PART I

Introduction

1 *The Enigma of Eastern Mediterranean Urban Culture*

Photographs can give us glimpses of lost worlds. In a picture taken sometime in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we see pedestrians rushing past each other across the tram tracks on Smyrna's (İzmir) quays, while a great number of ships with flags of various countries and steam rising from their funnels are being loaded and unloaded (Figure 1.1). We see one man wearing a fez with a kerchief wound around it, a very short jacket, a shawl with dangling coins wrapped around his waist, baggy trousers, and boots. He is followed by a man with a similar fez-kerchief combo and boots, but wrapped in a wide, flowing overcoat. They seem about to collide with a man rushing the other way with big steps, wearing a bowler hat, black jacket, needle stripe pants, and city shoes. A man with a similar bowler hat and straight cut overcoat can be seen in the background. If we took only these four pedestrians, we could muse about culture clash. However, we also see a man who, like the first two, wears a fez (albeit with no further adornment), but needle stripe pants like the third, and an overcoat somewhere in between the length and cut of those of the second and third pedestrian described. This slightly older pedestrian also carries a walking stick and wears his beard trimmed at half-length. Next to him, we see yet another man with a fez, but with his beard trimmed short, wearing an elegant tightly tailored light-colored vest and jacket over equally tight-fitting pants. Off to the left, we see the back of yet another man, apparently in military uniform, with a conical fez and half-long coat that is tight at the waist, but widens almost like a dress around his hips. Dressing up in late nineteenth-century Smyrna, one could surmise, was not a matter of choosing between East and West, city and countryside, or tradition and modernity, but of combining them in a manner that fit to one's personality or worldview.

Another picture takes us onto the quays of Salonica (Salonico/Selânik/Thessaloniki/Solun, Figure 1.2). The year is 1917, after the city has

Figure 1.1 The Smyrna Quays, ca. 1870s
Courtesy of the Ahmet Piriştina Archive, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality

Figure 1.2 The Olympia Cinema in Salonica, 1917
Public domain

been annexed from the Ottoman Empire to Greece and while it was occupied by Entente soldiers. In contrast to the earlier picture from Smyrna, the tram tracks have an electric overhead wire. A crowd is gathered outside the Olympia, a luxurious cinema built according to the recent architectural style of Art Nouveau. Again we see fezzes mingling with Western-style hats, but now also flat caps, and especially many women's hats as well as the bonnets and braids of schoolgirls, as they jostle to enter the Olympia. There are very few soldiers present, the crowd appears to be made up of mostly locals. The posters advertise the 1910 short film *Hearts of the West* as well as the more recent films *L'homme qui assassina* and *Les fiancés de 1914*. All three are only announced in their original language, with no translation of the title visible. First written as a novel by the Frenchman Claude Farrère, *L'homme qui assasina* is situated in the multicultural milieu of nearby Constantinople, as the fezzes on the posters show. Salonica, even after being taken by the Greek army, we could surmise, was far from Greek but still interested in Constantinople affairs, and also consumed American and French culture with great enthusiasm.

What of Constantinople (Istanbul/Dersaadet/i Poli/Bolis/Kushta/Tsarigrad)? A picture from 1912 shows us the downtown business district and commuter hub of Karaköy, just after the steel bridge over the Golden Horn, together with an electric-powered tram line that had been completed, and we see a crowd no less colorful than those of the two previous pictures rushing through the streets, over the bridge, and along the quays (Figure 1.3). A cacophony of advertisement in Greek, French (Latin), Armenian, and Turkish (Arabic) characters praise the quality of the department stores Stein, Tiring, and the furniture store Psalty. The dominant building on the waterside, another recent Art Nouveau creation, declares in big letters that it belongs to the *Wiener Bankenverein*, while immediately adjacent to it a small mosque stands as another experiment in twentieth-century architecture.

These are images from the city centers of some of the largest, most affluent, and most well-connected cities that existed 100 years ago on the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. By rights, we would expect them to adorn the history text books on Middle Eastern, Southeast European, Ottoman, Turkish, or Greek modern history, as a late nineteenth-century photo image of the Champs Élysées, Piccadilly Circus, or Unter den Linden might illustrate a text book on French, British, or German history. But instead, the images of colorfully

Figure 1.3 Constantinople, Galata Bridge and Karaköy Square, 1912
Courtesy of German Archaeological Institute Istanbul

dressed pedestrians on the quays, the waiting lines for the American movie, and the multilingual advertisement billboards strike us as something exotic. They give testimony of a range of multilayered, complex, and certainly contradictory ways of engaging with overseas cultures. By and large, the master narratives for the nineteenth-century history of the region do not touch much on such realities. Instead, they have been relegated to a special interest section subsumed under the headings of either cultural or urban history.

