RE Thinking Ottoman Imperialism:
Modernity, Violence and the Cultural
Logic of Ottoman Reform

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In recent years the cause of the Ottomans has undergone a dramatic shift. From being labelled a brooding tyranny incapable of modernization, the Ottoman Empire's historiographical fortunes have changed. Drawing on different methodologies and exploring facets of Ottoman economic, social and cultural history, scholars of the Ottoman Empire have systematically deconstructed the "decline" thesis of the Ottoman Empire. They have replaced a broad, yet static, picture of an empire with a portrait of a vastly complicated empire that sought to modernize, indeed modernized, in the face of uninterrupted European imperialism. Yet in their effort to illuminate the complexities of Ottoman history, Ottomanists have dispensed a little too hastily with a notion of Ottoman imperialism. While several important studies have critically analyzed how Europeans portrayed the Ottomans and how the Ottomans responded and resisted these portrayals, they have only hinted at the implications of these representations for relations of power within the Ottoman Empire. By and large, they have not paid sufficient attention to how changes in Ottoman representation consolidated relations of power that bound imperial subjects, particularly those in the Arab provinces, to Istanbul. Using the case of Ottoman Leba-


non, therefore, this essay argues that the nineteenth-century Tanẓîmât reflected the birth of a distinctly modern Ottoman imperialism.

By modern Ottoman imperialism, I mean a set of imperial practices and discourses which were premised on the need to induct forcibly supposedly recalcitrant peripheries into an age of modernity. These practices and discourses defined the late Ottoman Empire’s bid to become a modern nation-state. Specifically, Ottoman reformers sought to reshape, improve, and ultimately discipline Arab peripheries of the Ottoman Empire as an integral part of a project of imperial renewal and modernization. Furthermore, Ottoman reformers consistently imagined the Arab provinces as subordinate parts of an Ottoman state despite the development of a language of secular Ottoman nationalism. The Arab peripheries of the empire became a proving ground for Ottoman modernity—physical places that signified both what the modern Ottoman was not, i.e. backwards, primitive and savage and, in addition, the Arab peripheries constituted metaphorical spaces in which Istanbul-centered reformers elaborated a notion what Ottoman modernity was, i.e. rational, scientific and civilized, attributes which were defined against a notion of a premodern periphery.

It is important to note from the outset that this modern Ottoman imperialism was not a throwback to earlier forms of imperial control over the Arab provinces. In other words, the advent of modern Ottoman imperialism was not, as suggested by George Antonius in his classic The Arab Awakening, a question of continuing a tradition of a moribund Ottoman “dark” age. Rather, it reflected a far more complicated intersection of modernization with imperial state building that had profound implications for the meaning of modernity in the late Ottoman Empire and its successor states. The primary concern of all Ottoman reformers in the nineteenth century was to maintain the integrity of the empire in the face of European encroachment. Statesmen such as Fuad Pasha urged Ottoman reform because they sought to “catch up” with the European states of Prussia, Russia, England and France. In this sense, modern Ottoman imperialism was a project that sought to break with what was seen by reformers to be a premodern past of the Ottoman Empire and from the hegemony of European power. It was, in other words, a dynamic project that was waged on two fronts simultaneously and dialectically: the domestic and the foreign. It was a project of both reform and violence. More precisely, modern Ottoman imperialism conceived of, justified, and deployed physical and symbolic violence in the name of reform, modernization, and imperial stability.

The Age of Ottoman Modernity

The age of Ottoman modernity was inaugurated in 1839. Mahmut II’s concerted efforts had begun with the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826 but quickly spread to sartorial and administrative domains and culminated in an era of wholesale modernization known as Tanẓîmât, The centerpiece of the Tanẓîmât reforms was the Gülhane decree issued by Mahmut II’s successor, Abdülmecid, in 1839 at a time when the Ottoman Empire lay on the brink of total collapse due to Muhammad ‘Ali’s imperial ambitions. Among its provisions was the solemn declaration of the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects before the law. Beginning with the Gülhane decree, imperial reformers abandoned the term reya in favor of tebaa. Like the suppression of the Janissaries, the new measures of the Tanẓîmât, which represented a clear break with the past, were couched in a language that suggested a reversion to tradition. However, the Gülhane proclamation, and the 1856 Hast-i Hümayun which followed the Crimean war, formally committed the empire to a course of modernization under effective western tutelage.

