
PROLOGUE

More than Stone: Rhodes Pious Foundations between Metaphors of Empire, Slavery, and Liberation



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“The invitation to participate in this volume came—as so many of our contemporary interactions often do—in the form of an email from an unknown sender, we often feel inclined to overlook. My initially reluctant acceptance, however, morphed into fascination when the editor, Tarık Tüten, generously shared with me the publication details as well as his own family story. What I had thought a rather generic local project has revealed itself to be a flux of contributions, each and every one of which offer ground-breaking insights. When viewed together, the collection's pieces shape a uniquely important scholarly mosaic that situates the manifold versions of the Archipelago centrally in the powerful historiographical symbolisms of the Mediterranean. Most vital is, of course, the story of Rhodes and of the editor's ancestors themselves. They captivated and—in some ways—liberated me from present, overwhelming global anxieties. As a loyal believer in Archipelago... superstitions, therefore, I would argue that perhaps our collective unspoken needs have summoned these Conversations into existence, during a moment of profound uncertainty. As R.F Kuang's masterfully expressed metaphors of temporality suggest in Babel (2022), the right etymology produces near magic. In classical Latin, “conversatio” does not refer simply to the exchange of ideas. It is a deeply communal and ethical test as to how one behaves when moving around or forward with others. When all of us accepted the editor's challenge, the endeavor has transformed from a manifestation of simple scholarly expertise to a genuine proposition of ethics. Unlike Latin languages' interrogative style, the equivalent Arabic term provides with rare clarity an answer as to what constitutes the only type of ethical conversation: “mahabbet (vulg. muhabbet)”: 1. To have affection/respect for another. 2. To chat together in an affectionate/respectful way 3. -otu, the mandrake, a plant carried about to secure love. Endemic only to the Mediterranean, the mandrake/muhabbet otu (also known as the “love flower”) is a piece of our lands carried around the world to secure love. Similarly, the Conversations extended an invitation back to the Mediterranean, unearthing affectionate belongings long buried by time. The spell was done. The answer was found. For my participation in producing this speck of ‘magic,’ I'm deeply grateful as well as honored.”

Elektra Kostopoulou

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An introduction

Once upon a time in Ottoman Istanbul lived Huseyin Efendi, a retired treasurer who spent his days alone, mourning the empire's decline. One day, a dervish friend of his brought an erudite boy called Tayyarzade to keep Huseyin Efendi company and to spiritually guide him. The boy's education and elegance impressed Huseyin Efendi, who started treating him like a son. But one day, upset with some false accusations against him, Tayyarzade left Huseyin Efendi's household. Devastated, his master tried to entertain his sorrows elsewhere and fell prey to the criminal syndicate of Gevherli Hanim: a bitter, childless, aging spinster, who used courtesans to seduce and abduct affluent men, extorting their families. Eventually, Tayyarzade uncovers the scam, finds his way to Gevherli's labyrinthic dungeon—her old harem quarters—and tries to liberate his beloved master. In the process, he meets a beautiful innocent girl, who mysteriously appears out of nowhere ready to sacrifice her life for him. She tries to help him against the ruthless matriarch but inexplicably disappears from the plot when Tayyarzade exits the dungeon alone. Eventually, he ends up wandering in a garden where he crosses paths with Sultan Murad and his bard. When Tayyarzade informs them of Gevherli's crimes, the sultan decisively liberates the male prisoners and executes the female tyrant.¹

So goes the 17th century tale of Tayyarzade that introduces this essay and collected volume. At a first glance, the metaphor may read like an unorthodox choice for an introduction that focuses on the pious foundations of Rhodes. Considering, however, that the story of Ottoman Rhodes starts with conquest and ends with narratives of military decline, the selected metaphor speaks to gendered understandings of hegemony that this volume aims to defy. In essence, the goal is to problematize right from the outset the continuous association of regional history with simplistic dualisms of center versus periphery. More specifically, the introduction offers a critique against the gendered construction of geography through the juxtaposition of male virtue—which equals centralization/conquest/revolution—with female obedience or corruption, which equals either the peripheries' subordination to the center or anarchy.²

Because so much of history has been decided by war, the association of aggression with success of any kind continues to inform understandings of the past that linger over the present, always in support of existent power structures. Conversely, because even war is commemorated through storytelling, the interpretive labor entailed in it can produce alternative perspectives. Ultimately, if long-term power stems from the ability not to conquer but to successfully adopt, the perpetual continuation of any kind of hegemony is an oxymoron. Past a certain threshold, in other words, relations that depend exclusively on violence transform privilege to an imagination deficit that inflicts hegemony with the anxiety of violent self-destruction. It is in these moments that the seemingly powerless can escape their metaphorical confinement in the dungeons of anonymity or passive subordination.³

From a spatial perspective, if centralization is the process that defines and consumes hegemony, it reaches a breaking point when the center's self-indulgence starts overwhelming the peripheries that sustain its functions, leading to disorder that becomes revolution when the old system is replaced by a new one. From this perspective, while hegemony resembles the instant glow of a shooting star, long-term history is mostly a metaphor of distant stars that do not spark because they do not fall. They persist, as a hidden spectacle of alternative clues, awaiting to be discovered in the continuity of geography, the materiality of built environments, the intimacy of lived experiences, the salvation of storytelling. One example of such clues can be found in the pious foundations of the eastern Mediterranean island of Rhodes.

Our collected volume, in other words, presents the pious foundations under scrutiny not as sites of anxiety but as geographies of mobile permanence, where movement meets belonging and subjugation fades into resilience. With that in mind, this introduction briefly situates Rhodes's pious foundations in their continually evolving historical context, following the thread of storytelling within geographies of endurance.

To clarify, let us return to the story of Tayyazade, once created by the Sufi court bard Tifli to appease the tormented heart of his patron Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-1640). On some level, Tayyazade's story rhymes so closely with the sultan's life that reads like an almost Freudian ritual designed exclusively for him. Simultaneously, the allegory's implied association of female royal power with decline speaks to the broader intellectual canons that shaped 17th century perspectives, together with a big part of contemporary academic literature.⁴ For context, Sultan Murad's mother was no other but the iconic Anastasia/Kosem Sultan, a former slave girl of Greek-Orthodox origins, who became one of the most influential women in Ottoman history. Acting as the guardian of her underage sons after their father's death, Kosem Sultan was the empire's *de facto* ruler and the first imperial wife to establish motherhood as a platform for dynastic leadership.⁵ Among other things, her new role manifested in increased female patronage over the empire's pious foundations: the impressive network of religious centers, soup kitchens, libraries, colleges, clinics, commercial and residential quarters, water sources, and other public spaces that served the welfare of the empire's subjects and connected Istanbul to the vast and quite diverse Ottoman provinces.

