radically transformed by reform or revolution.

Here, Juchereau tries to answer how revolutions, namely, radicalisms energizing the common people, prevented, rather than produced, reform in the Ottoman Empire. In many ways, Juchereau reversed Montesquieu's reading of the Ottoman Empire. Only despotism, and a good one, could save it. Juchereau was not alone in this interpretation. Some British and Austrian observers of the Ottoman Empire had similar understandings of the revolutions in Istanbul.[79]

I would like to conclude with a note about the reception of Juchereau's book in post-revolutionary France. Perhaps the most important review was by Augustin Thierry (1795–1856), a historian of medieval Europe, who was one of the founders of French national history during the Romantic era.[80] In his review, Thierry compares the medieval Franks and the Turks and describes two conquering peoples, pointing out the parallels between post-Roman Europe and the post-Byzantine Ottoman Empire.[81] Both conquering Germans and the Ottomans/Turks (Thierry uses the two terms interchangeably) established their rule over conquered people. The servitude of non-Muslims, Thierry maintains, was not because of the Ottoman Empire's despotism but because this was the regime of a conquering nation. Muslims, especially Turks who associated themselves with Ottoman conquest, were not subjects in the conventional sense, but were masters of the Ottoman order. While rejecting the conventional Orientalist scheme, like Juchereau, Thierry places Juchereau's story in the context of his national historical framework. It was the Janissaries, Thierry argues, who represented the Ottoman nation during this period. "This militia, at first purely Pretorian, composed of prisoners of war, and young men furnished as a sort of tax by the conquered nations, has gradually become filled by free men; it had thus become national; and it now contains all that is most active in the Turkish population; it is the mirror of opinions; the organ of the popular passions; it is the security for the nation against the projects of the government, a security which may be an obstacle to useful innovations." In Thierry's rereading of Juchereau, revolutionary history is replaced by national history, and the *public* is replaced by the *nation*.

When Thierry wrote these lines in the 1830s, the Janissary corps had just been abolished after a bloody massacre orchestrated by Mahmud

II in which thousands of Istanbulites participated. The authors of nineteenth-century Ottoman history would see this moment as the "Auspicious" Incident, which, they believed, broke through the most important obstacle blocking the reforms. Soon, Mahmud II unleashed his radical reforms in a despotic manner, much as Juchereau would have wished to see. Reform of the ulama and religious establishment would come later, in the early twentieth century. The Ottoman Empire was fragmented into nation-states, and as Juchereau predicted, it was the Greeks who left the empire first. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Republic of Turkey was founded by its elites in 1923, historians of the new nation depicted Selim III's era as the beginning of the hundred-year battle between "reactionary" and "progressive" forces. This narrative of reform from Selim III to Atatürk demonstrated that eventually the "nation" emancipated itself from the guards of ignorance and, with the republic, joined the forces of "modernity." The reception of the French Revolution by Turkish republicans was a complex phenomenon. They saw kinship between 1789 and 1923. But the Janissary movements were not viewed as relevant in this context. Rather, modern Turkish reformers saluted autocratic enlightenment with its secular and republican components that would shape the political culture of Turkey in the twentieth century.

NOTES

I would like to thank Keith Baker, Aron Rodrigue, Fatih Yeşil, Darin Stephanov, Vladimir Troyansky, and Patricia Blessing for their valuable comments on this essay.

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