The Tanẓîmât opened the empire to what anthropologist Johannes Fabian has described as the evolutionary “stream of Time” — an idea of a “denial of coevalness” that was at the heart of modern European colonialism. Although the discourse of reform in the Ottoman Empire was not itself new, nineteenth-century reform was part of wider culture of modernity. In this culture, the Ottoman Empire sought to culturally define itself as an equal player (especially after the 1856 Treaty of Paris which formally inducted the Ottoman Empire as a member of the European state

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4 This process culminated in the 1869 Ottoman law of nationality, which produced for the first time a juridical definition of the Ottoman citizen without an overt or implied reference to religion. The term reya which literally meant flock was the classical Ottoman appellation for the subjects of the Ottoman government. Although the term included all tribute-paying subjects (including Muslims) it was often used to refer to non-Muslim subjects. The ruling askeri class was theoretically entirely Muslim. The term tebaa simply means followers, in other words, subjects of a sovereign state and has no religious connotation.


system) on a world stage of civilization. It was a world stage dominated, in Ottoman eyes, by mischievous, but modern, European states, and a world stage in which Istanbul was only one of many centers. As part of this project of imperial political and cultural reassessment and redefinition, indeed as part of its own “cultural logic” that placed it on par with other supposedly civilized states, Ottoman modernization generated its discursive opposite, the premodern within the empire, be it in the sands of Arabia or in cebel-i dürüz. Places like cebel-i dürüz, or what the Europeans referred to as Mount Lebanon, became locations of the premodern: places of danger and anxiety that threatened to destabilize the course of modernization. Intellectual, architectural and political and social Westernization occurred in Istanbul creating what Göçek has called a “new vision of Ottoman society.”

Ottoman reformers aspired towards an elusive modernity which they thought was within their grasp if only they could deflect external European hostility which retarded Ottoman advancement while also identifying and eliminating internal premodern problems which invited European interference.

This Ottoman attempt to modernize the empire was both motivated and plagued by a feeling of constant crisis. The first aspect of this crisis manifested itself in the often desperate efforts of reforming officials to outline the exact parameters of modern Ottoman sovereignty in an age of European hegemony: how to reach the nineteenth-century El Dorado – modernity – without becoming a colony of Europe in a century when European empires came to control more than 85% of the surface of the globe. European powers played an increasingly intrusive role in the internal affairs of the empire by emphasizing their duty to protect the non-Muslim minorities from a putative Islamic (and Asiatic) despotism. Ottoman officials, while they were acutely aware of their need to modernize along European lines, decried repeated European interference on behalf of non-Muslim minorities as sinister attempts to weaken the empire through sectarian means (mezhebdaşlık vesile).  

In cebel-i dürüz, because of Eastern Question politics which were centered on the expulsion of the Egyptian troops from Syria following renewed Egyptian-Ottoman hostilities in 1839, and because of episodes of intercommunal violence in the two decades that followed the inauguration of the Tanẓimāt, the crisis of representation expressed itself in dramatic form. For one thing, European intervention was continuous in the region, and European influence was expressed in military terms (through the British defeat of Muhammad ‘Ali in 1840), in cultural terms (with the introduction of Jesuit and Protestant missionary education and medicine) and in economic terms (with the imposition of the Free Trade Treaties of 1838). For another, local notables and commoners in cebel-i dürüz and the surrounding region seized the initiative between 1840 and 1860 in interpreting the Tanẓimāt, and did so with the knowledge that European powers played a vital role in their own political, material and cultural future. Some, such as members of the Maronite church establishment, advocated a Maronite-dominated Lebanon in accordance with the Tanẓimāt stipulation to protect non-Muslim subjects; some, such as secular notables from the Maronite Khāzīn and Druze Jānbulat families insisted that the Tanẓimāt – because it was premised on an idea of restoring a glorious past – legitimized a full restoration of the old regime social order. And some, such as the Maronite muleteer Tānyūs Shāhīn, who led a popular uprising against Khāzīn domination in 1859 in the predominantly Maronite district of Kīsrawān, understood the Tanẓimāt to mean social as well as religious equality, and therefore, contended that the Tanẓimāt legitimized social revolution. He and his followers demanded what they saw as their right to representation and equality guaranteed to them by the imperial reform edicts because they were Christian subjects.

A second aspect of this crisis lay in the redefinition of the relationship between rulers and subjects in a modernizing empire. The traditional imperial attitude, which had presupposed an inviolable Ottoman domain of obedience, could no longer be maintained. The temporality of traditional

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7 It should be added that there was considerable resistance to the reform program even within certain circles in Istanbul. This is a central aspect to Bernard Lewis’ classic narrative of positive westernizing reformers opposed by fanatical traditionalists in his The Emergence of Modern Turkey. See also Cavid Baysun, ed., Cevdet Paşa Tezakır, 3 vols., Ankara 1991, vol. 1, 68, for Cevdet’s recollection of the reading of the 1856 Hatı-i Hümâyûn and the negative reactions it produced not just among what he calls “many of the ehl-i islam” but also the Greek orthodox élites.


9 Göçek, Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of the Empire, 119.

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10 Başbakanlık Archives, Istanbul (hereafter BBA). IMM 1115. Left. 8 27 B 1258 [Receeb].


politics—which had reflected a shared understanding between rulers and ruled of the functioning of politics in a heterogeneous empire, and which had, in fact, regulated an Ottoman accommodation of Druze “heretics” and Christian “infidels”—was effectively broken by the urgency of Ottoman modernization. In their race against destruction by “advanced” Europeans, Ottoman reformers sought to locate and extinguish what they considered to be the premodern within their empire. Politics was no longer simply about bargaining with subjects, as Karen Barkey has described the relationship between the Ottoman state and the ceallas in the early modern Anatolian provinces of the empire, as much as it was of bargaining and performing with Europeans on the world stage of modernization.

