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978-0-521-51949-6 - The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World

Baki Tezcan

Excerpt

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Introduction

Ottoman political history in the early modern period

On the morning of Wednesday, May 18, 1622, the imperial pavilion of the Ottoman sultan and many other tents were to be carried over to Üsküdar, across from Istanbul, on the Asian shores of the Bosphorus (see Fig. 1). Osman II, the seventeen-year-old emperor of vast lands stretching from modern Hungary and Ukraine to Eritrea and Yemen to the south, and from Iraq to Algeria to the west (see Map 1), was about to leave his imperial capital for a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, most jurists and the overwhelming majority of the members of the army corps were opposed to the departure of the emperor as they suspected that the young sultan's pilgrimage was a cover for other plans that would have consequences detrimental to their own interests. The next day, before Osman II could even set foot outside his palace, the opposition forces enthroned his uncle Mustafa I. On Friday evening, Osman was strangled at the Seven Towers where he was being held prisoner. God's shadow on earth, as Osman II would be described in his imperial title, was not permitted to visit the House of God – the name given by Muslims to the Ka'ba in Mecca.

Ottoman emperors, God's shadows on earth, should not have been so easily dispensable, but apparently they were. The political history of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century was marked by depositions like that of Osman II. Of the ten reigns by the nine sultans who occupied the Ottoman throne between 1603 and 1703, six ended with dethronements. In modern historiography, at least until recently, this discrepancy between the theoretical claims of Ottoman emperors to uncontested sovereignty and the practical reality of their frequent depositions has generally been interpreted as a manifestation of Ottoman decline, yet another sign of the disorders that plagued the empire beginning in the late sixteenth century. Although recent contributions to Ottoman historiography have challenged the decline paradigm from various angles, a new interpretation of these depositions has yet to appear.

In their recent book, *The Age of Beloveds*, Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı took a step toward a new interpretation of seventeenth-century Ottoman depositions:

The movement in England from late-Tudor absolutism to an increasingly limited monarchy under the Stuarts is well defined and widely accepted. In the Ottoman Empire, there

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Map 1. The Ottoman Empire, c. 1550. Adapted from Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. xxxiv–xxxv.



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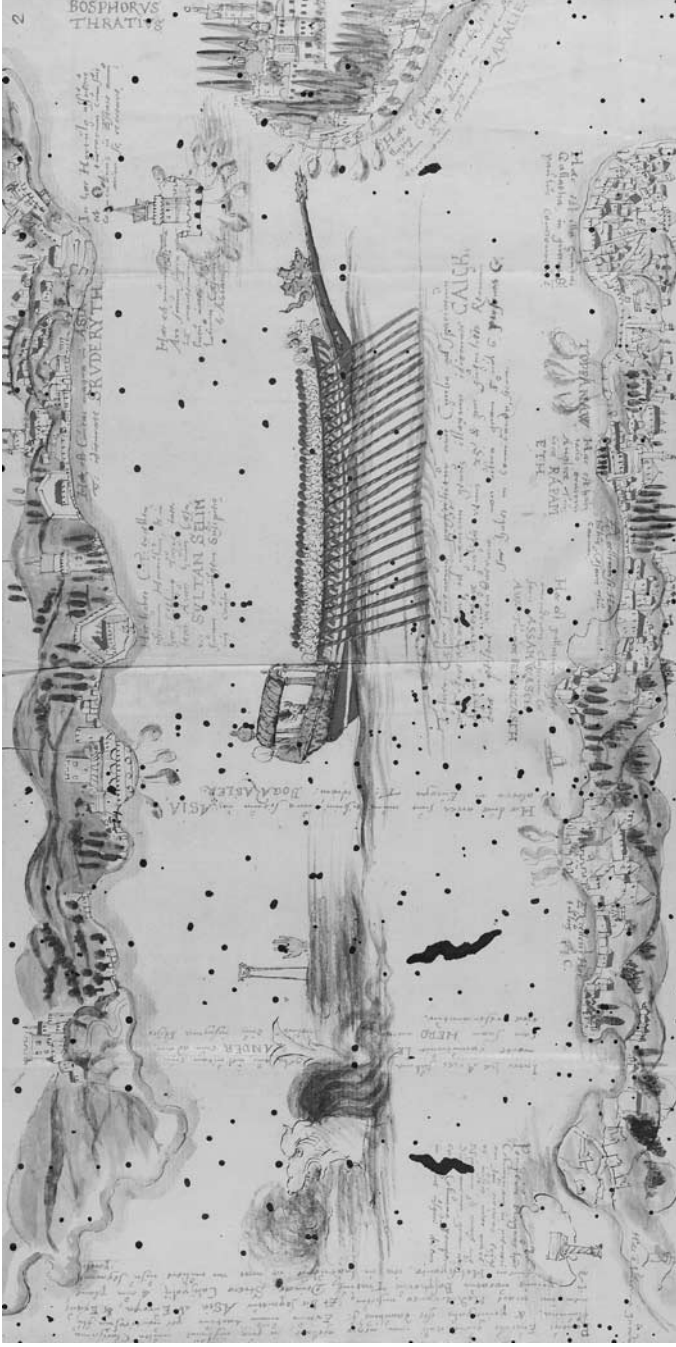
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Fig. 1. Panorama of the Bosphorus with the imperial palace on the extreme right and Üsküdar [Skvderith] across from it (1588); MS. Bodl. Or. 430, f. 2 (fold-out); courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