Viewed in this light, Tayyazade's dark references to sex dungeons, promiscuous concubines, and aging matriarchs, had less to do with actual imperial administration and more with the traumatic childhood of Sultan Murad himself. The six-year-old prince had to stay confined for five years in the palace's female quarters after his father's death, in the special cage (*kafes*) designed to guarantee male succession. Although he eventually ascended to the throne thanks to his mother's conspiracies and under her firm control, it is plausible he had never truly escaped mentally his childhood's cage. Throughout his reign, therefore, Murad appeared torn between loyalty and resentment towards his mother, as well as unable to trust any of his consorts, his favorite among whom (Rosana) he ended up stabbing to death, allegedly due to his mother's manipulation. Either way, although Tayyazade's fictional trials reach their triumphant closure when the men take down the old female criminal, in real life Kosem managed to navigate with ease her son's fable rebellions, while also ruling quite successfully over the empire's robust domains. The concubines who dared to challenge her, by contrast, disappeared into oblivion in the same fashion Tayyazade's only redeemable female character, the brave young girl that challenges the evil matron, appears and disappears mysteriously somewhere in the labyrinthic harem, almost as just a figment of the male hero's imagination.

Aside from the above facetious reversal of Tayyazade's gendered symbolisms, this essay starts with said tale to situate the island of Rhodes within the Ottoman context, at a time when imperial sovereignty manifested mostly not through conquest but through the expansion of pious foundations. Kosem's emblematic legacy came to symbolize the transition from the period of military expansion to an early phase of modern state building, which was marked by the increased patronage exercised by privileged women over the empire's vast endowments. From the perspective of imperial princes, by contrast, the same transition translated into coming of age not on the battlefield, but in the palace's female quarters (*harem*), frequently in literal cage-like confinement, under the necessary protection and control of their lovers, wives, and (mostly) of their mothers.⁶ As a result, the above evolution of dynastic culture produced internal friction in the continuous Ottoman tradition of exclusively male emperors, who now came to the throne severely traumatized by the character of their succession. Unsurprisingly, the often-misplaced violence and erratic administration of said male rulers was often blamed on the harem.⁷

As a result, both popular and academic views of Ottoman decline have been traditionally based on the selective experiences of the Ottoman dynasty's male members. For instance, the stories prepared by court administrators and bards to appease the childhood demons of Sultan Murad were indicative, perhaps, of his traumatic relationship with his mother but were not true to her imperial legacy. Indeed, Kosem seized the throne in the name of her son with cruel authority rather than care, but her overall influence could be better described by reference to the impressive projects she initiated in order to strengthen the empire's welfare state—which had rather nothing to do with sex trafficking dungeons. That said, the infamous brutality, wars, and celebrated poetic riddles that characterized the reign of her son, revealed not only his own trauma but also the general anxiety of the Ottoman male dynasty, during a time when the warrior ethics of their former frontier culture were gradually replaced by an enormous empire administered centrally through the court and, mostly, by the harem.

In the previous century, by contrast, and more specifically at the time of Rhodes's Ottoman conquest (1522), the empire was still at the peak of its military might. It is safe to argue, therefore, that unlike his later successors, the island's conqueror Sultan Suleiman I (r. 1520-1566) appeared equally confident in his military victories and in his reproductive abilities. As much was suggested by his decision to partially abandon the tradition of imperial polygamy, previously adopted by the dynasty to guarantee the production of male heirs, in order to marry the ex-Christian slave Roxelana. Under the name of Hurrem Sultan, she became his beloved, his distinguished imperial wife, and the first Ottoman (*Haseki*) Sultan, hence developing an almost mythical, and equally controversial, reputation that for centuries now has continued to inspire popular gossip, academic research, and fiction. The indisputable talents of Hurrem notwithstanding, traditional historiography has long attributed the beginning of the dynasty's downfall to one woman's bewitching powers due mostly to the insights of dominant male scholars. As suggested by all other evidence, however, it is unlikely that the same sultan who called himself the “Magnificent” and the “Lawgiver,” had surrendered himself to tradition, lust, or even true love.⁸

Sultan Suleiman's conquests may have stretched the empire's borders farther than ever before, but the territories seized by his forces belonged with a steadily aging world. Arguably, therefore, Suleiman's biggest success was neither satisfying the ambition of his concubines, nor continuing the empire's territorial expansion—both of which he seemed to be managing rather fine. Instead, his reign was called the Ottoman “golden era” because he consolidated imperial order over diverse regions within an unstable global context. Against the overt emphasis placed on his military campaigns (or on his wife), it could be argued that Suleiman's real legacy was one of careful urban planning, diplomacy, and administrative reform. In addition, he adapted western dynastic canons to make his power visible across Europe and—be it true love or not—that was the most likely reason he chose an impressively capable former Christian slave to become his empress, his representative when addressing Christian ambassadors, and his singular imperial wife.

In the same vein, the island of Rhodes was integrated with the Ottoman cosmos at a time when the reign prioritized administrative efficiency over the demographic repopulation of new lands. Hence, the local Christians remained relatively protected from resettlement or forced conversion after the conquest, provided they were willing to pay the heavier taxes imposed on the empire's non-Muslim subjects. But the Muslim dynasty decisively took over the local spaces previously occupied by the Knights of St John, replacing the latter's sovereignty and castles with the symbolism and functions of Muslim imperial foundations. The sultan himself had entered Rhodes ceremonially on horseback, right after the siege, to sanction the conversion of the former Saint John Church into the mosque named after him, where he performed the first Friday prayer. Soon after, he had his own foundation built in stages to provide the socioeconomic and cultural services commonly

associated with imperial Ottoman endowments: feeding the poor, protecting education, building infrastructure. Thus, though it was Suleiman's navy that had conquered the island, it was the empire's pious foundations that actually turned Rhodes into an Ottoman province by changing the local landscape, as well as by establishing durable links between the province and the administrative capital.⁹ Hurrem Sultan, by contrast, did not play much of a role in that process. Ultimately, royal women would have had to wait for another century before expanding their influence over provincial endowments, in competition with the growing numbers of male imperial officeholders.

From the ranks of these imperial chamberlains came, eventually, the Rhodes-native Hafiz Ahmed Agha, who traced his lineage all the way back to Sultan Suleiman's expedition and who, upon retiring from a successful career in the service of the dynasty, decided to have his own pious foundation established on his native island. It is unknown if Hafiz Ahmed Agha took this initiative with the intention to move his family back to Rhodes. Either way, any such plans were interrupted when he was abducted, imprisoned, and killed amid the turmoil and client clashes that took over Ottoman lands right after the French and American Revolutions (1789/1776). In this sense, his story tragically resembled that of Tayyazade's fictional treasurer Huseyin Agha, given that the two men embodied two different stages in the evolution of early-modern Ottoman bureaucracy. From the massive geostrategic shifts triggered in the 17th century by global explorations, all the way to the seismic changes caused in the 18th century by early industrialization, the Ottoman regime maintained its hold of imperial domains through the fragile equilibrium of administrative flexibility. Ironically, the happy ending to Huseyin Agha's fictional drama agreed with a regime that was still capable of adopting to its tumultuous environment. But the chaotic circumstances of Hafiz Ahmed's death overlapped with developments that marked the beginning of the old order's end.