This feeling of crisis was dramatically illustrated by the transformation of the hitherto marginal region of cebel-i dûrüz into a problem of central importance. It was precisely the fact of a rural, neglected and relatively unknown region that caused the Ottomans anxiety, for the questions that confronted them were how to incorporate cebel-i dûrüz into a project of Ottoman modernization, and, more specifically, how to address, mitigate and ultimately resolve cebel-i dûrüz’s premodernity within the context of a modern politics with (and against) Europe? The dispatches and reports of Ottoman officials in the two decades following the Tanẓımat indicated that they had no clear answer to these questions. For the first time, in fact, Ottoman governors described the region as Mount Lebanon, or “cebel-i lâbân,” conforming to European nomenclature. The term cebel-i dûrüz was abandoned. For the first time, really, Mount Lebanon entered Ottoman imperial consciousness in a sustained manner. Ottoman officials began to discuss what they referred to as “cebel-i lâbân meselası (the question of Mount Lebanon)” indicating the location of Mount Lebanon within a constellation of other problems that threatened to thwart imperial modernization. Men like Muṣṭafâ Pasha, sent in late 1841 to settle the affairs of Mount Lebanon following sectarian clashes that had earlier erupted in the village of Dayr al-Qamar, epitomized the Ottoman predicament. His mission began by a reassertion of social order. He summoned both Druze and Maronite elites to Beirut and relieved Bashir Qâsim, who had succeeded the famous Bashir Shihâb in 1840, of his powers; he informed the notables that the return of the Shihâb dynasty was out of the question. Beyond reasserting Ottoman authority in the name of the reforming Sultan, Mustafâ Pasha symbolically and physically broke with the old regime by finally abolishing the Shihâb dynasty which had ruled since 1697. Yet this rupture was not complete, for although the Tanẓımat was concerned with building a modern nation, there was very little in the dispatches that indicated how this was to be accomplished. Precisely because the Tanẓımat lent itself to a variety of interpretations, including a European one that mandated interference, the Ottomans considered the reorganization of local administration imperative to stifling European involvement. The Tanẓımat placed the Ottomans in a quandary, for while they repeatedly pledged to obey the sultan’s will to reform, they viewed the natives as essentially unrefomable subjects. Ottoman officials were certain, however, that reform and state violence went hand in hand; public order and security could be guaranteed only by bringing local notables to heel and by removing their “stupid, silly and fickle” followers from the realm of politics. The longer Muṣṭafâ Pasha remained in Mount Lebanon, the more insistent he became on the urgent need of the central government to act decisively to restore order. Christian notables seemed on the verge of joining the 1842 Druze rebellion against Ōmer Pasha’s heavy handed policies. The dispatches of Esad Pasha, the Governor of Šaydâ, further reflected the weakness of the local Ottoman government—whose troops were unreliable.

13 Takvim-i Vekayi, No.267, 26 Za 1257 [9 January 1842] (İstanbul Universitesi Kütüphanesi 407).


15 In the era of the Tanẓımat, the central authorities were still hampered by their ignorance of the local populations. With the possible exception of the mission of Selim Bey, a commissioner sent by the Sublime Porte to inquire into the feelings of the ahâlî toward Ōmer Pasha’s administration (which the European Ambassadors rejected out of hand for being an entirely coercive undertaking), there was no comprehensive knowledge, no ethnography of any kind, no travelers’ reports they could rely on to inform them of the “customs and manners” of the rural population.

16 This was evident in the marked persistence of the old regime discourse of social differentiation. If the Tanẓımat was about equality of communities, the repeated use of the word zimmî [dînî] to describe the Christian inhabitants of Mount Lebanon belittled that. If the Tanẓımat was concerned with social equality between the “great and the small,” the everyday metaphors and practice of the Ottoman masters and their Lebanese subjects blunted its impact. Schools were left in the hands of the clergy or the missionaries. In fact, the only active interest Ottoman officials took in the ahâlî was whether they signed petitions that praised Ottoman rule. The Ottomans referred to these obedient subjects as “loyal people” (âdîqa). See BBA IMM 1124. Leif.3, 9 B 1258 [16 August 1842]. Inappropriate upanûsîhaçî behavior meant any agitation for the Shihâb; in particular foreign consuls and the Maronite Church were accused of instigating the ahâlî to disavow direct Ottoman rule. Just as European consular reports dismissed as fabrications any petition signed in favor of direct Ottoman rule, the Ottomans also insisted on framing any petition for a restoration of Shihâbihe rule as the work of conspirators.

17 BBA IMM 1124. Leif.3, 9 B 1258 [16 August 1842].
and unpaid, which had to borrow coal from the English consulate (which, in turn, made it quite clear that it would supply no more), and which had a difficult time in suppressing a Druze revolt against Omer Pasha, an Ottoman officer of Croatian origin who had been appointed to directly rule Mount Lebanon in 1842. Like Mustafà Pasha, Esad stressed the age-old conflict between barbaric people, they being “in essence two coarse and savage sects … [who] often need punishment to keep them in order.”

