

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This history of mine has from the beginning sought the supplementary to the main argument. Herodotus

In 1719, the outgoing governor of Mosul, Morali Ali, collected the market dues from the artisanal population and left the city to take another position. The leaders of the city's guilds met with him before he departed and demanded that he return what he had collected from them as taxes. They were sure that the incoming governor would gather the same taxes as soon as he took his new position. Morali Ali refused to comply with the artisans' request and fled the city. Meeting the incoming governor on his way, he proceeded to tell him of the trouble he had encountered in Mosul. The new governor, Sari Mustafa, asked, "Is what is legal (*shari*) accepted by the people, and do they have a judge (*qadi*)?" When Morali Ali replied in the affirmative, the new governor felt reassured. As soon as he arrived in the city, the notables (*a'yan*) gathered and encouraged him to impose a tax (*salyane*) on the artisans.

Faced with a potentially explosive situation, Sari Mustafa invited the notables to a feast of birds and stuffed lamb. The meal was served one course at a time, as was the habit among the Ottoman elite. The notables' hunger was not satiated by the birds, but they were quite happy after they had the stuffed lamb. Sari Mustafa then told the notables that their desire to tax the artisans was much like eating birds, one had to collect one *dirhem* at a time, a painstaking process. Since they were, like the stuffed lamb, quite rich, it was easier to collect the taxes from the three of them. Besides, he added, it was far better to explain this extortion of three notables than of three thousand artisans on Judgment Day.¹

This anecdote cum morality play encapsulates the main themes that will be explored in this study of the relations between the Ottoman state and

¹ Yasin bin Khairallah al-Umari, "al-Durr al-maknun fi ma'athir al-madiya min al-qurun" (Hidden jewels in the events of the past centuries), British Museum Library (henceforth BM), Add. no. 23312, fol. 386.

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Mosuli provincial society in the early modern period. Morali Ali and Sari Mustafa were representatives of the state who had to establish their credentials continuously by appealing to the local population as partners in upholding an Islamic moral and legal universe.² They sought to project themselves as protectors of the commoners' interests against those of local notables who were tied to the Ottoman state through an elaborate system of entitlements. At the same time, the state representatives had to negotiate their position and their ascendance through the maintenance of social and political rituals. The three notables presented themselves as mediators between the Ottoman authorities and the population. Their mediation was accepted by the governor, but they were reminded of their social station by the sophistication of the elaborate meal, and, more importantly, by Sari Mustafa's insistence that as mediators they should alleviate the burden of taxation of the local artisanal population by paying the dues themselves. The final agreement was a negotiated settlement between the city's artisanal population, the state, and the urban notables. In its spirit, the agreement is emblematic of the nature of state-society relations in the provincial city of Mosul in the early modern period.

This book is an exploration of the workings of the Ottoman state in a provincial setting. It approaches Ottoman power from the eastern fringes of the empire and attempts to show in concrete terms what "state power" meant to different sectors of provincial society. Rather like Sari Mustafa, it gropes for an understanding of the limits of state power as articulated by literate Mosuli notables and circumscribed by the political practice of urban and rural populations. While my focus is on the early modern period, many of the themes developed throughout the book are infused with late twentieth-century problematics about the nature of the links between state and society in the modern period.

The larger debates

There are four problematics that undergird the analyses of the data in this book. The first centers around the nature and workings of the Ottoman state in a provincial setting. While no attempt will be made to engage in the debates about the nature of the central state, I will try to test the assertions about the manner and extent of its administrative controls. My second concern flows from this examination of the nature of Ottoman political power and focuses on the kind of relations between state and society and the meaning of political practice, both in writing and action, of provincial actors trying to define such hegemony. Underlying almost every chapter of

² Haim Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 58–78. Gerber makes the argument that this *shari'a* law was regularized and systematic and it defined quite clearly the limits of social and political practice.

this book is an attempt to work against the binary representation of relations between state and society prevalent among Arab intellectuals and Western scholars working on the early modern period. The third issue that is addressed in this book is one that has occupied Ottomanists for some time. It revolves around understanding the nature of the relationship between the state and provincial society in the eighteenth century. Much of the thesis that the eighteenth century was one of decline has been discredited; the alternative offered is that the century was one of decentralization. I will argue that while the second part of the century was marked by the receding administrative controls of the state, it was balanced by the progressive “Ottomanization” of Mosuli provincial society. Finally, inherent throughout the book is the attempt to understand the extent to which the Ottoman experience in the early modern period shaped the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century.