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appears to be a parallel to the English case in the double enthronement (1618 and 1622) of the mentally incompetent Mustafa I sandwiched around the deposition and regicide of (Genç [the Young]) Osman II.¹

Andrews and Kalpaklı are justified in qualifying their statement with the phrase “appears to be” because as two historians of literature they could not locate a work of political history that approached the Ottoman case from an angle that would make possible a comparison with the English example. According to the prevalent scholarly view, the regicide of Osman II was nothing but a military rebellion; hence, a sign of the decline of the Ottoman Empire or a symbol of its transformation into something else that has yet to be defined. In the absence of any study on the question, Andrews and Kalpaklı hesitate to offer any suggestions about why the regicide has been viewed so negatively: “Why movements toward limitations on monarchical absolutism are seen as an advance in the one case and as a decline in the other we will leave to nonliterary historians to thrash out.”²

Why indeed? How have we been led to believe that the English Civil War, which led to the execution of Charles I in 1649, and the “Glorious” Revolution of 1688, which dethroned Charles I’s son James II, were advances in the history of limited government, whereas the regicide of the Ottoman Sultan İbrahim in 1648 and the deposition of İbrahim’s son Mehmed IV in 1687, for instance, were simply signs of decline? The similarities between the events in England and in the Ottoman Empire did not pass unnoticed by contemporaries who wrote works like the “Interview between Sultan İbrahim, Emperor of the Turks, and the King of England, held in the Elysian Fields” as early as 1649 nor by modern scholars who do comparative work on a global scale.³ Of course, there is no Ottoman parliament to compare with the English one. Yet this particular difference does not mean that the Ottoman depositions and regicides lacked any formal constitutional components and were simply results of irregular behavior on the part of some soldier-turned-bandits as mainstream twentieth-century Ottoman historiography would like us to believe. The way in which Ottoman depositions were legitimized and the presence of certain features that established links among them point to the development of an unwritten understanding of what an emperor was supposed to do and not do, when it would be legitimate to depose him, and through what means.

¹ Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 322.

² *Ibid.*, p. 323; Gabriel Piterberg’s *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) offers an insightful study of the Ottoman historiography on the regicide of Osman II. However, Piterberg does not directly engage with the question of decline in the political context of placing limitations on Ottoman royal authority.

³ *L’Entrevue du sultan Hibraïm, empereur des Turcs et du roi d’Angleterre aux Champs Elysées* (Paris, 1649) is a short piece in verse. Jack A. Goldstone is well aware of some structural similarities related to economic crises and their social repercussions; *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