The Europeanized culture of the modern Eastern Mediterranean therefore needs more attention in historiography. Of course one cannot claim that the West has not been a subject of research in studies of the nineteenth century around the Eastern Mediterranean. Far from it, the relationship Turks, Greeks, Arabs, Bulgarians, Armenians, and other inhabitants of the region had to the rest of Europe has been the classic subject for historians of the nineteenth century for a long time. But the framing of the questions posed in the context of Europeanization has limited the scope of phenomena that have been discussed in this context. What dominates the common narrations of the region are clear bifurcations: tradition – modernity, modern – premodern,

West – East, or along ethnic or religious lines. Standard works highlight economic upheavals that changed contemporary society, state actors' efforts to adapt to the challenges of their times, and the various struggles for national hegemony and the violence that came with it. All of these are naturally important processes to be studied, but why are they usually dissociated from the milieus in which many of these processes took place?

Are we to consider the Levant's infatuation with Western culture and the hybrid forms it produced a short and superficial aberration that we need not concern ourselves with in detail, as it had no consequences for the course of history? It seems not, as an example will show. Europe – as a paradigm and as a collective agent – was not only a distant imperial center that through its great military and economic might managed to reach out into the lives of inhabitants of the marginalized periphery. It was also an intimate part of people's everyday lives, as intimate as factors such as ethnicity or denomination. A Greek colleague once told me about her grandfather. He was suffering from dementia. Dementia is understood as the gradual erosion of an individual's personality as it has evolved throughout his or her life. By losing his memories one step at a time, from most recent to those of events long past, her grandfather was reverting, traveling back in time through his own life until he would ultimately end up in a childlike state. During his illness, two ruptures managed to particularly startle his relatives. At some point the man stopped speaking Greek and would only talk in Turkish anymore. But in a later stage, Turkish came to be replaced by the singing of French Christian and children's songs.

The initial reversion to Turkish will not come as a surprise to those who have followed critical enquiries into the history of nationalism in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Case studies have shown that the ethnic markers of a group that in theory should be clear and unchangeable in practice proved confusing and negotiable. Thus, instead of clearly outlining Greeks as subjects of the Greek-Orthodox Church and speakers of a modern Greek dialect vis-à-vis Turks as adherents of Islam and speakers of a Turkish dialect, many more confusing identities have emerged, such as the Pomaks, who as speakers of a Bulgarian dialect and adherents of Islam have been claimed to belong to the Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish nations;[1] the Levantines, who were

[1] Karagiannis, "The Pomaks of Bulgaria," 143–158.

mostly Catholic but would as a rule speak a Greek idiom strongly influenced by Italian;[2] and the *Karamanlis* community to which my colleague's grandfather apparently belonged.[3] Despite being considered Greek Orthodox Christian, he had in his family spoken Turkish and had only learned Greek in a later stage of his life, possibly after he had been deported from Asia Minor to the Hellenic Kingdom in the Greco-Turkish Exchange of Populations of 1922/1923, which targeted people solely on the base of their religion without regard for their spoken language.

But the second reversion from Turkish to French seems indicative of a constellation that has not received proper attention in academic debate. If a man who grew up in the late Ottoman Empire remembers the French language after having been stripped of most of the memories of his adult life, and his active command of both Greek and Turkish, then it would seem that – besides the different elements of the Ottoman mosaic – West European culture had made a fundamental impact on him as well. This phenomenon hints at a more widespread and deeper penetration of "Europe" into nineteenth-century port city residents' identity, an "internal Europe"[4] that evolved within a constant dialogue with the rest of the continent. The photograph of the cross-dressing pedestrians alludes to the fact that there was no clash of binary opposites on the Eastern quays, but rather a wide spectrum from which individuals had to choose their own place. What amount of soul-searching, identity building, curiosity, experiment, despair, and line-drawing did interaction with "Europe" produce when local residents tried to carve out their particular place in the modern, quickly evolving world around them? Answers are best found not by assuming the port city residents' situation to be exceptional, but rather part of a European, if not global predicament of how to come to terms with a constant state of polyvalence, where a word has "a hundred meanings" and society takes on the form of a "cosmopolitan gods-, morals-, and arts-carnival," as Robert Musil and Friedrich Nietzsche characterized the predicament.

This book reconstructs, analyzes, and interprets the evolution of Eastern Mediterranean culture and the ways in which it became "Europeanized" in the course of the nineteenth century. I demonstrate how

[2] For more on the Levantines, see Chapter 18, pp. 288–301.
[3] Kechriotis, "Atina'da Kapadokyalı." [4] Barak, *Egyptian Times*, 299.

for the urban residents, European culture initially stood for a curious, but distant ideal. It then became something they could become a part of, but finally evolved into a model to be rejected. What people in Smyrna, Salonica, or Constantinople considered European often followed ostensible forms from elsewhere on the continent, but these forms became suffused with meanings the local residents projected onto them: They played a very active part in determining the course of the Europeanization of their urban surroundings and their identities, blending various aspects of overseas and local culture to find a style for themselves; utilizing foreign innovations to find new and more appropriate forms for buildings and the urban public space of their choice; and determining the flow of exchange as consumers. In this way, I hope to establish this urban culture as an important element of nineteenth-century history. To explain why it has so far not been given the attention it deserves I must first discuss the predominant master narrative we have commonly employed to frame nineteenth-century Eastern Mediterranean urbanism and demonstrate its shortcomings.