Ottoman concern reached a climax when Shahîn’s calls for Christian social liberation spread to Druze-dominated regions of Mount Lebanon and helped spark sectarian clashes between the Druze and Maronite communities, which in turn led to the infamous war of 1860 in which thousands of Christians were massacred by the Druze in June. In July, to add to Ottoman embarrassment, a riot by Damascene Muslims killed several thousand Christians.

Locating the PreModern

What interests us here are not the details of these sectarian episodes, but how Ottoman reformers took advantage of the restoration of order in Mount Lebanon and Damascus to construct their vision of an Ottoman modernity in contrast to an alleged local premodernity. The foreign minister of the Ottoman Empire, Fuad Pasha – who himself was educated in reformed schools, was fluent in French and had served as an Ottoman ambassador to Russia, and was a statesman who embodied many of the ideals of the Tanzimât – went personally to Syria to ensure that modern Ottoman law and order was properly imposed. His immediate objective, however, was to stem European influence, for in the aftermath of the massacres the French had sent an army to Syria to “aid” the Ottomans re-establish peace. From the outset of his mission, before he had actually completed any investigations, Fuad Pasha alleged that the violence in Mount Lebanon was a reflection of an “age old” (kadim il-cereyan) tribal struggle, whereas the outbreak in Damascus was the work of unthinking and ignorant Mus-

lins. In report after report, Fuad Pasha contrasted the punishment inflicted by his modern army – whose outfits and organization reflected the new face of the empire – with the supposed tribal savagery of local inhabitants. Tanyûs Shahîn was condemned as a “brigand” and the Kisrawan revolt was suppressed. In Damascus, because of the scale of violence and because of the city’s symbolic importance to an Ottoman reconfiguration of their Islamic heritage, scores of “ignorant” Muslims who allegedly took part in the riots were arrested. They were executed after hasty trials because they had “violated” the precepts of the sharîa and the will of the sultan – both of which Fuad Pasha maintained upheld the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. He concluded that Ottoman culpability was limited to a neglect of duty at the local level, which resulted in a “stain” or the honor of a modernizing state.

The point here is to understand the implications of Fuad Pasha’s convictions rather than their veracity. The descriptions of the conflicts as age-old, in the case of Mount Lebanon, or the work of ignorant rioters, in the case of Damascus, conveniently located sectarianism in a premodern work dominated by fanaticism, ignorance and tribalism. The Ottoman punishment – following supposedly impartial investigations and sentences in accordance with reformed and allegedly unambiguous penal codes and carried out by a Tanzimât army in the presence of European representatives – was, by contrast, understood by Fuad Pasha to be modern. Modernity, in other words, was a contest between reforming Ottomans and Europeans. Fuad Pasha was out to prove that the Ottoman Empire was just as tolerant and therefore could be modern. The local setting – be it the city of Damascus or Mount Lebanon – provided the stage upon which two interrelated spectacles could be simultaneously enacted. The first was a modern one which pitted Fuad Pasha and his reforming cohorts against their European rivals. It was a struggle in which a reformed army and officials valiantly tried to snatch the initiative from, and thereby defeat, the hubris of European orientalism, represented by the French army and expressed in the reports of the various European commissioners. This struggle over modernity constituted and defined the second spectacle in which the Ottoman modern crushed the supposed local premodern, that is to say the spectacle of discipline and punishment that went on through 1861. For Fuad Pasha, the local inhabitants themselves were not modern. They did not make of

8 BBA IMM 1129, Lef't.14, 7 B 1258 [14 August 1842].
9 The reasons for the Damascus massacre (as well as the Lebanese war) were complex, but most historians agree that an economic recession among traditional artisanal sectors precipitated by European textile imports played a significant role in fueling Muslim resentment against wealthy Christians who dominated trade with Europe. See Leila Fawaz, An Occasion for War, London 1994, for a narrative of the war in Mount Lebanon, the Damascus massacre and the European responses to them.
20 For details on the French expedition see Leila Fawaz, An Occasion for War, 110-131.
21 BBA, BEO A M.KT. UM. 415/56, 1 M 1277 [20 July 1860]; BBA, BEO A M.KT. UM. 480/28, 11 Z 1277 [20 June 1861] and BBA. IRADE H 9861, 16 Ra 1277 [2 October 1860].
22 See BBA. IRADE MM 851/4, Lef't.4, 16 M 1277.
move history as much as they were pawns and objects of a modern historical struggle that pitted, in Fuad Pasha's view, powerful yet scheming Europeans against beleaguered Ottoman reformers.

