Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire

This book explores the history of natural disasters in the Ottoman Empire and the responses to them on the state, communal, and individual levels. Yaron Ayalon argues that religious boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims were far less significant in Ottoman society than commonly believed. Furthermore, the emphasis on Islamic principles and the presence of Islamic symbols in the public domain were measures the state took to enhance its reputation and political capital – occasional discrimination against non-Muslims was only a by-product of these measures. This study sheds new light on flight and behavioral patterns in response to impending disasters by combining historical evidence with studies in social psychology and sociology. Employing an approach that mixes environmental and social history with the psychology of disasters, this work asserts that the handling of such disasters was crucial to both the rise and the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Yaron Ayalon is an Assistant Professor of History at Ball State University. He previously taught at Emory University and the University of Oklahoma. He has published articles on Middle Eastern, Ottoman, and Sephardic history, and is an editor for the *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*.

To Keren

Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire

Plague, Famine, and Other Misfortunes

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Preface

One night, when I was twelve or thirteen years old, I went into my father's study. There was always something intimidating about that room, with books aligned along the walls from floor to ceiling and my father's old, dark, and heavy desk and chair taking up much of the space. That night, as I walked in, Bernard Lewis was sitting on that wood chair, holding his right shoe with his left hand. The shoe's sole had suddenly fallen off, and my father was assisting Lewis in gluing it back. The scene was quite amusing, but not so much for the presence of Lewis himself or the rare informal setting in which I encountered him that night. Growing up in a house of a Middle East historian who had studied at Princeton, the sight of famous people (famous in my father's profession, that is) was not unusual. As a toddler, so I was told, I sat on S. D. Goitein's lap. As a teenager, I had dinner with Elie Kedourie shortly before he passed away. And I got to meet and converse with Lewis every so often.

It was not before my last year in high school, however, that I started to show interest in all those books my father had. When I did, I realized I knew a few of the authors who had written the books we had at home. Later, many of them would become my teachers and mentors. The first book I read was Lewis's *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, which I found to be quite fascinating. To the mind of a clueless teenager, Lewis's explanation of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire made perfect sense. It also whetted my appetite for Middle East history, so as a senior in high school I sat in on an Intro to the Middle East class at Tel Aviv University. The modern era in the Middle East, so the professor explained to a room of two hundred–plus students, began with Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt in 1798. The narrative of the course, as well as that of

a similar class I took as an undergraduate several years later, was one that equated modernity with Europe, decline with the end of Süleyman the Magnificent's reign in the sixteenth century, and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with stagnation. Twenty years have passed since I first read Lewis's book. Historiography of the Middle East, and the Ottoman Empire in particular, has gone a long way in the interim, and our understanding of the region's history has evolved quite a bit. This book reflects much of that historiographical transformation, and hence also my personal journey to become a historian that had started with my reading of Lewis's *Emergence* in the mid-1990s.

This book tells a story that took place over vast lands and several centuries. Very appropriately, it took traveling to distant lands – physically and emotionally – and more than a decade to write it. I first envisioned this study while participating in Amy Singer's graduate seminar on poverty and charity at Tel Aviv University in 2003. I developed its main themes during my time as a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton from 2004 to 2009 and a student at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in the summers of 2005 and 2006. Work on this project took me to archives and libraries in Istanbul, Marseille, London, Jerusalem, and New York. But when I was done writing my doctoral dissertation, I was not happy with it. So the journey to create this book continued, not only with further research in the archives, but also in Norman, Oklahoma; Atlanta; and Muncie, Indiana. The final product, the one you are about to read, therefore, hardly resembles my original dissertation.

Many people have helped and supported me with this project along the way. Much of the work on this book was done during my years at Princeton. My adviser, Mark Cohen, knew me before I knew him. Always helpful and generous with his time and resources, he provided invaluable feedback and advice. Michael Cook probably spent as much time reading and commenting on early versions of my chapters as I took to write them. I am truly indebted for his nearly endless commitment to helping me see this project through, whether by providing research advice or personal encouragement when the prospects of finding employment in an ever-competitive job market appeared to be slim. Also at Princeton, Şükrü Hanioğlu was responsible for introducing me to the world of Ottoman Turkish manuscripts and for helping me decipher some of the most challenging and illegible documents human eyes have ever seen. Thanks to his ability to read Ottoman handwritten texts as one would read a newspaper, I managed to overcome many technical obstacles throughout this study. William Jordan provided useful feedback and offered the greatly needed

perspective of someone who is not a Middle East historian. Heath Lowry also read parts of this work in its early forms. Attending his seminar in 2007 opened my eyes to the world of Muslim-Christian interactions during the early Ottoman period and has shaped many of the questions for this book. Erika Gilson, my Turkish teacher, instilled within me a passion for Turkey and the Turkish language, and helped make possible the two summers I spent at Boğaziçi University. Anthony Grafton, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Michael Reynolds, and Abraham Udovitch also deserve thanks for their words of wisdom and encouragement.

Others have contributed to this project by reading sections, discussing ideas, writing on my behalf, or just offering advice. They include Amy Singer, who read the parts of this book about charity and provided honest and much-needed criticism, and Alan Mikhail of Yale University, who has been especially helpful and generous with his comments and suggestions for one of the chapters and the book overall. Michael Winter and Israel Gershoni of Tel Aviv University, Yaron Har'el of Bar Ilan University, and Yaron Ben-Naeh of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem also helped along the way.