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A year before the Glorious Revolution took place in England, in the early morning of Saturday, November 8, 1687, the leading jurists of the Ottoman Empire convened at the Mosque of Ayasofya (the former Cathedral of Hagia Sophia) to discuss for a last time the demands of the army to depose Mehmed IV. When the grand mufti, the chief jurisconsult of the empire, asked the dignitaries present whether the sultan should be deposed, Mehmed, the chief justice of the Asian and African provinces, was the first one to give an affirmative answer. The father of this Mehmed, Abdürrahim, had issued the legal opinion that legitimized the regicide of Mehmed IV's father İbrahim in 1648 and had even overseen the execution personally. Mehmed's son Yahya was to be elected chief justice of the Asian and African provinces by the opposition forces in Istanbul in 1703 and to take part in the deposition of Mehmed IV's son Mustafa II. Thus Mustafa II came to be deposed, among others, by a jurist whose father had deposed his father and whose grandfather had deposed and executed his own grandfather.⁴

The jurists were not the only political actors involved in Ottoman depositions in the seventeenth century. The janissaries, who have been blamed for almost everything that went wrong in the Ottoman Empire after the late sixteenth century, played a consistent role in most depositions. Although mainstream Ottoman historiography has insisted on treating these political acts of the janissaries as signs of corruption and decline, according to Victor Fontanier, a Frenchman who spent many years in the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century, the janissaries were defending people against the ravages of absolute power.⁵ Antoine de Juchereau de Saint-Denys, another Frenchman who served the Ottomans as a military engineer in the early nineteenth century and witnessed a janissary rebellion in 1807 in Istanbul, stated that the janissaries, who were "identified with the nation," were "under the influence of popular opinion" and resembled a "populace that became sovereign."⁶ For Namik Kemal, a major figure of Young Ottoman thought in the second half of the nineteenth century, the janissaries had been the "armed consultative assembly of the nation" before their destruction by Mahmud II in 1826.⁷ Although the recognition of the janissaries as a political force with some popular legitimacy has been explored by Cemal Kafadar and Donald Quataert, whose works in this area have profoundly influenced this study,⁸ Ottoman

⁴ Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion and the Structure of Ottoman Politics* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1984), 28.

⁵ Victor Fontanier, *Voyages en Orient, entrepris par ordre du gouvernement français*, vol. I: *Turquie d'Asie* (Paris: Mongie aîné, 1829), 322.

⁶ Antoine de Juchereau de Saint-Denys, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman depuis 1792 jusqu'en 1844*, 4 vols. (Paris: Au comptoir des imprimeurs-unis, 1844), vol. I, 349, 355.

⁷ Mehmet Kaplan, *Namik Kemal: Hayatı ve Eserleri* (Istanbul, 1948), 107.

⁸ Cemal Kafadar, "Yeniçeri – esnaf relations: Solidarity and conflict," M.A. thesis (McGill University, 1981); C. Kafadar, "On the purity and corruption of the Janissaries," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 15 (1991): 273–80; C. Kafadar, "Janissaries and other riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels without a cause?" in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, eds. Baki Tezcan and Karl Barbir (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center of Turkish Studies, 2007), 113–34, the text of

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historiography in general has been very reluctant to embrace this train of thought and carry it further. It was a political scientist, Şerif Mardin, who argued that the rebellions that were attributed to the licentiousness of the janissaries or others might instead be regarded as the manifestation of a political culture that had a tradition of legitimate opposition:

There exist a sufficient number of cases of Ottoman rebellions with a justification and of uprisings with what appears to be a tacit recourse to a theory of legitimate revolt for us to take up this thread in Ottoman history and to give it the consideration which no one has accorded it to date. One must bear in mind that in retrospect, the history of Western European democracy from its origins onwards also looks like a series of unrelated episodes of violence and intrigue.⁹

Juxtaposing a history of democracy and a history of Ottoman rebellions may sound too anachronistic for the modern reader. Some of the premodern observers of the Ottoman Empire, however, would agree with Mardin. Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli was one of them. Marsigli visited the Ottoman Empire in 1679–80 for eleven months in the company of the Venetian ambassador and had an opportunity to become well acquainted with some of the most renowned Ottoman men of letters, such as the historian Hüseyin Hezarfenn and the geographer Ebu Bekir. His relationship with the Ottomans continued as he was enslaved during the Ottoman-Habsburg wars in 1683. After he gained his freedom, he returned to the Habsburg service and took part in peace negotiations with the Ottomans. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Carlowitz (1699), Marsigli oversaw the actual demarcation of the 850-km-long Habsburg-Ottoman border. Thus he was one of the better informed Europeans in matters pertaining to the Ottomans. In his monumental work on the Ottoman military forces, there is a short section on the political authority of the Ottoman sultan, the grand vizier, and other pashas. After reviewing the actual sociopolitical power of the Ottoman central military organization and of the educational-judicial hierarchy, or the ulema, Marsigli implied that the Ottoman Empire merited being called a democracy rather than a monarchy or an aristocracy.¹⁰ Taner Timur suggests that Marsigli regarded the Ottoman central military organization and the ulema as institutions whose functions paralleled the *États-Généraux* of France.¹¹