Another implication was the nature of this modern stage and its impact on the traditional relationship between rulers and ruled in the Ottoman Empire. Although Fuad Pasha deployed the language of the old regime in his reports such as brigandage and the šarṭa, he was acutely aware of the world stage upon which local order had to be restored. “Because the Sublime State never accepts that the slightest harm or aggression should befall any of the classes of imperial subjects who take shelter under its protection,” decreed Fuad, “and because the events [that transpired] were contrary to the principle of civilization current in the world and beyond the pale in every manner, the Sublime State, in accordance with its duty to ensure justice, has decided to punish those involved in the events.” The ideology of progress allowed Fuad Pasha to deploy the language of brigandage and the šarṭa—thereby tapping into classical Ottoman ruling discourses—to equate the modern Ottoman subject with the tolerant, obedient and quietist subject. Fuad Pasha reminded his soldiers that although they were in Syria “to bring peace and security to this area and to punish the sins of the [Ottoman subjects] because of their cruel acts,” they were also there to “show everybody what the worth and value of a soldier is and let all our compatriots (vatandaşlarımız) know our Padişah’s justice.”

On the one hand, therefore, the soldiers acted on behalf of their theoretical compatriots in Damascus and Mount Lebanon, who lived at least in the case of Mount Lebanon in a ‘savage tribal landscape’. The imperial soldiers constituted the vanguard of Ottoman modernity, rationality and nationalism. They were to lead by example, for in addition to being commanded to obey the person of the sultan, the soldiers and their Ottoman compatriots were exhorted to be loyal to an abstract Ottoman nation. They were meant to embody a concept of national allegiance—which like loyalty to the House of Osman of the old regime, flowed up the social order, from periphery to center. Fuad Pasha envisioned an Ottoman modernity which included a modern subjecthood composed of fellow-citizens or vatandaşlar who listened, followed and obeyed rather than actively participated in the governance of the empire.

Ottoman modernity introduced a linear progressive understanding of time which created a temporal distance, a gap that separated modern Istan-
ul from tribal Mount Lebanon within a redefined imperial framework. The closure of this gap became the ostensible goal of Ottoman reform. The inhabitants of Mount Lebanon were not simply savage (for that was a fairly standard Ottoman description of rural mountainous areas even before the Tanzimat), but savage in the context of a race of progress against civilized Europe. Fuad Pasha believed that Lebanese savagery and tribalism held back Ottoman reformers in their quest for the holy grail of modernity. In other words, the Ottoman Empire was waging a war of modernization on two fronts. It was desperately trying to close the metaphorical gap between itself and the European states which continued to intervene in the affairs of the empire, while it also imagined an ever widening gap that separated its center from its periphery. The closer the Ottoman reformers edged towards “modern” Europe, the more they drew back aghast at the horror of what they perceived to be their “premodern” subjects. Their own sense of modernity depended not only on their reforms and their emulation of Europe, but also on an increasingly clear representation of their subjects' backwardness and stagnation.

**Representing Ottoman Modernity**

In the wake of Fuad Pasha’s mission, Mount Lebanon and its surrounding regions became the subjects of what Deringil has recently described as the “Ottoman self-portrait,” or the official Ottoman representation of their own modern empire. However, Ottoman interest in the region was not simply to “minimize the exotic” as Deringil suggests, but to actually achieve modernity. A reforming Ottoman administration recognized several gradations to modernity. To the Sublime Porte, Europe represented the summit of modernity, a metaphor whose tangible manifestations were advanced technologies and well-organized cities. At the same time, however, Europe also constituted the single most dangerous threat to the survival of the empire. At another level, while Ottoman reformers such as Fuad Pasha and historian and statesman Cevdet Pasha may have considered themselves as individuals to be as modern as their European counterparts, they nevertheless conceived of their task as one to lift the empire as a whole, beginning with Istanbul, to the level of a European modernity. Below Istanbul, there were provincial capitals, such as Beirut after 1888, which became arenas of modernization, and finally there were rural “tribes,” for example those

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23 BBA IRADE D 31753, Lefl.3, n.d.
25 See Makdisi, Romantic Imperialism, 111-115, for a discussion of British modernization in the context of colonial India.
26 Deringil, The Well-Protected Domains, 150-151.
of the Caucasus or Mount Lebanon. The official nationalism launched in the wake of the Tanzimat was a project of modernization which strove to homogenize different cultures, different regions and, above all, different stages of progress within a coherent culture of an Ottoman modernity and civilization. In this sense, it was a direct parallel to modern British imperialism which sought to incorporate the Highlands of Scotland into a project of British modernization.