Norman Stillman deserves to be mentioned twice: once for helping me get my first job at the University of Oklahoma in the midst of the 2008–9 financial crisis when all other positions evaporated, and for being a close mentor and friend ever since; and the second time, for asking me to join the editorial board of the *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, my work for which has greatly informed my approach to religion and religious boundaries presented here. Mark Frazier, my department chair in Oklahoma (now at the New School), was always there to give professional advice even though we worked in different fields. And my other colleagues and students in Oklahoma helped make my time there enjoyable and productive.

Ken Stein brought me to Emory University, where I spent two years, and ensured I had ample time to devote to writing this book, financial support to travel to conferences, and wonderful students to teach. I have learned a great deal from him professionally and personally, and am forever indebted to him for his support and mentorship. Colleagues in the History and Middle East and South Asian Departments made working at Emory a rewarding professional and social experience. They include Vince and Rkia Cornell, Benny Hari, Jeff Lesser, Roxani Margariti, Gordon Newby, and Ofra Yeglin. My students at Emory have inspired me in numerous ways. I owe special thanks to Samantha Grayman, who worked as my undergraduate research assistant and diligently sorted

through numerous primary documents in English and French. Finally, at Ball State I have found a welcoming atmosphere in a relaxing setting that allowed me to complete this book. In particular I should mention Kevin Smith and Abel Alves, who have been extremely patient as they guided me through my first year in unfamiliar institutional waters.

This project involved working in several archives and libraries: the Prime Minister's Archives and the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul, the Archives of the Chamber of Commerce in Marseille, the National Archives and the British Library in London, the National Library in Jerusalem, the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and the Rare Books and Special Collections department at the Princeton University Library. In all of these places, I found knowledgeable and eager-to-help staff.

During this long journey I was fortunate to have the support of friends who (at times inadvertently) helped with this project, and who made life a little easier, if not enjoyable. They include Alan Verskin, Mehmet Darakçioğlu, Tuna Artun, Jack Tannous, Uriel Simonsohn, Bella Tendler, Kathi Ivanyi, Lev Weitz, Joel Blecher, Ariel Ahram, Joshua Landis, Deniz Kilincoğlu, who read the last chapter of the book and provided priceless insights, and his wife, Sevil, and Cara and Aaron Rock-Singer, who spent many hours in the National Archives in London photographing files when I could not travel there myself.

At Cambridge University Press, I would like to thank Will Hammell, who has believed in this project since I first presented it to him more than two years ago, and who was very efficient in getting the manuscript through the vetting process. Sarika Narula and Kate Gavino have handled all the aspects of seeing the manuscript to production and were always available to answer my many questions. I'm also grateful for the extensive comments the two anonymous readers provided. Their diligent attention to details and wonderful ideas have no doubt made this a better book.

Finally, this book could not have been written without the constant encouragement and patience of my family, near and far. From Israel, my parents, Ami and Yael, and my brother, Gil, were always available when I needed them; my father spent much time and energy offering expert advice, and my brother provided his design expertise for some of the technical aspects of this work. My wife, Keren, has endured more than anyone should have for the realization of such a modest scholarly accomplishment. Giving up many opportunities so I could pursue an academic career, she changed jobs numerous times as we moved back and forth across the country, while putting up with a husband who at times

preferred the company of books to that of people. The quest to complete this book and secure an academic position has taken a toll on my son, Yuval, who was born in Oklahoma, and by the time he was three had already lived in four homes and gone through four preschools. Omri, the latter addition to our family, was born in Indiana when this project was near completion, but he, too, got to spend less time with his father than he should have. All in all, Keren and my children are the true heroes behind this work.

Abbreviations, Transliteration, and Dates

I have used the following abbreviations throughout the book:

ACCM	Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Marseille-Provence
AHR	*American Historical Review*
BL	British Library, London
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, Istanbul
EI²	*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition
EJIW	*Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
JESHO	*Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient*
NA	National Archives, London
SL	Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul
TDVİA	Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi

Words in Arabic are transliterated according to the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* with some modifications: I use diacritical marks and apostrophes to denote *hamza*, *aliph*, or *'ayin*, but not vowel signs. Words in Ottoman Turkish are transliterated according to Ferit Devellioğlu's "Ottoman-Turkish Lexicon" (*Osmanlıca-Türkçe ansiklopedik lugat*). For words not appearing in Devellioğlu's dictionary, Redhouse's Ottoman–Modern Turkish–English dictionary (*Türkçe-Osmanlıca-İngilizce sözlüğü*) is used. Words that occur in the sources in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish are initially transliterated in both languages, with the first word denoting the Arabic and the second the Ottoman form (e.g., *jizya* or *cizye*). Thereafter, terms appear in either

the Arabic or Turkish, depending on the context and the language of the document in which they appear. Words in Hebrew are transliterated to reflect Modern Hebrew pronunciation: ‘ is used to denote the letter *ʿayin*,’ a vocal *aleph*; ḥ the letter *ḥet*; kh a soft *kaf*; k a *kuf* or *kaf;* ṭ for *ṭet;* and ṣ for *tsadi*. An h is used for a final *hei*, and double consonants represent a *dagesh ḥazak*. As in Arabic, vowel signs are not used for Hebrew.

People’s names have been left in the original form, as they appear in the sources, even if there is an English equivalent (e.g., Yosef and not Josef). Place names have been provided in English when an English equivalent exists (e.g., Aleppo and not Ḥalab or Halep), but when appropriate also in the original language. Technical terms in languages other than English are italicized. Although in many sources used for this book dates appear in the Hijri calendar (based on the lunar year and beginning in 622 CE), I’ve used the Common Era for dates throughout the main text. Hijri dates appear here and there in the footnotes when such usage is justified.

MAP 1. The Ottoman Empire.