The first part of this book focuses on the manifestations and working of state power and control in the provinces through an analysis of central state archival sources. The questions it asks are, therefore, informed by the debates within Ottomanist writing in the Western languages and focus on central state institutions. Turkish historians of the Ottoman Empire, who have done much to shape Western scholarship, have focused primarily on the state because it has been central to their narrative of modernity. They continue to function under the Atatürkist legacy, despite meaningful efforts to surpass it.³ Consequently, they have tended to study Ottoman political hegemony by analyzing central institutions and ascribing agency and autonomy to the state. Such autonomy is most evident in analyses of the extent of control over the distribution and allocation of resources the Ottoman state possessed. There seems to be a consensus among scholars that the economic *raison d'être* of the Ottoman state was provisionalist, concerned with securing goods of all kinds to large urban centers and to fighting armies. With that in mind, the Ottoman state elite set up what has been characterized as a command economy based on the control of artisanal products, the maintenance of guild monopolies, and the control of the movement of agricultural goods.⁴ From the beginning, however, a market economy based on demand coexisted with the attempts of the Ottomans to

³ See on this issue the collection of articles entitled, “New approaches to state and peasant in Ottoman history,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18/3 and 4 (1991), 1–264, and Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 29–59.

⁴ Cemal Kafadar, “When money turned into drops of dew and bankers became robbers of shadow: the boundaries of Ottoman economic imagination in the sixteenth century,” Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1986. Halil İnalcik, “The economic mind,” in Halil İnalcik and Donald Quataert eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 44–54. For the eighteenth century see Mehmet Genç, “Ottoman industry in the eighteenth century: general framework, characteristics, and main trends,” in Donald Quataert ed., *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1950* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 59–86.

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control distribution of resources. The relative efficacy of each economy depended on a variety of factors such as location, and the strength of mercantile groups and local elites allied to them.⁵ For example, in the commercial town of Basra, Ottoman control remained minimal because of the power of the local mercantile elite and their alliance to local political elites.⁶ Yet, the main economic system remained one of devolution, based on the distributive power of the state and its various agents to move and allocate resources within a limited area. According to Inalcik, outside of production for Istanbul and capital accumulated from long-distance trade, the bases of the Ottoman economy remained the peasant household, and artisanal production geared “to supply only the immediate neighboring region, that is, a clearly defined and limited market.”⁷

States that set up command economies have to have exclusive control over the means of coercion. They usually justify such control in moral terms that promise social justice and protection for their subjects (*reaya*). Thus, the economic policy of the patrimonial Ottoman state was one marked by control of the distribution of resources and monopoly over the means of coercion. The state emerges in this view as all-powerful, affecting social stratification through doling out of resources and maintaining its hold over economic activity. In such a system, the development and longevity of merchant capital, associated with the emergence of autonomous urban institutions, is dependent on the political needs of the state and subject to its predatory demands.

Central to this paradigm of command economy/centralized state is the view that it was effective at one time and that global and regional factors combined to shake its foundations. Fueled by inflationary trends, rebellions, and changing military needs, the state experienced a fiscal crisis that weakened its control over the economy. Although there is some disagreement among scholars about the role played by the influx of American silver in the inflation of the late sixteenth century, all concur that it taxed the fiscal resources of the state.⁸ Hoping to cover its military and administrative expenses, the state devalued its coins. The burden on the fiscal resources of

⁵ Traian Stoianovich, “Cities and the Balkan command economy, 1500–1800,” in Charles Tilly and Wim Blockmans, eds., *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, AD 1000 to 1800* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 60–99.

⁶ The alliance represented the marriage of protection and merchant capital, see Dina Rizk Khoury, “Merchants and trade in early modern Iraq,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 5 and 6 (1991), 53–86.

⁷ Halil Inalcik, “Capital formation in the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Economic History*, 29/1 (1969), 104–5. Samir Amin, an Arab political theorist, has given a similar assessment within the framework of the “mode of production” paradigm. Samir Amin, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), pp. 1–70.

