

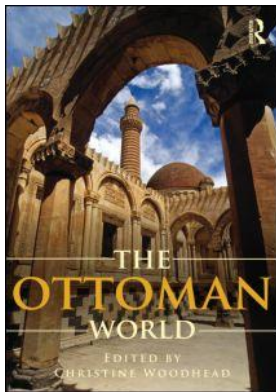
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The Ottoman World

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The Old Regime and the Ottoman Middle East

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PART V
LATER OTTOMANS



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE OLD REGIME AND THE OTTOMAN MIDDLE EAST



Ariel Salzmann

Few centuries in Ottoman history hold greater import for understanding the emergence of the modern Middle East than the long eighteenth century. A political chronology might trace the outset of this ‘century’ to the reforms of the Köprülü vezirs (1656–91), launched after decades of provincial uprisings and economic turbulence. The ‘century’ would draw to a close with the regimes of Selim III (1789–1807) and Mahmud II (1808–38). Their policies of military and fiscal consolidation triggered civil wars and revolts from Greece to Kurdistan. However, often forgotten is the fact that, between these temporal brackets, the empire’s many Middle Eastern and North African provinces remained largely intact. Despite violations and incursions along the Azeri and Iraqi frontiers, the Ottoman–Safavid treaty of Kasr-i Şirin of 1639 remained the primary point of reference until 1829, when the treaty of Erzurum with tsarist Russia delimited the Caucasus. In North Africa, the regencies of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli continued to respect the terms of the sultan’s suzerainty, albeit with considerable latitude in the conduct of their diplomacy and trade. Only in Yemen did the 1631 Zaydi rejection of sultanic rule prove decisive.

Despite this remarkable geopolitical stability, accounts of this period have commonly viewed the crises that punctuated the end of the century, and particularly the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798–9, as evidence of deeper political problems and proof of deteriorating social and economic conditions. This consensus is not limited to the scholarship of the late colonial and Cold War eras,¹ but has coloured Arab and Turkish nationalist narratives as well. Lauding the defiance of frontier magnates such as Da’ud Paşa (r. 1817–31) of Baghdad and Mehmed/Muhammad Ali Paşa (r. 1800–49) of Cairo has served to repudiate a ‘Turkish’ past and identify progenitors of a nation yet unformed.² The defenders of Istanbul-centred rule during the late Ottoman period decried provincial power and heralded the *étatisme* of the Turkish Republic.³ In all these versions, conflict between the central state and local authorities was the bloody but inevitable overture to modernity.

Given the densely ideological and peculiar instrumentality of these interpretations, it is one of the great accomplishments of the last three decades of historical inquiry to have restored many of the complexities and nuances to this critical period. The older notion of economic decline has been reassessed.⁴ Entire populations and social

classes have emerged from the shadows. We learn that women, craftsmen, soldiers and peasants exercised great initiative and defied the injustice of statesmen and local authorities.⁵ Rigid institutions never shackled social change or agency.⁶ The judge's court became the locus for new interpretations of the Hanafi code, *kanun* and custom to suit the needs of the times.⁷ Although this body of research furnishes the essential ingredients for a new narrative of the long eighteenth century, greater attention to methodology and a willingness to deploy multi-disciplinary expertise to investigate critical historical questions are needed to reconstruct larger trends.⁸ By default, any essay on state–society relations over the long eighteenth century, including this one, furnishes only a glimpse of the complex facets which defined the old regime in the Ottoman Middle East.

ESTABLISHING THE CO-ORDINATES OF POLITICAL CHANGE

Preconceptions as tenacious as the association between ‘imperial decline’ and state–society relations in the later Ottoman empire endure in social science theory and popular histories, despite the best endeavours of historians. Historians still hesitate to confront the social scientific paradigms directly, including the presumption of political decentralization. Although we now know that flows of currency, cadres and commerce continued to link the empire's most distant parts,⁹ reconstruction of the circulatory patterns of persons and resources lags behind.¹⁰ Moreover, euphemisms such as ‘localization’ or ‘semi-autonomous’¹¹ which have crept into the historical jargon neither displace the determinism of sociological theses nor question the normative judgements about Middle Eastern political culture upon which they are based. That is, while individual studies approach universalizing claims piecemeal or highlight discrete developments within a single region, reluctance to reinterpret the empire as an interdependent whole allows larger conceptual assumptions to go unchallenged.