That said, both Hafiz Ahmed Agha's legacy and the Ottoman realm did endure for more than another century. Hafiz Ahmed was survived by his young pregnant widow Saliha Hanim who, soon after her husband's death, gave birth to their son Ahmed Fethi.¹⁰ The latter grew up to follow in his late father's footsteps. He pursued a standard education in Ottoman statecraft and, ultimately, gained success by becoming a prominent statesman. Essentially, therefore, due to his own choices as well as broader developments, his career and life trajectory moved forward like a figurative journey back to his father's native island. To clarify, while Ahmed Fethi was completing his studies, the aftershocks of European and American revolutions were already reaching multiple Ottoman provinces, including but not limited to Rhodes. Hence, by the time Ahmed Fethi was old enough to serve in the army, the raging battles of the Greek Revolution (1821) were spreading over imperial domains like fire. The Greeks continued their struggle for independence over more than a decade, time and again confronted with brutal retaliations. Until, eventually, popular outrage in Christian Europe would force the reluctant Christian Great Powers to coordinate a decisive military intervention against the Muslim dynasty and in favor of the rebels. Thus, came to life independent Greece (1833), the first nation-state to secede from the Ottoman realm under the auspices of western Europe.¹¹ In that context, it was a rather lucky coincidence that Ahmed Fethi fought mostly on the Russian-Ottoman front during those years and hence did not participate directly in any of the Greek massacres. Because both his origins, as well as his later choices, suggested that his Ottoman identity developed in close proximity to that of modern Greece. To elaborate, it suffices to consider how one early instance of the broader carnage ended up altering his life and the life of his mother, who must have been of a Greek origin as well given that she had raised her son to be fluent in Greek.

Following the unsuccessful Greek uprising that took place on the island of Chios in 1822, the Ottoman forces tried to make an example out of Chios by slaughtering, displacing, or enslaving the local Christian population almost in its entirety. The massacres made headlines in western Europe and were awful enough to inspire significant works of art, such as one of Eugene Delacroix's

most famous paintings.¹² Hence, it is plausible that similar feelings inspired Saliha to take under her protection Shemsinur Hanim, an enslaved Christian girl brought to Istanbul in chains after the massacres. At the time, Ahmed Fethi was still serving on the battlefield and did not meet Shemsinur until years later, upon returning to his mother's house severely injured. Shemsinur was the one who took care of him then, nurtured him back to health and, eventually, accepted to marry him— perhaps out of love, gratitude, or simple despair. Ahmed Fethi had more agency on the matter, of course. Thus, it is interesting to consider how his marriage affected his future choices and conduct, bearing in mind that a few years later he was appointed to serve as Ottoman ambassador in Western Europe. Under this prestigious title, Ahmed Fethi had to represent the regime responsible for the Chios massacres, while interacting with powerful audiences still mourning his own wife's slaughtered brethren as symbols of Christian martyrdom and ravaged ancient glory.¹³

It is of note, furthermore, that Ahmed Fethi Pasha was chosen for the above positions by the same Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) whose forces had previously ravaged his wife's homeland. This seeming contradiction spoke to Ahmed Fethi's own complex potential and desires, as well as to the long trajectories of violence that had long shaped the policies of the Ottoman throne.¹⁴ Simply put, Sultan Mahmud's youth too was marked by the standard cage confinement and assassinations that had come to characterize Ottoman dynastic succession. Unlike his murdered siblings, Mahmud was lucky enough to eventually escape the cage alive, not because of his own heroism but thanks to the bravery and smarts of a Christian slave girl. Specifically, it was the Georgian concubine Cevri Kalfa that had distracted his aspiring assassins as the terrified future sultan fled over the harem rooftops with his life, but not necessarily with his dignity intact. Arguably, that Mahmud rewarded the savior of his life and of his reign by naming a staircase after her, was not the most generous manifestation of gratitude and suggested the sultan did not want to highlight the details of his escape. Later on, he also named a foundation after her, in addition to granting her an important internal promotion, provided she administered the harem quarters that did not have much to do with him. Considering Mahmud's temperament, however, maybe Cevri Kalfa was lucky the sultan dealt with the possible humiliation her bravery had caused him by avoiding her. Not to forget that, at the time, it was more common for concubines that exercised influence over male rulers to end up stabbed to death like Roxane, rather than becoming a legend like Roxelane.¹⁵

More to the point, Sultan Mahmud chose to escape his childhood traumas neither by fantasizing about the execution of his mother, nor by murdering his concubines. Instead, he fashioned himself to be a Napoleonic reformer, determined to cut rather than untie the gordian knots of imperial client networks and of their provincial pious foundations, on which he blamed anarchy, widespread tax evasion, and military dysfunction. True, Mahmud's violent reforms set in motion a dual confrontation with old Muslim privilege and non-Muslim rebellion from which the empire never recovered. It is questionable, furthermore, whether or not brutality was the most efficient strategy against nationalism, especially at a time when the growing influence of the print culture turned good old-fashioned slaughters to horrid foreign press.¹⁶ That said, Mahmud did break precedent with his predecessors, who had often empowered imperial women to serve as benefactors or ambassadors. Instead, Mahmud labored to replace both his court's old male guard and the harem with young statesmen like Ahmed Fethi, whom he groomed to become the architects of future reforms, as well as his throne's charming representatives in Western courts.¹⁷

Ahmed Fethi, who spoke with native fluency both French and Greek, was the perfect candidate for this mission. He was thus favored by the sultan especially as Mahmud got older and became increasingly concerned with improving his reputation by forming a court of younger, erudite statesmen. In other words, men like Ahmed Fethi were expected to act as Sultan Mahmud's own version of Tayyazades: the loyal servants that could exonerate if not the sultan himself at least his

posthumous legacy, convincing foreign observers that the regime's violent choices had been not an ideological choice but a sacrifice made in the service of enlightenment and modernization. Either way, Ahmed Fethi was fortunate to be so very well-liked by the same ruler who otherwise thought mass murder formed the best way to address internal opposition, and that land grabbing was the path to solid fiscal reform. As a consequence, at a time when many provincial foundations were destroyed under Mahmud's orders, Ahmed Fethi not only maintained but also expanded his family endowments in both Istanbul and Rhodes.