⁸ See Kafadar, “When money turned into drops of dew,” pp. 61–109. See also Haim Gerber, “The monetary system of the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 15/3 (1982), 308–24. The debates were generated by Omar Lutfi Barkan’s article, “The price revolution of the sixteenth century: a turning point in the economic history of the Near East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6 (1975), 3–28.

the Empire was further increased by changes in the organization of war in the sixteenth century. Hitherto, the Empire had depended on the use of central and provincial cavalry forces (*sipahis*), which were funded by assigning to their members rural revenues in exchange for services rendered to the state. By the late sixteenth century, the development of musketry and cannon had shifted the emphasis of waging war to the use of an infantry and siege warfare. In both Europe and the Islamic world, the impact of the changing technology of war on the formation of states was profound.⁹ Ruling elites, who controlled the means of coercion, became hungry for cash to finance their wars and developed a number of strategies to cope with their needs. Of these, two are significant for this study. The first was the sale of short-term tax farms and offices to local groups under a system known as *iltizam* or *muqata'a*. This process culminated in the sale of lifetime tax farms known as *malikanes* in the eighteenth century. The second option taken by the state was to contract out to private families or kinship groups, often drawn from mercantile backgrounds, the provisioning and/or recruitment of fighting forces or mercenaries to support its main infantry forces. Both of these options were predicated on the availability of money and a sophisticated system of credits and cash transfers. In other words, the state could sell its resources only if it could borrow from the beneficiaries of a market economy based on the availability and circulation of capital.¹⁰

Scholars of the seventeenth-century crisis posit that the command economy, which had functioned more or less effectively until the late sixteenth century, began to contract in the face of expanding global and regional markets. Merchants, entrepreneurs, and political elites, encouraged by the demands of a growing population, expansion of the world market, and the provisioning needs of the state itself, began investing in state offices and tax farms. Rather than developing a mercantilist policy designed to prevent the flow of bullion to areas outside the Empire and to protect merchant wealth and the industries within its borders, the state chose to maintain its provisionalist policies. Where the expanding market demands had created the smatterings of a rural proto-industry in the first part of the eighteenth century, the state fought and sought to control its development. When it set up its own industrial complexes, its main aim was not economic growth but the provisioning of its armies.¹¹ This lack of economic vision resulted in the strengthening of regional economies that catered to expanding populations and growing demands of the world market for

⁹ For the clearest discussion of these changes see, Halil Inalcik, "Military and fiscal transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1700," *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 6 (1980), 283–337.

¹⁰ This development occurred in India as well, see C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 51–63. See also Bruce McGowan, "The age of the Ayan, 1699–1812," in Inalcik and Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History*, pp. 658–79.

¹¹ Mehmet Genç, "Ottoman industry," pp. 66–74.

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agricultural goods by the middle of the eighteenth century. Until the outbreak of the Turkish–Russian war in 1768, the state appears to have been able to tax and benefit from these regional economies. War expenditures and mobilization efforts put a strain on the fiscal resources of the state, and repeated losses to European powers greatly tested its ideological hold over its literate and regional elite. The last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth were marked by urban unrest and regional rebellions.

The political repercussions of the “privatization” of the state’s resources were the incremental loss of control by the state, despite effective interruptions, over various regions in the Empire.¹² In the Balkans, emergent nationalisms, spearheaded by mercantile elements, slowly eroded the hold of the Ottomans. In the Arab lands, local political dynasties established bureaucratic or military households and challenged the hold of the state, sometimes through outright rebellion, at other times through the monopolization of both local resources and the means of coercion. The end result was the devolution of political and economic power to local notables (*a‘yan*) and warlords. By 1807, these local groups converged on the capital to save the sultanate and install a new ruler more amenable to their needs. They drew up a political document which recognized their power and allowed them to maintain their privileges within the Ottoman context. The series of reform measures, the Tanzimat, issued beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century, were devised to liquidate these regional groups and reorganize the Empire around new administrative principles. In contrast to earlier attempts at reform, the nineteenth-century Tanzimat reforms were articulated through the political ideologies of modernism and nineteenth-century European reform models.

While the extent of controls of the Ottoman state is supposed to have been strong at one point and to have receded gradually, it is not very clear what such controls meant outside the Anatolian and the Balkan Ottoman domains. The debates about the nature of state economic controls are important because they define political power relations and social controls across the Empire. Since the state had large powers in the distribution and allocation of resources, it follows that it had the power to affect social stratification and define the contours of political practice.¹³ There is little doubt that decisions made by the state elite about the distribution of resources were instrumental in transforming social

¹² I have borrowed the modern term “privatization” from Ariel Salzmänn who applies it to the early modern practice of tax farming. Ariel Salzmänn, “An Ancien Régime revisited: privatization and political economy in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire,” *Politics and Society*, 21/4 (1993), 393–424.