Having defined the Lebanese inhabitants as premodern subjects of a potentially modern empire, the task before Ottoman rulers was to uplift and incorporate Mount Lebanon into a project of Ottoman modernization. Engin Akarlı's work on the Mutasarrıfiyya (the autonomous special province established by the Ottomans and Europeans in the wake of the 1860 war) of Mount Lebanon has shown how Ottoman statesmen took the lead in reforming local administration; as the Ottoman salnames (yearbooks) about Mount Lebanon illustrate, Mount Lebanon, its hinterlands and the adjacent coastal cities were studied, mapped, reformed and administered as never before. Beirut, while technically not part of the Mutasarrıfiyya but nevertheless a major influence on it, was redeveloped as a modern Ottoman city. The famous Roman temples of Baalbek, which lay immediately adjacent to Mount Lebanon, were rediscovered by now "civilized" Ottomans. They reclaimed the ruins from a European colonial discourse that had hitherto interpreted them as a metaphor for Ottoman decline, and insisted, to the contrary of European Orientalism, that Baalbek reflected the empire's own rich and dynamic heritage. The entry for Baalbek in the geographical dictionary, Kamus ül-şânîme printed in Istanbul in 1888-9, declared it "the most important of the ancient cities famous for its antiquities," adding that "the ruins of ancient temples and other buildings today attract the attention of visitors and tourists. Both the extraordinary skill [in the construction] of columns and sculptures together with the massive size of the stones used in the buildings provoke the astonishment of he who views them."

Ottoman archaeological interest in the pre-Islamic Phoenician and Hellenistic past reflected one more step in the incorporation of the empire into a culture of modernity.

An Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümâyûn) had already been founded in 1869, and although the first directors were foreign, in 1881 the French-educated Osman Hamdi Bey was appointed as head of the museum. Under his guidance, various excavations of Phoenician and Hellenistic sites were conducted throughout the Empire; he was instrumental in creating an awareness of the cultural (and hence political) importance of these sites and prompted the Ottoman government to pass a law in 1884 (Asar-i Atika Nizamnamesi) which prohibited the export of antiquities from the Empire. The passage of the 1884 law created an exclusive legal and cultural claim for Ottoman antiquities. The Ottoman State directed important finds, among which was the 1887 discovery by Hamdi Bey of the Royal Necropolis of Șayda including the alleged sarcophagus of Alexander, to the recently rebuilt Imperial Museum. Although the museum he directed and the conservation law he oversaw were, in large measure, a reaction to European "pilfering" of (what was now seen as) Ottoman antiquities, Hamdi Bey was nevertheless acutely aware of his debt to European archaeological knowledge and solicited the French philologist and orientalist Ernest Renan's help in deciphering some of the Phoenician inscriptions he found at Șayda.

According to Hamdi Bey the sultan "who has placed himself with a firm will and great solicitude at the head of this œuvre civilisque, has

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28 Makdisi, Romantic Imperialism, 98.
29 Ottoman dictionaries which appeared in the late nineteenth century defined Mount Lebanon as a land inhabited by perpetually warring Druze and Christians. See for example, Ahmed Rifat, Lugat-i Tarihiye ve Coğrafye, Istanbul 1881, 3-4: 239-240.
34 The first law on antiquities promulgated in 1874 had mandated only that antiquities discovered in archaeological digs were to be divided equally between the excavator, the owner of the land on which the excavation was made and the State. See Mustafa Cezar, Mucize ve Ressam Osman Hamdi Bey, Istanbul 1987, 21.
created, without pause, institutions such as museums, special schools, libraries, etc., appropriate for the regeneration of national art while also introducing modern European sciences into his nation. 37 For Hamdi Bey, places like Baalbek and the necropolis of Şaydâ reflected national treasures that could be recovered through the science of Europe, namely archaeology and philology. The necropolis was the major display in the imperial museum in Istanbul whose neo-classical facade, as Jens Hanssen has written, suggested an empire able to both reach into the past to set the stage for its own teleological evolution into modernity and at the same time a nation able to translate East for West, and, of course, West for East. 38 The necropolis of Şaydâ embodied the Ottoman Empire’s claim to an ancient pre-Islamic heritage as well as of its own bid for an independent modernity — after all, it had been excavated, transported and displayed as an Ottoman artifact, in an Ottoman museum and for an Ottoman public.

Ottoman modernization reinforced an imperial relationship that explicitly separated a modernizing center from the rest of the empire — through the flow of antiquities from Şaydê and Baalbek to the Imperial Museum in Istanbul — at the same time as it increased actual control and authority over the provinces through administrative and urban reform. The irony, of course, is that while Osman Hamdi Bey reacted to and deplored European “theft” of Ottoman antiquities, he unilaterally removed local antiquities to Istanbul. On the one hand, the Ottomans wanted to present their modernization by saving and displaying antiquities in a new museum; they wanted to emulate Europe and thereby close the metaphorical gap of progress that separated Ottomans from Europeans. On the other hand, the relocation of antiquities was premised on a distinction between the discerning and cultivated modern center and the ignorant provincial premodern periphery. The Ottomans, in other words, used Baalbek as one of many sites from which to elaborate their own sense of modernity in the face of constant European pressure and in contrast to “the perpetual warfare” of the neighboring Lebanese tribes and the lawlessness of the Arab Bedouins. 39 For example, a plaque erected by Sultan Abdülmecit II to commemorate the visit to Baalbek of the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898 was placed inside the Temple of Bacchus to remind visitors of a civilized Ottoman sovereignty over the ruins. It also intimated in no uncertain terms the desirability of the Empire to be treated equally by its “friendly” European allies. Significantly, the plaque was inscribed in Ottoman and German, but not Arabic. The vast majority of the local inhabitants were apparently not deemed worthy enough (or capable, perhaps) of reading or understanding the significance of the imperial visit and its reflection of the elevation of the Ottoman Empire on the world stage.