As a matter of fact, Ahmed Fethi visited his ancestral island for the very first time either in 1838, right before his departure for Western Europe, or in 1850 when he accompanied Mahmud's successor as his brother-in-law. Either way, he became the administrator of his family foundations' (*mütevelli*) in 1839.¹⁸ Soon after, he decided to commission the building of a prominent clock tower and of a Muslim boys' school—which was later converted to junior high under the administration of the reformed Central Ministry of Education. That the above conspicuous symbols of urban modernization reached Rhodes before the official advent of the Reform Era (*Tanzimat*: 1839-1876) was significant. Sultan Suleiman's pious foundations may have sealed Rhodes's subjugation to the Ottoman capital, but it was Ahmed Fethi's family endowments that reaffirmed the island's integration with Ottoman modernity. From a certain angle, therefore, when Ahmed Fethi visited Rhodes in all of his imperial glory, his arrival resembled and simultaneously reversed Sultan Suleiman's triumphant entrance into the castle of Rhodes three centuries earlier. While Ahmed Fethi's royal distinctions represented the continuation of Rhodes's subjugation to the Ottomans, his connection to the island was rooted in local family origins that defied hegemony from within. He was, simultaneously, a privileged outsider well-versed in projecting royal power via public visibility, and the descendant of complex, intimate cultural bloodlines.¹⁹

Ahmed Fethi's individual "identity," in other words, was negotiated autonomy. Far from an exception, furthermore, such had always been the hidden rhythm of imperial survival, manifest both from below and at the higher echelons of power. Let us expand, for instance, the comparison between Rhodes's conqueror and Ahmed Fethi's royal patron. In the same way Sultan Mahmud trained his court of modern statesmen instead of his offsprings to implement future reforms, after Sultan Suleiman's death it was the prime minister Sokollu Mehmed Pasha that continued his legacy. Himself a former Christian slave, the pasha used his influence to increase Christian and/or provincial representation in the empire's central administration. Simultaneously, he guaranteed the court's stability during the turbulences of dynastic transition. True, Sokollu Mehmed's reforms were limited to intimate projects influenced by his own origins and/or incentives.²⁰ By contrast, 19th century reforms were a massive operation that spanned the reign of three sultans and a whole century. They involved and produced an army of new bureaucrats with diverse backgrounds, all of whom shaped to a certain degree the administration's novel, and often contradictory, directions. Yet to the extent that both Suleiman's prime minister and 19th century statesmen drew inspiration from their own distinct origins, the two examples agreed with the pattern of negotiated diversity highlighted above. On that front, the era of reforms magnified rather than disrupted Ottoman administrative precedent. The difference in scale and temporality, however, led to different outcomes. Most important, the regime's attempts to standardize previously fluid canons triggered extensive provincial backlash. Because even the federal experiments of provincial representation revolved around the regime's hierarchical understanding of religious engineering.²¹ Essentially, the Tanzimat's biggest success and failure was that it extended the life of the dynasty through top-down reforms.

The Ottoman dynasty's belated fall was marked by the usual vices that characterize any regime's attempt to overstay their welcome in history: irate cruelty, self-destructive totalitarianism, violent secessionism, territorial losses, and bankruptcy. Specifically, Tanzimat bureaucrats initiated costly

projects that threw fiscal planning completely off balance, causing widespread reactions. Instead of acknowledging them, the regime tried to suppress popular opposition through military action and rhetoric, presenting the reforms as a clash between enlightened modernity and barbarism. Yet the most disastrous aspect of the Tanzimat was that the frantic quest for administrative efficiency regarding taxation undermined directly previously implicit arrangements that were vital in holding imperial domains together. Pointedly, privileged exceptions and a degree of permitted tax evasion were the necessary concessions successive regimes made towards their subjects. Stated differently, the empire ruled over diverse communities that tolerated political exclusions or discriminatory taxation largely because they were allowed to partially escape them. Hence, it is understandable that when rigid modernization started to challenge the above system of negotiated mutual tolerance, at a time when nationalism already offered political alternatives to empire, the ultimate outcome was chaos. Among the empire's non-Muslims, widespread dissatisfaction manifested mostly through national secessionism. Conversely, the Muslim majority moved towards religious triumphalism and violent suppression, which eventually found expression in the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909). Hence, soon after coming to power, the new sultan was pressed by the majority to terminate the federalist experiments of the Tanzimat, opting instead for a version of modernization that revolved around autocratic centralization and Islamic populism. Predictably, the turn on autocracy exacerbated both internal tensions and the actual administrative dysfunction of the Ottoman realm, expediting the dynasty's collapse.²²

Thus, by the time the empire witnessed its first successful popular revolution in the guise of the Young Turk movement (1908), any chance to reconcile diversity with popular representation had already been lost. The short-lived constitutional experiment of the early Young Turks quickly transformed into brutal dictatorship, state-sponsored terrorism, forced displacement, and genocide.²³ Soon after, the end of the first World War inaugurated the age of national self-determination not only as a new pillar in international law, but also as a novel way to legally justify coveted expansionism, militarization, and new types of carnage. To sum up, the last Ottoman century overlapped with the frantic headlines of much broader turmoil, the destruction of old systems and the emergence of new ones. In that context, it is plausible that individual actors navigated uncertainty via adaptable, and at times even capricious, behaviors and choices. To illustrate, let us return to Ahmed Fethi Pasha's ambassadorial term in Paris, which was abruptly interrupted in 1839 when Sultan Mahmud offered him the hand of his teenage daughter Atiyye Sultan. Clearly, that the sultan considered Ahmed Fethi a fitting match for his much younger daughter, suggested his ambassador's popularity among Europeans could help the throne restore their family image. As for Ahmed Fethi's role in the arrangement, the way he approached the offer revealed the complexity of his motives and feelings. By all accounts, he was a Muslim Ottoman dignitary about to join the imperial family. Yet, in some ways, he was also Greek.

To clarify, after his marriage to the young princess, Ahmed Fethi became established indeed as a most prominent statesman, a western-cultured cosmopolitan, legendary spender, and charming *bon vivant*.²⁴ It is worth noting, therefore, he was ready to reject the marriage if, as stipulated by the condition of monogamy which was required when marrying a princess, accepting it meant divorcing his first wife. Only after the newly enthroned Sultan Abdulmecid I (r. 1839-1861) accommodated his plea for an exception did Ahmed Fethi marry Atiyye Sultan. And when a few years later Atiyye Sultan died without producing a male heir, Ahmed Fethi returned to his first wife and to their children. True, they all lived in a world in which the dominant ideologies of nationalism and empire suppressed dual (or fluid) identities that did not agree with specific ideological canons. The imperial regime used Ottoman Greekness as a category that accommodated exclusively Greek-Orthodox Christians.²⁵ Similarly, independent Greece had been founded right from the outset to be an entirely Christian state, inseparable from its church.²⁶ Against these limitations, Ahmed Fethi's origins, choices, and

experiences left behind a trail of capricious ambiguity. He was an Ottoman dignitary who could perform westernization with ease, was married to a former Greek slave, and expressed a pioneering interest in archaeology.

Simply put, Ahmed Fethi's *hidden Greekness* was certainly not an identity he ever articulated with coherency or deliberately. Yet it appeared to be one of the factors that consistently influenced his intimate life choices. How else could one describe Ahmed Fethi of Rhodes, who once-upon-a-time found himself charming European kings and queens, performing westernization with native ease? Who was selected to become the sultan's son-in-law precisely because of the above skills? And who, as a member of the royal family, would influence significantly the aesthetic vista of the Tanzimat, among other things pioneering archaeology, neoclassicism, and musicology—all while bending imperial law and precedent to honor his beloved wife Shemsinur? She, who was not an Ottoman prince but one of the dynasty's enslaved victims, and who did not speak the language of diplomacy but his mother tongue, represented the ultimate embodiment of what could be seen as Ahmed Fethi's intimate connection to *Greekness*.

The riddle of Ahmed Fethi's identity as presented here was thus embedded in multilayered knots that actualized by remaining unsolved. By extension, the fierce ambiguity of his existence was evident also in the many material traces he left behind.