¹³ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), vol. I, pp. 1–33, and 341–72. See also John Haldon’s attempt to offer an alternative to Mann’s neo-Weberian views in *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 51–103.

stratification in provincial society. However, these policies were created and implemented within the constraints of the social realities of the provincial milieu. What is lacking in most analyses of state/society relations is an account of how provincial realities limited the political choices available to state elites. This study attempts to establish how specific state policies were determined by state needs, but, more importantly, by the kind of social alliances and resistance to such policies encountered at the provincial level. Once we sift through the links between state policies and provincial actors we draw further away from ascribing agency and autonomy to the Ottoman state.

Furthermore, studies that focus exclusively on state policies and institutional controls tend to assign such controls to large areas of the Empire. This allows for a convenient and unitary explanation for the dynamic of change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, the command economy model is attractive because it offers a teleological narrative that runs parallel to the political narrative. The Ottoman economy was transformed from a command economy to a market economy. For a world system theorist the dynamic of this transformation was one of subordination to Europe. Others focus on internal dynamics and the state fiscal policies. In all such theorizing the end result was the loosening of state controls. At the political level, the movement was from centralization to decentralization, followed by reform and centralization again in the nineteenth century. Regardless of the theoretical problems this model creates for those concerned about “homogenizing epistemologies,” there are too many empirical exceptions to the rule available within the Empire to allow us to formulate a theory of disintegrating command economies. Egypt, the Dalmatian areas, southern Iraq, and North Africa seem to be obvious exceptions to the rule. Even for a relatively core area such as southeastern Anatolia and Mosul, there are indications that a command economy only functioned effectively at moments of crisis or war, at least where agrarian production and markets were concerned. It was more effective in the city, where taxes were collected and quality and prices of artisanal production were controlled.

Furthermore, while the decentralization paradigm might be difficult to discard for all areas of the Empire, it has two major problematics to contend with. The first is the problem of contextualization and historicizing; that is, how was the decentralization process that took place in the eighteenth century different from earlier ones that had plagued the Islamic and other empires from the late medieval period? Unless one subscribes to the now overused Ibn Khaldunian notion of Islamic history as a “pendulum” swinging between states formed by strong tribal solidarities and the disintegration of these states, it seems to me that the decentralization paradigm remains weak as an analytical tool for the early modern period of Ottoman history. Second and more importantly, how can one explain the

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social bases of the Tanzimat movement in the provinces without investing the state with overwhelming abilities to coopt and create consensus? Unless we find a more satisfactory answer based on the pre-Tanzimat provincial class or elite alliances and conflicts that cut across the state and society divide, the speed, direction, and effectiveness with which the modernization process took place remains debatable.

The existence of large areas in the Empire where effective administrative controls were almost continuously challenged makes the centralization/decentralization model quite limited in its applicability. In addition, the paradigm makes it difficult to formulate a cogent understanding about what it is that makes the Ottoman state between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries an early modern one comparable to other state systems of the same period. Work by two scholars, one focusing on central state institutions and the other on Syrian provincial history, has helped in revising the view of the eighteenth century as a period of decentralization. Karl Barbir has shown that the first half of the eighteenth century was marked by the administrative reorganization of the provinces allowing for more controls of provincial governors over wider geographic areas. This permitted the state to rule more efficiently and to expand its prerogatives at the expense of old local elite. If this is true of wide sections of the Empire, then the expansion in the practice of tax farming and the emergence of local magnates did not necessarily mean, in the first half of the eighteenth century, loss of controls.¹⁴ The apparent contradiction between the tightening of state controls and the privatization of its resources is problematic if we accept the view that expansion of tax farming practices represented the culmination of the devolution of the fisc, and of the process of decentralization. Building on the pioneering work of Mehmet Genç, Ariel Salzmänn has further revised our understanding of the eighteenth-century tax farming practices as representative of a decentralization process. She suggests that the lifetime tax farms (*malikanes*) did not lead to the devolution of the fisc and loss of control. Rather, the introduction of lifetime tax farms was one of many strategies devised by the state elite to tap into the resources of provincial political and social groups. By issuing *malikanes*, the state accomplished two goals: it dipped into the surpluses of tax exempt groups within the political and religious establishment; and it provided these groups with incentives to invest in agricultural production and to root a peasantry grown restive as a result of the seventeenth-century social crisis. Salzmänn's argument is convincing. In political terms, it reverses the view that the inclusion of provincial groups in the fisc meant a loss of state powers.¹⁵

¹⁴ Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708–1758r* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 13–56.

¹⁵ Ariel Salzmänn, "An Ancien Régime revisited. See also, by the same author, "Measures of Empire: tax farmers, and the Ottoman Ancien Régime, 1695–1807," Ph.D. thesis, University of Columbia, 1995.