Hamdi Bey believed that Ottoman modernization could succeed only if it preserved some sense of Ottoman difference from the West. He saw native culture as a timeless patrimony that set the Ottoman Empire apart from the West. 40 He bitterly criticized, for example, some Damascenes for rushing to imitate Western architectural style. This was evidence, according to Hamdi Bey, of a degeneration of taste among “Oriental” peoples. 41 In other words, anticipating what would become a standard, third-world, nationalist claim that modern western science could and should be married to an essential indigenous tradition, Hamdi Bey sought to reconcile Western science and national culture rather than totally emulate the West. 42 Yet in his understanding of native culture of the Ottoman Empire, be it the Islamic architecture of Damascus or the traditional attire of the various peoples of the Ottoman lands which he detailed in his Les Costumes Populaires de la Turquie en 1873 for the Universal Exposition at Vienna, Hamdi Bey articulated a vision of Ottoman modernity that was hierarchical and imperial. He intimated that it was the task of Ottoman modernizers to save Ottoman heritage not just from the West but also from the Oriental peoples of the Ottoman Empire. 43 He proposed to save the Ottoman subjects of the Arab provinces from themselves — both the supposedly indolent majority in need of uplifting and the active minority who were blindly imitating European style which threatened to destroy any sense of Ottoman uniqueness. Behind Hamdi Bey’s romantic discourse of Ottoman difference from the West lay a rhetoric of modernization that necessitated an Ottoman civilizing mission.

In his Les Costumes Populaires, Hamdi Bey explicitly outlined where and how tradition fit within a modernized world. He carefully distinguished between what he called clothing and costume. For him, clothing was the

37 Osman Hamdi Bey and Theodore Reinach, Une Nécropole Royale a Sidon: Fouilles de Hamdy Bey (Paris, 1892), 112; see also Hansen, “Imperial Discourses,” 169.
38 Hanssen, “Imperial Discourses,” 169. See Çelik, Displaying the Orient, 12-13, for a similar point.
39 Rifai, Lugar-i Tarihîye ve Cohrafeye, 3-4, 240.
40 This point has been made by Çelik, Displaying the Orient, 42. The following section on Hamdi Bey is reproduced from an article on “Ottoman Orientalism” forthcoming in the American Historical Review.
41 Hamdi Bey, Une Nécropole Royale, 112.
43 Osman Hamdi Bey and Marie de Launay, Les Costumes Populaires de la Turquie en 1873, Istanbul 1873.
manifestation of the homogenizing and rationalizing impulse of moderniza-
tion: “Day by day, clothing tends to become more uniform across the world,
and to efface not only all distinctions between diverse classes of society, but
also those between different nations which seemed otherwise to be perma-
nently separated by natural and moral barriers.”44 Traditional costume, on
the other hand, reflected the clearest expression of the innate—a nd hence
for Hamdi Bey authentic—characteristic of a people.45 Costume, like the
archaeological treasures of the Empire, gave the Ottoman state its distinctive
cultural and historical code in an otherwise homogenous modernity. For this
reason, Hamdi Bey gave an exhaustive account of the myriad costumes, and
customs and manners, of the various peoples of the Empire. He began with
“Turquie d’Europe” and more specifically Istanbul, which he declared was a
link between East and West, and then he proceeded to the Balkan provinces;
his next turn to Anatolia, then the Arab provinces, before ending with Af
rica.46 Yet in constituting the various popular costumes of the Empire as
integral components of Ottoman “tradition” and, therefore, as the authentic
underpinnings of any project of modernization, Hamdi Bey paradoxically
made it abundantly clear that his ethnographic survey—just like his later
archaeological expeditions—both proved and justified an Ottoman mission
to civilize quaint, but backwards and often savage, peripheralities. For example,
Hamdi Bey prefaced his discussion of what he understood to be native dress
in Syria, by stating:

Great historical memories are in abundance in these rich countries, con-
quered in turn by the Phoenicians, the Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Ro-
mans; [these countries] where the Quran and the Bible—two books of
peace, fraternity, and tolerance—have long served as a pretext for crusaders
coming from all over the Occident and for Arabs who founded Islam to tear
each other apart. [This continued] until the Ottoman conquest contained
by force [these] fanatical hatreds, which, on occasion, would reawaken.47