From the clock towers and modern schools, he had built on his family's island, to the new coastal palaces commissioned by his imperial in-laws—to which he contributed cultural expertise— Ahmed Fethi managed to blend his family history with the Ottoman dynasty's most iconic symbols. If the renovation of the Rhodes foundations resonated directly with his origins, his involvement in the design of the dynasty's new headquarters cannot be explained through simplistic references to the stereotypical argument of cultural imitation. To clarify, Topkapi Palace, which had remained the formal seat of the imperial court up until the Tanzimat, had been commissioned in the 15th century by Istanbul's Ottoman conqueror. Erected over the ruins of Eastern Rome, the old palace complex was situated on the hill overlooking two continents and three seas, an iconic reminder of the Eastern Roman Empire's fall to the Ottomans.²⁷

By contrast, the new coastal palaces' location, architecture, and aesthetics, imitated western design from a position of cultural subordination, especially if one equates the empire with its Muslim, Turkic dynasty. Beyond the profile of its rulers, however, the Ottoman realm had manifested its power throughout the centuries mostly by way of its inner diversity. From this point of view, it is of note that many of the new palaces' actual builders were Greek or Armenian Christians, who hence maintained their own intimate connections to different versions of western culture. In the same vein, from the perspective of Ahmed Fethi, his connection to Greek culture via family origins shaped understandings of Ottoman westernization that defied the bipolar dichotomy of uncritical imitation or treasonous affiliation with external interests.²⁸

Erected right next to the maritime routes dominated by Christian merchants, the new coastal palaces rose above the water like sirens that lured the dynasty to willingly abandon the imperial hills of Eastern Rome; and to spend the wealth exorted from its domains in the construction of modern mansions that yielded Ottoman symbols of power to the aesthetics and heritage of ancient Greece. Moreover, the nature of the project required also the employment and handsome compensation of builders who had relevant cultural expertise.²⁹ On some level, therefore, westernization did not signal the empire's cultural takeover from without but its cultural reclamation from within. Admittedly bold, this interpretation agrees nevertheless with the plausible observation that before the Ottomans started copying the West, the West had already appropriated the ancient heritage of the geographies and the peoples that constituted the Ottoman realm. On a more personal level, one cannot guess what crossed Ahmed Fethi's mind when he was advising his royal relatives to go

bankrupt over ornate Ionic columns, intricate mosaics, and neo-classical opulence. But being the erudite cosmopolitan that he was, Ahmed Fethi must have known that Greek antiquity had survived its military conquest by Rome, resurfacing to power from within not through war but through cultural privilege.

Although Western European dynasties traced their self-proclaimed origins back to ancient Greece, it was the Ottomans that controlled the multilayered geographies where the legacies of antiquity and the Roman Empire had historically shaped each other. In this context, Ahmed Fethi was perhaps exceptionally gifted, and hence an exceptionally privileged representative of negotiated cultural fluidity, but his background was not all that unique. Rather, it formed a true reflection of Ottoman Mediterranean complexity. By implication, his connection to westernization was not externally imposed but the internal product of long historical processes. The Ottomans had ruled for centuries, after all, over Mediterranean regions, the cultural legacies of which formed an integral component—if not the very foundation—of Western European civilization. It is, therefore, bizarre to characterize Ottoman westernization exclusively as a process of imitation. At the same time, the success of the Greek Revolution had produced indeed an unbridgeable gap between the dynasty and Mediterranean geographies of continuity. Although the Ottoman regime would manage to hold onto most of its domains for another century, it failed to accommodate popular belonging on a collective level and beyond religious divisions. From this point of view, the lived experiences not only of Ahmed Fethi but even of prestigious Greek-Ottoman statesmen mirrored both the exclusive privileges and the profound agony experienced by dynastic realms in the age of national populism.

For instance, when Tanzimat bureaucrats attempted to legitimize administrative reform by reference to tradition/continuity, their focus was placed almost exclusively on either religious hierarchies or on dynastic symbols that ignored from-below sentiment.³⁰ Similarly, Ahmed Fethi's fascination with antiquities remained the erudite hobby of a collector.³¹ In the end, our hero was a pragmatic man, hence likely to realize that seeking collective popular meaning in archaeology, while in the service of the Ottoman elite, was a dangerous choice. Conversely, the Greeks became visible and gained independence not thanks to their warrior skills but by using collective imagination as pragmatic leverage, producing narratives that surpassed all other regional versions of history in length, grandness, and range. Greekness was an affirmation of modernity through alleged continuity and revolutionary folly. In the same vein, when the Great Powers of Europe interfered to stop the much superior Ottoman army from annihilating the Greek rebels, theirs was an act of hegemonic appropriation rooted in equally pragmatic, modern calculations. To put it differently, Greekness imagined the modern nation as a message of freedom/revolution that made or destroyed empires: from the Roman conquest to Christianity; from Byzantine hegemony to Ottoman expansion; and from the Enlightenment, European colonialism, and industrialization all the way to the New World.

Greekness was able to outlive, in fact, even the European empires that initially sponsored the creation of the homonymous state, eventually finding expression in the neo-imperial ambitions and resulting neoclassical architecture of American hegemony. The above top-down chain of cultural appropriation served primarily expansive ambitions. Yet the rebellious spirit of Greekness thrived as a kaleidoscopic manifestation of the multitude, which transformed the antiquity from elite academic reference to universal message of freedom. From Ottoman Rhodes to Athens and from Paris to Washington DC, that dual legacy survived through the reconciliation of top-down elitism with from-below defiance. As a case in point, around the same time Tanzimat reforms were reaching an end, concluded also the American Civil War. Its termination was marked by the abolition of slavery and tragic assassination of the Union's President Abraham Lincoln (1865). Fast-forward to 1922, at a time when the Republic of Turkey emerged from the ashes of empire to claim popular independence, a memorial characterized by impressive neoclassical features was erected to enshrine the memory of Abraham Lincoln in the administrative capital of the American Republic “as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union.”

But the most iconic appropriation of the Lincoln Memorial, perhaps to this day, occurred on the day a legendary civil rights' leader climbed up its stairs and declared that emancipation can never exist in the passive voice. Whereas when the liberated act by themselves to reclaim freedom, they alone can cry "I have a dream."³²

Ahmed Fethi was most certainly neither a rebel nor preoccupied with collective action. But in his own way, he was an audacious dreamer. His hidden Greekness manifested, therefore, in his ability to simultaneously disobey and serve structural injustice, as well as in his loyalty towards his first wife and children. He would spend the last years of his life and the last remnants of his fortune next to them in an attempt perhaps "to have it all," that resulted mostly in mounting debts. When he passed away, therefore, he left his son Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha with not much more than their shared charm. Hence, eventually, Mahmud found a way out of family bankruptcy by marrying Sultan Abdulmecid's daughter, Princess Cemile.³³ Following in his father's footsteps by this means, Mahmud Celaleddin immersed himself in the second phase of the Tanzimat and became the fervent supporter of Midhat Pasha's federalist plans.³⁴ Amid the broader conspiratorial climate that shaped the rise of Abdulhamid II to the throne, however, the two men met a tragic end. Under the accusation they were plotting against the throne, they were stripped of their power, imprisoned, exiled, and assassinated while in captivity.³⁵ In the words of Midhat's own son Ali Haydar:

"On bursting in the door of Mahmoud's room , they threw round his neck a soaped cord , which had been specially prepared, for they were aware that he possessed very considerable muscular strength. Mahmoud made a most desperate resistance , giving vent to piercing cries . They tried every means to hasten his death , with such ferocity that even the animals in the neighbourhood trembled at the sound of his heartrending cries for help. But soon the screams of anguish died away.