I have chosen to test the efficacy of the centralization/decentralization paradigm by focusing on two features which were crucial in shaping relations between the state and Mosuli society over a long period of time. This allows for an understanding of the transformation in the workings of state power at the most concrete and fundamental level. Furthermore, this approach is effective because it contextualizes and historicizes what appear to be political decisions made by an autonomous state elite oblivious of the specificities and constraints of space and time. I have chosen to focus on war making and tax farming because they are features that were shared by a large number of early modern state formations. Thus, this study attempts to show how in the frontier society of Mosul local social groups were transformed, and in turn shaped the process of war making as well as state fiscal policies. In the process, and despite loss of administrative controls by the state by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Mosuli society became more Ottomanized as wider sectors became involved in determining what constituted allegiance to an Ottoman state through their involvement in the defense of the frontiers of Sunni orthodoxy and through an elaborate system of entitlements and investments in the state fisc. The most important of such investments was the lifetime tax farm (*malikane*). I argue that the *malikane* represented a break with the past tax farming practices because of the political and legal implications it carried for its Mosuli buyers and for the state. For a socially and economically diverse group of Mosuli buyers the lifetime tax farm represented an investment in the state fisc whose returns lay in more proprietary rights over land rents and other taxes. In effect, they had become an Ottoman service gentry. For the state, the extension of more proprietary rights meant bringing in a larger segment of provincial society into the Ottoman “system” by borrowing from large and diffuse segments of society.

These conclusions are only tentative and circumscribed by the specificities of the Mosuli situation. But if the analysis carries through to other areas of the Empire, then there is a serious need to reassess the decentralization paradigm.¹⁶ The Mosuli example makes clear that the Ottoman state, like many other early modern state formations, was actively engaged in defining its frontiers through forging alliances with provincial capital and mobilizing human resources. Furthermore, this process of consolidation was particularly evident in the first half of the eighteenth century but began to experience stresses and strains in the second half of the century after the Russian–Turkish war. Ottoman

¹⁶ Recent work on Aleppo and Diyarbakr revises the decentralization paradigm. For Aleppo the implications of the new scholarship are analyzed by Bruce Masters, “Power and society in Aleppo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 62/4 (1991), 151–8. See also Salzmann, “Measures of Empire,” pp. 147–350. The section of her work on Diyarbakr was made available to me by the author only after I had completed my manuscript.

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control, however tenuous, was maintained during this period because a provincial class of urban-based gentry in Mosul remained committed to the state. They did so, however, with a voice that called for reform and for clearer rights to land rents. When the warlords and bureaucratic/military households that had acted as contractors of violence for the Ottomans during the eighteenth century attempted to rebel against the state, they were opposed by this service gentry resentful of their monopolization of resources and power.¹⁷

After establishing the institutional and economic link between state and society, the second part of the book presents an exploration of the forms of political hegemony and types of political practice that were prevalent in Mosul in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I have focused primarily on the interaction between state policies and local political writing and political practice. Throughout this part of the book, the overwhelming dynamic is one that links the state and society. This does not mean, however, that there were no other forms of political practice. These have been amply studied by scholars more concerned with local political culture and less interested in how this culture fits in the larger narrative of Ottoman provincial history. To understand the implications of this foray into early modern provincial political culture it is perhaps useful to set it within the parameters of late twentieth-century debates on the issue.

A large number of studies on state and society relations in the pre-modern period are concerned, either implicitly or explicitly, with the lack of bourgeois democracies and institutions that limit the power of the state in the twentieth century. Perhaps the most developed of the intellectual trends are the Weberian and neo-Weberian approaches, which continue to dominate the discourse on the relationships between state and society in the early modern period for both Europe and the Middle East. Refined and enriched by the multidisciplinary approach taken by Michael Mann and Ernest Gellner, they have been reinforced by the resurgence of Islamist political movements.¹⁸ They assume a fundamental difference in the institutional, political, and ideological realities between the Islamic world and the “West,” and have spawned a sophisticated literature which is often described as the New Orientalism.¹⁹ Ernest Gellner is perhaps the most articulate proponent of this approach. For Gellner, Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century North African intellectual, has given the best analysis of the relationship of state and society in the Islamic world. According to this

¹⁷ I have borrowed the term from C. A. Bayly, *Rulers and Townsmen*, pp. 38–48. He finds these gentry heavily invested in the state fisc, and operating their tax farms as economic enterprises.

¹⁸ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. I. Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ For a concise critique, see Yahya Sadowski, “The New Orientalism and the democracy debate,” in *Middle East Report*, 183 (1993), 14–21.