which was presented at Princeton University in 1991. I am grateful to Molly Greene who brought this paper to my attention in the late 1990s; and Donald Quataert, “Janissaries, artisans, and the question of Ottoman decline, 1730–1826,” in *17^o Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Historicas, Madrid – 1990*, vol. I: *Sección Cronológica*, eds. Eloy Benito Ruano and Manuel Espadas Burgos (Madrid: Comité International des Sciences Historiques, 1992), 264–8.

⁹ Şerif Mardin, “Freedom in an Ottoman perspective,” in *State, Democracy, and the Military: Turkey in the 1980s*, eds. Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1988), 26–7.

¹⁰ Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, *Stato militare dell'imperio ottomanno / L'état militaire de l'empire ottoman* (La Haye: Gosse, 1732), 31.

¹¹ Taner Timur, *Osmanlı Çalışmaları: İlkel Feodalizmden Yarı Sömürge Ekonomisine* (Ankara: Verso, 1989), 121.

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In the eighteenth century, it was Ottoman officials themselves who described their government as more republican than the ones in St. Petersburg and Vienna because the sultan “could not offer preliminaries of peace without the concurrence of [the jurists].”¹² Sir James Porter, who served as British ambassador in Constantinople for fifteen years in the second half of the eighteenth century, asserted that the Ottoman government was “a species of limited monarchy.” He went to great lengths to defend his observation to a contemporary who claimed that because of “their long residence” in the Ottoman Empire Marsigli and Porter had become so reconciled to the country and people as to make them “unwilling to admit that [the Ottoman government] should be denominated a despotism.”¹³ Porter regarded the Ottoman army as “a powerful check upon the Grand Signor [i.e. the sultan]” and the upper ranking jurists as the “hereditary guardians of the religion and laws of the empire.”¹⁴

Adolphus Slade, a nineteenth-century British navy officer, agreed with Marsigli, Porter, Juchereau de Saint-Denys, and Fontanier. He argued that the Ottoman monarchy used to possess a “constitution: defective, and in a state of chronic disorder, but still a roughly balanced system.”¹⁵ As noted by Bernard Lewis, Slade saw the modernizing reforms of Mahmud II and Reşid Pasha in the first half of the nineteenth century as a “subversion of the ancient Turkish constitution” or a “subversion of the liberties of his (Turkish) subjects.”

These expressions are strikingly reminiscent of the language used by the pro-Parliament jurists during the English Civil War of the 17th century and its aftermath. The doctrine of the ancient constitution of England and the immemorial rights of Englishmen are central to the arguments which were used to justify Parliament against the King in the Civil War and, in a different way, in the ensuing struggles of the later 17th and 18th centuries. . . . Slade applied these characteristically English doctrines to the Turkish situation, and pursuing them in great detail, found that they fitted.¹⁶

For instance, it was Slade who thought that the janissaries represented the people and thus constituted a “chamber of deputies,” forming the “legal opposition in the state.”¹⁷ He was justified in thinking about the janissaries in these terms as they indeed came to reflect the socioeconomic makeup of the Ottoman population as more and more lower-middle and middle-class Ottoman men

¹² Sir James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Nourse, 1771), xxxiv.

¹³ Compare William Robertson, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, 3 vols. (London, 1769), vol. I, 388–9, n. 42; and Porter, *Observations*, xiv–xxxvi.

¹⁴ Porter, *Observations*, xxviii, xxxi.

¹⁵ Adolphus Slade, *Turkey and the Crimean War: A Narrative of Historical Events* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), 10.