A few moments after , two corpses , wrapped in sheets , were transported to a room in the hospital."³⁶

Thus, in perfect harmony with the literary canons of ancient Greek tragedy, family history repeated itself when Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, the grandson of Rhodes's Hafiz Ahmed Agha, died in captivity like his ancestor. His devastated mother had already passed away right after her son's arrest.

Let the conclusion to their story, however, be different. Let us return to the pious foundations of Rhodes, which maintained some of their functions away from Istanbul's continuous uproar. After the assassination of Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, his sister Saliha Yegane took over the administration of the endowments and started visiting frequently the island to protect their preservation. In this way, centuries of imperial bloodshed concluded in a beautiful library and a secluded space. Despite carrying the name of male founders, said endowments have survived the empire's eventual collapse thanks to the daughter of a female slave. In the end, although most of recorded history is written through war, the subjugated, the enslaved, the peaceful, and the spiritual are never passive. When the roar of battle is over, these unlikely survivors often re-emerge from the rubble to slowly rebuild. Severely injured, heavily traumatized, significantly changed—at times—but undefeated.

Eventually, when in yet another twist of fate Italy defeated the Ottomans in the regional war of 1912, unlike many other majority Greek regions, the Dodecanese islands remained occupied by an external power and did not unite with Greece until 1947.³⁷ A most consequential implication of that development was that Rhodes's Muslims and their pious foundations were excluded from the treaty of Lausanne signed between Turkey and Greece in 1923. That mandatory population exchange of almost 2 mil people along the lines of religion transformed the human geographies of both

countries, leaving behind deep scars and multi-generational trauma.³⁸ By contrast, Rhodes's forced integration with fascist modernity interrupted population transfers, and the vengeful destruction of pious foundations that usually followed Muslim displacement. The Italian occupation had no incentive to acknowledge the Greek majority's nationalist sentiments or to protect the Muslim minority. Nevertheless, it unintentionally blurred the memory of earlier subjugations by forcing an external version of empire over the population, hence liberating local Islam from its symbolic association with the island's former subjugation to Istanbul.

In this context, Rhodes's Muslim foundations pose a fascinating question not about 'how' empires start or end, but about 'what' they are, corroborating the argument that administrative flexibility serves rather than undermines imperial longevity. Most important, this is a story that engages with empire not to glorify but to challenge it. Which brings us from the Ottomans to patterns of 21st century globalization which, among other things, have shaped new directions in academic research—and in research funding. Under the auspices of the new global superpower, sanitized versions of regional history have come to replace old nationalist paradigms, in the service of reconciliation, fiscal centralization, and neoliberal expansion. Additionally, American academia has asserted its intellectual superiority over the lingering epistemological parochialism of European colonialism, through the appropriation of ground-breaking fields—such as critical gender or race studies, subaltern and postcolonial studies etc.³⁹

On the other hand, Greek and Turkish national historiographies have traditionally approached Rhodes's unique past as nothing but an anomaly, or a thorn in the side of alleged cultural homogeneity. To a certain degree, therefore, the recent deconstruction of nationalist academic paradigms has protected local history from external appropriation or erasure. Not enough attention is dedicated, however, to the dangers that usually accompany the negation of majority national sentiment by revisionist historiographies. Similarly to religious belief systems, national teleology attracts the faithful via the presentation of political independence in the guise of alleged destiny that justifies both cruelty and sacrifice. Top-down attempts to replace the all-powerful nation with nothing but its absence tend to produce disaster. From a legal or historical perspective, furthermore, according to the international norms established after the Great War, nationalism provides the only path towards political independence. By extension, global systems continue to operate fiscally, legally, and politically along the lines of recognized nation-states.⁴⁰

The secessionist rebels that fought against the Ottoman regime during the last century of its existence understood the above limitations very well. Similarly, all contemporary freedom fighters of any kind, as well as domestic politics almost anywhere in the world, operate within the parameters of the exact same limitations. Thus, paradigm shifts that disregard contemporary international frameworks, popular sentiment, and recent history have disastrous implications—an observation that extends to otherwise well-meaning, sophisticated academic endeavors. It is worth remembering that the "people"—however defined—tend to develop a taste for extremism, violence, or upheaval when their demands for socioeconomic inclusion or political/cultural representation are systematically suppressed by ruling establishments. This tendency further intensifies when said establishments adopt the rhetoric of modernization/enlightenment to introduce from above new canons, perceived by the majority as conceptually alien and materially harmful. Which goes some way to explain why the recent process of US-driven, neoliberal globalization has failed spectacularly across the world, causing intense reactions even at the very heart of the American superpower.

Simultaneously, in the many conflict zones that neighbor the island of Rhodes, the current crisis manifests in series of regional clashes and dreadful military operations. The combination of lawlessness and inhumane violence has eroded the superpower's international credibility, together with its ability to justify the enormous military expenditures realized at the expense of

its own welfare state. As of lately, therefore, the US has surrendered itself to populist upheaval and reactionary authoritarianism, at the backdrop of increased international turmoil, military violence, and genocide. As with other aging hegemonies throughout history, the American superpower has started to take the distinctive shape of decline. For those of us who study the last Ottoman centuries, the similarities are both unmistakable and alarming. While the “Red Sultan,” Abdulhamid II became the symbol of paranoid violence, bankruptcy, and autocracy, it remains to be seen if the erratic second Trump presidency, which has inspired mockery and horror across the world, will mark the American establishment’s decisive downfall.⁴¹

The reign of Abdulhamid was, of course, much more complex than the caricatures we remember it by. Moreover, the real disasters associated with his administration did not undermine a thriving empire but failed to overcome pre-existing challenges. Similarly, the Trump presidencies may constitute particularly maladapted responses to American hegemony’s existential crisis, but they did not cause it. The US is, of course, the most recent, most sophisticated, most powerful, and thus most brutal version of empire in recorded history. For its various migrant communities, it is also home. America’s association with migration could be described, in fact, as a most telling metaphor for imperial diversity. It is the mechanism through which the center has ruled over—and occasionally ravaged—its global domains, in exchange for an ambiguous, often untenable, promise: the “free and the brave” can always escape the poverty, wars, and oppression that shutter global peripheries. Even if their homelands vanish, they have a chance to survive, by coming to the center of empire in search of the “American Dream.”⁴²