Hamdi Bey not only sought to rewrite the history of the Ottoman conquest
of the Arab provinces in a profoundly nineteenth-century discourse of tol-
ernce, but he seized on the supposedly timeless costume to underscore
other allegedly timeless characteristics of various groups in the Ottoman
domains; he sought to adduce what he considered to be the essential char-
acteristics of the native inhabitants of these provinces who were tamed,
disciplined and civilized—that is to say, forcibly removed from their end-
lessly repeated history of putatively endemic and age-old tribal violence
by the Ottoman imperial center. He described “the Muslim of Lebanon”
(by which he meant a Sunni) as imbued with “soft and tranquil manner
and customs” unlike his “turbulent neighbors,” the Druze and Maronites.48
The Maronites, he declared, were “remarkably intelligent and proud” and
were “industrious and rich” but “just like their Druze neighbors, with
whom they have never been able to live in harmony, the Maronites have
proved difficult to subdue. Only since a few years ago has the joint effor:
of the imperial Ottoman government together with its faithful allies suc-
ceded in pacifying [Mount Lebanon]; today the age-old hatreds of the
Druzes and Maronites seem to have been finally quelled; obedient sub-
jects, they now live as brothers under the legitimate authority of a Chris-
tian Pasha sent by Istanbul to govern Mount Lebanon.”49

Although Hamdi Bey’s main goal was to portray an Ottoman cultura
heritage that he feared might be lost, his supposedly objective delineation
of the popular costumes of the different groups of the Ottoman Empire
—supplemented with innumerable photographs—reinforced once more the
notion that Ottoman modernization was not about equality between cen-
ter and periphery but was a project of imperial benevolence and, above all
power that sought to mitigate an alleged civilized gap between the
modernizers of the imperial center and their subjects in the far-flung pe-
ripheries of the Empire. As the Hamidian state continued to battle Western
imperialism, and as the Balkan provinces continued to be whittled away in
the late nineteenth century, the civilizing Ottoman gaze over a number of
different groups and classes (Anatolian, Kurd, Armenian, Serb, Damascus
Muslim, Arab, Maronite, Druze, Jew, shaykh, merchant, peasant, an
urban elite) was increasingly complicated—and indeed redefined—as the de-
sire of the modernizing “Turkish” nation to aid and civilize a backward
“Arab” nation (as well as the Armenians and Kurds). With the rise of th
Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came an increasingly explicit
racial articulation of modernization that pitted the Turkish race as the mos
natural and able leaders of the modern empire.

Race-thinking in the late Ottoman Empire was not, of course, the pre-
sure of the imperial center. However, it is important to note that as Otto-
man modernization diminished “traditional” religious differences that ha
legitimated Ottoman rule in its classical age, it also introduced a discours-

44 Ibid., 5.
46 Ibid., 11-12.
47 Ibid., 258.
48 Ibid., 265.
49 Ibid., 267.
and suppression of Arab nationalists in Syria in WWI, an intimate and ever more lethal and efficient relationship between modernization and putative national security developed. Is it not time that we, as scholars of the Ottoman Empire, should take seriously all aspects of modernization rather than reproduce the conceit of the Ottoman reformers themselves—that all that they did was for the benefit of the local populations?

Cemal Pasha, for example, may not have been the ghoulish figure that Arab nationalists have made him out to be. Hasan Kayal’s recent work on Arabs and Young Turks certainly points in this direction, for it indicates that Cemal Pasha was genuinely interested in reform and urban renewal in Syria. But what Kayal dismisses far too easily are the implications of representation for imperial modernization.55 Cemal Pasha’s memoirs are suffused with a language of race-based distinctions. This language informed his attitude towards supposedly backward Arabs, whom he first tried to uplift, and then—during the First World War—subjected to a reign of terror. It is an indisputable fact that Ottoman reformers relentlessly battled against Orientalism and imperialism. But in this battle did they not elaborate a language and attitude towards their Arab (and non-Arab) subjects that was analogous to Western Orientalism and imperialism? This is precisely the question that has not been sufficiently theorized.

Until recently, the assessment of the Tanzimat-ı Hayriye (“beneficent regulations”) or reform era from 1839-1878 has tended to fall into two dominant heuristic categories. There were those scholars who followed the enthusiastic line of contemporary politicians and observers. They saw in the men of the Tanzimat around the foreign minister Resit Pasha enlightened visionaries imbued with the qualities of European democracy and representative government which culminated in the establishment of the Ottoman parliament and the promulgation of a constitution in 1876. The reformers’ subsequent failure is attributed to the autocratic rule of Abdülhamid II. The second school has been more skeptical from the outset. It holds that any reform was either imposed by the Western powers or what British diplomatic circles referred to as “paper organization” or a “dead letter” in the first place, i.e. an Ottoman attempt to evade European military pressure by pretending to be reform-minded when in fact the Ottoman politicians were never really interested in “true” democracy, equality and liberty. This view was vindicated by Abdülhamid II’s authoritarian policies which were seen as nothing else but the real face of Ottoman politics. Both approaches echo the words of one of the earliest (French) commentators who states that the Tanzimat decrees were a “veritable bilateral contract” between the European powers, in particular Britain and France, and the Ottoman government and that “everything that was successful about the Tanzimat was done in collaboration with foreigners.”

55 Hasan Kayal, Arabs and Young Turks, Berkeley 1997, 199-200 for a discussion of Cemal Pasha from an Ottoman perspective.

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2 See for example Şerif Mardin, The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought, a Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas, Princeton 1962, 10-80.

3 See for example, Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, Oxford 1961, 169-170.