¹⁶ Bernard Lewis, “Slade on Turkey,” in *Social and Economic History of Turkey, 1071–1920: Papers Presented to the First International Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey (Hacettepe University, Ankara, 11–13 July 1977)*, eds. Osman Okyar and Halil İnalçık (Ankara: Meteksan, 1980), 220.

¹⁷ A. Slade, *Turkey Greece and Malta*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), vol. I, 303, 305, 306.

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bought their way into the janissary corps in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, other than in a short work by Lewis that he presented to a large group of Ottoman historians more than thirty years ago, Slade's views have been practically ignored by Ottoman historiography.

The present work is, in part, an effort to carry forward some of the observations offered by Marsigli, Porter, Fontanier, Juchereau de Saint-Denys, Slade, Namik Kemal, Mardin, Timur, Quataert, and Kafadar about limited government in the Ottoman Empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, it is very difficult to focus a revisionist lens just on the janissaries and the ulema, as well as the depositions they staged, without any regard to other dynamics of Ottoman history. That is why this book proposes an overhaul of our understanding of Ottoman history between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ottoman historians have produced several works in the last decades revising the traditional understanding of this period from various angles, some of which were not even considered as topics of historical inquiry in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ Thanks to these works, the conventional narrative of Ottoman history – that in the late sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire entered a prolonged period of decline marked by steadily increasing military decay and institutional corruption – has been discarded. In the most recent general economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire, for instance, only one of the four contributors sees decline as a central phenomenon, which necessitates an editor's comment in the preface on the divergence of this contributor's assessment from that of others.¹⁹ As observed by Douglas Howard, Ottoman decline became an “untrue myth.”²⁰ Nevertheless,

¹⁸ See, for instance, Gábor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007); Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560–1660* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*; Madeline C. Zilfi, ed., *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

¹⁹ Noted by Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 197, referring to *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, eds. Halil İnalcık, with Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xxvi.

²⁰ Douglas A. Howard, “Genre and myth in the Ottoman advice for kings literature,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, eds. Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144.

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the narrative of decline has not yet been replaced by a *positive* narrative that goes beyond defending Ottoman history *against* the claims of decline.²¹ In short, Ottoman history of this period is lacking a grand narrative with an explanatory power that might connect well-defined short periods, themes, and topics in a coherent whole. Although some historians prefer to avoid grand narratives, others expect history to open a window onto the past that offers a larger view. This book presents an attempt to provide such a view by taking political history as its central focus. For that attempt to succeed, it is crucial that we approach the period that starts in the late sixteenth century and ends in the early nineteenth century on its own terms. When studied as such, this era acquires a character all its own, which makes it quite legitimate to call its political structures the “Second Empire.”

Taking my inspiration from Rifa’at Ali Abou-El-Haj’s work on the 1703 rebellion and the formation of the modern Ottoman state,²² I argue that the Ottoman polity underwent a major socioeconomic transformation in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This transformation is so profound that one is justified in arguing that a Second Empire replaced the patrimonial empire, the perfect form of which is associated so closely with the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–66). The Second Empire came to be marked administratively by an early modern state, as opposed to a medieval dynastic institution; culturally by an early modern sensibility; economically by a more market-oriented economy; legally by a more unified legal system that came to exert some authority over the dynasty; monetarily by a more unified currency system; politically by the development of a type of limited government that grew out of the interaction between the legal developments of the time and such processes as “civilization” and “proto-democratization;” and socially by a *relatively* less stratified society. I use the term “proto-democratization” to refer to the process through which a much larger segment of the imperial administration came to consist of men whose social origins were among the commoners, the very people who used to be known as “outsiders” to the previous ruling elite whose leadership was dominated by the military slaves of the emperor. Thus more and more men whose backgrounds were in finance or trade came to occupy significant positions in the government of the empire, replacing those military slaves and *civilizing* the imperial polity.

Instead of providing a detailed history of the Second Empire, this book focuses on the major political developments of the period in general and

²¹ Serious efforts in this direction have been undertaken by, among others, Jane Hathaway, “Problems of periodization in Ottoman history: The fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20/2 (Fall 1996): 25–31; and Linda T. Darling, “Another look at periodization in Ottoman history,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 26/2 (2002): 19–28.

²² R. A. Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion, and Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005 [1st ed., 1991]).