By implication, the American experiment has wrestled with history and with the phobia of decline, by turning acute demographic mobility into its instrument of growth, reproduction, and survival. Most grandiosely captured by the Statue of Liberty, who like a siren’s song enchants the migrant masses at the entrance of the New York harbor, the American version of empire did not conquer the world. It coerced it into subordination. She bewitched the tired, the poor, the huddled masses that yearn to be free and took their offerings in flesh or in spirit. At the same time, she often annihilated the worlds they came from, negating potential escapes towards back home. In this way, the superpower has long remained *young* (and somewhat savage) by constantly renewing the ranks of its laborers, its thinkers, and of its soldiers through the manipulation of hope or of despair. Moreover, similarly to the Ottoman dynasty’s system of forced recruitment and reproduction, the innovation of birth-right citizenship has long facilitated America’s demographic rejuvenation, at times by devouring, and at times by rejecting, the children born first to enslaved and later on to migrant mothers. Through the mechanisms of birth-right citizenship, slavery morphed into migration engineering, replacing the open brutality of the former system with the vampiric charm of the latter, in an irresistible choreography of predatorial power that renders resistance vain if not fully undesirable.⁴³

Thus, for as long as young migrant women have been willing to surrender their reproductive abilities to the American dream, the latter has grown stronger. Until it has finally reached, perhaps, the breaking point of its economic, political, and ideological dominance; the climax of its global ambition; and the folly of its arrogance. It is not accidental, therefore, that like every other empire in human history, the superpower’s golden era was characterized by the successful—and often equally cruel—engineering of migrants’ robust demographic potential through masterfully narrated diversity tales. In the same vein, America’s current existential crisis actualizes, among other things, in generational/demographic terms. It is a clash between, on the one hand, the established privileges of an aging population and, on the other, the administrative state’s need for, and inability to regulate, the ever-growing numbers of migrant newcomers. By the same token, it is rather typical that—in Tayyazade fashion—domestic frustrations are loudly expressed mostly by young men, who

feel increasingly irrelevant in an empire that charms through education, coerces through elderly privilege, and slaughters with its drones.⁴⁴

Among the above-mentioned three pillars of hegemony, education and the law are often the least corrupt and hence the most vulnerable ones, as least when compared to the military and financial branches of the establishment. By extension, universities and justice constitute hegemony’s most conspicuous endowments, which usually come under attack first. This goes some way to explain why the most prestigious representatives of American academia have recently become the main targets of populist rage and authoritarian manipulation. As for their potential to overcome the crisis, it may simply depend on their ability to realize that, in times of hegemonic collapse, a failure in collective imagination often leads to collective carnage. For a cautionary tale, it suffices to consider the Ottomans.

Besides, these two versions of empire momentarily crossed paths over the Mediterranean, right after the Great War, when one of them crumbled in surrender and the other thrashed to be born. At the time, US involvement in regional affairs was limited to humanitarian initiatives, hidden behind the language of ambiguous idealism. It was Europe’s empires and peoples that were bleeding then, all drunk with the anxiety of power, determined to risk annihilation for the chance of rebirth. More than a century on, much has changed in terms of the protagonists, but the cycle remains the same. Which leads us back to the same question: if this is how empires end, do they/should they ever survive?

Saving the global superpower from itself is certainly not this author’s main goal. It is worth noting, however, that any diverse political entity—including the US—entails complex relational meanings and hence the potential escape from self-destruction. Relational, as used here, means interpersonal mobility, which becomes visible humility when hegemony transforms into the multitude, if only out of self-preservation. Thus, if the global superpower were to exit its own labyrinths of imperial arrogance and populist ruin, it should perhaps move away from the loud cacophony of battle, towards the whispers and crushed homelands of its victims. History’s path towards the future may exist in the transnational connections that emerge when the enslaved, the indigenous, the migrant, and the local summon together ancestral ghosts, in search neither of memory nor of oblivion but of forgiveness. Such has been for centuries, the rhythm of eastern Mediterranean survival.

Let us, thus, circle back to the “Inland Sea,” a common description that captures the association of Mediterranean histories with historical crossroads and long durations. The region is synonymous, in other words, to a distinct school of geographical determinism, the foundational principles of which go all the way back to the iconic work of Fernand Braudel.⁴⁵ Predictably, however, Braudel’s pioneering insights have inspired many subsequent works to reproduce also his lopsided focus on western culture. Artificially detached from real time and space, in this fashion, the east became the *other Mediterranean*. It was reduced to the tales of a vanquished past, overwhelmed by the implied clash between two regional modernities: a sea within the sea, deprived of present relevance.⁴⁶ This imbalance is not surprising if understood as the product of western intellectual dominance and, by implication, of cultural imperialism. But it is methodologically negligent and conceptually inconsistent with Braudel’s own principles. What is then the Inland Sea if not a coherent geography shaped by shared rhythms? In response, the recent scholarly focus on Ottoman geographies has produced numerous evidence-based studies that reclaim the other Mediterranean back from historical essentialism.⁴⁷

While our introduction aligns itself fully with the above alternative readings of the region’s past, it wishes also to transcend them. To sum up, the same framework can be used to engage with pressing issues about the near future. As implied throughout this essay, some of the most evident and violent turning points in history have occurred when old hierarchies started to collapse. According

to this author, the current existential crisis of the global superpower constitutes such a tumultuous turning point that stems from, and will continue to shutter, a malfunctioning international system. Consequently, the dominant hierarchies of the last centuries are unlikely to survive the transition. In the sphere of politics, both nationalism and top-down globalization, already belong with a fast-expiring old order. Nationalism prioritizes artificial, exclusionary cultural divisions that contradict both the contemporary reality of increased global connections and the past fluidity of historical interactions. Hierarchical globalization, by contrast, appropriates mobility and order albeit in the service of empire, thereby destroying past alternatives without offering any real new channels for popular representation. To bypass this hiatus, it suffices to realize that so much of hegemony’s dysfunction is caused by the violent erasure of peripheral alternatives. Is it plausible, then, to argue that the antidote against hegemonic decline may be found in neglected versions of past regional experiences?

In the end, geography “always wins,” only when its meaning is defined by those who inhabit it. To illustrate, the Mediterranean *long-durée* has existed neither exclusively as revolution nor as conquest, but as a process of survival through (pro)creation. Hence, its meanings have always been shaped by a universe of islands, simultaneously connected and autonomous in time and space. Humans have navigated the waves of Mediterranean history, while anchored onto its lands. Materiality, in this context, translated not only to security but also to the flexibility needed to accommodate, while simultaneously defying, ideological hierarchies—for instance, national, imperial, or religious. In other words, the universal Mediterranean story has always been not an answer but a question. Which one comes first? The lands, which offer the stability of belonging through the continuous reimagination of meaning? Or, the sea journeys, which depart from, discover, return to and, in the process, change the land?

The above dilemma forms a reminder that human agency involves fluid processes rather than rational conclusions. Hence, I propose that a way to bypass the confinements of any kind of determinism, is by emphasizing that (*e*)*motional belonging* precedes and survives every other ideological construction through *motion*. Namely, my use of the concept refers to the individual choices through which people have always connected from below with any land (or with any sea) in ways that continually reimagine geography and reaffirm the multitude by escaping fixed, externally imposed, conceptual restrictions.⁴⁸ Post-nationalism and empire, therefore, the regional future could be one of *motion through (e)motion* which, etymologically as well as conceptually, translates to expressing affection through mobility. Every escape, in this sense, is also potentially a return that stirs things up. It is the process of *motional agency* that affirms belonging not as imposition, but as active choice.

The Mediterranean has always been, after all, a most vivid geography of (*e*)*motional pauses*. Its timelines are often cyclical, but never stagnant. Occasionally, the waves lure away local storytellers, towards linear adventures and open oceans. But the sea is always there, and when the current brings the stories back, their changed components become healing. At times, the stories return in collected volumes about pious foundations, endowed centuries ago on ancestral islands to serve this very purpose.

And thus, onto our islands, we keep moving. Until we meet again, with the future.

Endnotes

1 On the story of Tayyazade, see Çizakça, “Deciphering an Ottoman Fairy Tale: Tayyazade Throughout the Centuries.”

2 Jha, “Pursuits of Global Gendered Intellectual History,” Kraft, “Spaces of Knowledge and Gender Regimes.”

3 For a broader discussion on imperial systems, see Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*; Motyl, *Imperial Ends*; Reinert, “Jacob Bielfeld’s ‘On the Decline of States’ (1760) and Its Relevance for Today”; Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline”; Bouquet, “From Decline to Transformation.”

4 Sayers, “Sociosexual Roles in Ottoman Pulp Fiction.”

5 On Kosem Sultan, see Görgün-Baran, “A Woman Leader in Ottoman History”; Ali and Naz, “Imperial Women”; Arkan, “Tarihî romanlarımızda Üç Haseki Sultan (Hürrem Sultan, Safiye Sultan, Kösem Sultan)”; Fatima Ali and Asmat Naz, “Imperial Women: Patrons of Political Power in the Ottoman (1520-1660).”

6 On imperial women, slavery, and the harem, see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*; Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*; Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*.

7 Douglas A. Howard, “Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of ‘Decline’ of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”; Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee*.

8 Zilfi, “Sultan Süleyman and the Ottoman Religious Establishment”; Afyoncu, *Muhteşem Süleyman; Kanuni Sultan Süleyman ve Hürrem Sultan (Yeditepe Yayınevi)*; İsmail Hira and Emine Yıldırım, “Türk Televizyon Dizilerinde Oryantalist Yansımalar: Muhteşem Yüzyıl Örneği.”

9 Kolovos, “The Fortress and the Town of Rhodes According to the Ottoman Survey After the Siege of 1522”; Fabian Leonardo Riesinger. “Empire in Sight : Architectural Transformations after the Ottoman Conquest of Rhodes (1522).” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 28 (2022): 81–93.

10 Olcay Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, “An Elegant Senior Bureaucrat Rodosluzaade Ahmet Fethi Pasha.”

11 Skopetea, *To Πρότυπο Βασίλειο Και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα*; Koliopoulos and Veremis, *Greece*.

12 Colette Burton, “Remembering Martyrdom.”

13 Petros Pizanias, *The Greek Revolution of 1821: A European Event*.

14 Ozavci, “The Ottoman Imperial Gaze.”

15 Polatcı Demirkol, Türkan, “Polatcı Demirkol, Türkan. ‘Çankırı İnas Mektebi (Central School For Girls) According to the Sicill-I Umumi Register.”

16 Aksan, “Mahmud II”; Mustafa Gölçek, “Centralization during the Era of Mahmud the Second.”

17 Ersahin, “Westernization, Mahmud II, and the Virtue Tradition.”

18 I’m forever grateful to Tanık Tüten for sharing with me the fascinating story of his ancestors. Although the initial draft for this introduction was quite different, when I’ve started engaging with the family story I became captivated by them and changed the story I needed to tell despite the lack of relevant archival research. Hence, I’ve tried to find traces in the secondary literature, which would have remained incomplete or false if I didn’t have the chance to learn some of the details directly from our editor himself. This essay wouldn’t have been possible without him acting as my main source as well as my inspiration.

19 Stephanov, “Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) and the First Shift in Modern Ruler Visibility in the Ottoman Empire.”

20 Tezcan, “The Second Empire.”

21 Kostopoulou, “Armed Negotiations: The Institutionalization of the Late Ottoman Locality.”

22 Angin, “Representation of Power.”

23 Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*.

24 Dönmez and Özdemir, “Osmanlı Modernleşmesinde Ahmed Fethi Paşa’nın Rolü”; Sunay, “Life style and standard of a Dynasty’s Son-in-Law.

25 Ortayli, “The Greek and Ottoman Administration during the Tanzimat Period”; Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*.

26 Mavrogordatos, “Orthodoxy and Nationalism in the Greek Case.”

27 Kafesçioğlu “Reckoning with an Imperial Legacy: Ottomans and Byzantine Constantinople”; Adams, “Constantinople as an Imperial Capital: Mehmed II and the Making of the Ottoman Empire.”

28 Akarlı, “The Tangled Ends of an Empire.”

29 Ersoy, “Architecture and the Search for Ottoman Origins in the Tanzimat Period; Wharton, “The Balyan Family and the Linguistic Culture of a Parisian Education.”

30 Deringil, “Late Ottoman Empire and Post-Colonial Debate”; Aytekin, “Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire.”

31 Eldem, *Pride and Privilege. A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations* and “Ottoman and Turkish Orientalism.”

32 Scott-Childress, *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism*.

33 Bouquet, “The Sultan’s Sons-in-Law.”

34 Permana et al, “Political Struggle for the Renewal of the Ottoman Empire.”

35 Erdoğan, “The Administrative and Judicial Status of the First Ottoman Parliament”

36 Mithat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha*, 256.

37 Guidi, “Ottoman-Italian Imperial Continuities in Rhodes.”

38 Yıldırım, “The 1923 Population Exchange.”

39 Zeleza, “Knowledge, Globalization, and Hegemony.”

40 Calhoun, *Nations matter*; Hall, *National collective identity*.

41 Cooley & Nexon, *Exit from hegemony*.

42 Manning, “Gestures of the Impossible: U.S. Immigration, Hospitality and Approaching Democracy.”

43 Chin & Finkelman, “Birthright Citizenship, Slave Trade Legislation, and the Origins of Federal Immigration Regulation.”

44 Eroukhanoff, Clara. “A Gendered Analysis of US Decline.”

45 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*.

46 Horden, “Mediterranean Excuses: Historical Writing on the Mediterranean since Braudel”; Cazzato, “Fractured Mediterranean and Imperial Difference”; Clines, “Edward W. Said, Renaissance Orientalism, and Imaginative Geographies of a Classical Mediterranean.”

47 Proudfoot, “The Ottoman Mediterranean and Its Transformation, ca. 1800–1920”; Gratien, “The Ottoman Quagmire”; Greene, “The Mediterranean Sea.”

48 Leavitt, “Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions”; Skrbiš, “Transnational Families”; Askins, “Emotional Citizenry.”



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