The assumption that there is a unique, western path or, in a minor revision, multiple non-intersecting paths to modern government remains a central principle of modern political theory.¹² Although too often a victim of the *idée fixe* of such social science theory, Ottoman history has occasionally been approached in a more systematic and critical fashion. Whatever co-ordinates of political change we might reconstruct owe much to such collective efforts, not infrequently under the sway of generations of the *Annales* school, with its emphasis on the integrative role of economy and geography and its rigorous analyses of social structure, exchange and material culture. Sociologists have responded to this approach, emphasizing contextual and relational approaches to capitalist development and state formation within the interactive geopolitical arenas of the Mediterranean.¹³

Over the last three decades, the world-systems *école* has been particularly influential, providing a forum and research agenda dedicated to understanding social and economic change within the Ottoman lands, albeit with a bias towards Ottoman–European relations and capitalist transformation of agriculture.¹⁴ Important studies on port cities, manufacturing, trade and epidemics have brought into relief other key aspects of Ottoman demography, commerce and urban structures over the eighteenth century.¹⁵ From the perspective of institutional change, investigations into relations

between the Ottoman empire and France, its principal European trading partner and ally, have yielded valuable insights into the role of both diplomacy and exchange. Ethem Eldem's mapping of trans-Mediterranean financial transactions during the eighteenth century has unveiled a hitherto unappreciated dimension of state formation, by examining forms of credit and bullion flows as well as the widespread usage of foreign instruments to transfer funds within the empire itself.¹⁶

A re-examination of exchange relations has helped to isolate the cultural impact of overseas merchant colonies on local populations. European trade went hand in hand with missionary activity. Over the long eighteenth century, missionaries were successful in convincing local churchmen and laity to join the Catholic Uniates, a process which not only drew these churches closer to Rome but also widened the political gap between Christian subjects and their Muslim and Jewish neighbours.¹⁷ The changing sectarian balance was not a phenomenon restricted to the Mediterranean coastline. Other Catholic orders, such as the Carmelites, traversed Anatolia in their march towards Iran and established satellite missions in Ottoman Diyarbakir and Basra. French patronage of the Catholic orders only deepened the political divisions between new Catholics and the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Gregorian churches. In order to stem conversion, Orthodox ecclesiastics enlisted the repressive arm of the state to punish lapsed parishioners with galley slavery and banishment. Yet European influence was only one factor in the changing relationships between Muslim city-dwellers and tribal confederations, or between the politically dominant Sunnis and the Greek, Armenian, Coptic, Assyrian, Shi'i, Jewish, Roma and Yezidi communities of Syria, Egypt, Kurdistan, Iraq and Arabia.¹⁸

The cultural and institutional dimensions of interactions between the Ottoman state and foreign powers should not obscure the impact of Mediterranean-wide conditions. The 'ecological turn' in world-systems analysis inaugurated by Faruk Tabak's *The Waning of the Mediterranean* (2008) helps resituate the Ottoman experience within a global time frame. In Tabak's account the long eighteenth century is the culmination of the 'little ice age' which began in the late medieval period. This climate conjuncture explains hitherto puzzling imperial policy decisions and institutional changes. Shifts in capital away from the Mediterranean towards the breadbaskets of Northern Europe suggest that the empire's determined westward offensive owed as much to mundane motivations as to religious ideology. By factoring the adaptations of Mediterranean peasants, pastoralists, guildsmen and merchants into administrative responses, important reinterpretations of the underlying premises of state-society relations must follow.

First, the forces that drove peasants from coastal areas into the hills from the *celali* period onwards included the increasingly precarious nature of low-land cultivation. Indeed, peasant responses, as Suraiya Faroqhi has often observed, remained pragmatic.¹⁹ Rather than rebelling against their rulers, they resorted to what James C. Scott has termed the 'weapons of the weak': farmers avoided rapacious bandits and government officials by flight. Yet to consider the retreat of the peasantry from valleys and coastlines as merely a survival strategy would be mistaken. Farmers cultivated hillside crops from the Atlantic for subsistence and for their commercial value; they relocated to villages near expanding cities because these afforded proximate markets as well as better protection from marauding bandits or pastoralists. Families engaged in by-employment in spinning and cloth-weaving or raised pack animals for growing caravan traffic.²⁰

Second, ‘classical’ Ottoman property conventions and prebendal assignments did not simply decay from corruption or bureaucratic disuse. Rather, administrative practices gradually conformed to social and economic realities. Given the transformation of the agrarian economy, from cereal cultivation to mixed crops and animal husbandry, and from population displacement, the state could no longer rely on older land surveys and revenue estimates, much less apportion taxes from these to support a landed cavalry. That is, the *sipahi* did not disappear, but all too often his *timar* or tax assignment did, under the brunt of decreasing yields, peasant flight and increasing fiscal demands. Greater material inducements and less regulation rendered the tax farmer – often members of locally garrisoned Janissaries or the urban gentry – better equipped to pursue the peasant and the pastoralist. When this, too, proved unworkable, the state conceded self-taxing rights to villagers, who paid their obligations in lump sums.

Third, the vagaries of climate, and with it crop failure, limited the ability of local magnates in Aegean and Mediterranean coastal areas to accumulate capital from plantation-like commercial farms and large-scale share-cropping estates (*çiftlik*).²¹ Instead, these power-brokers coupled agricultural pursuits with large-scale moneylending.²² By advancing peasants money to pay taxes and purchase necessities such as seed, they profited from the insecurity of agricultural yields and mounting peasant debt. During the bitterly cold seasons of the mid-eighteenth century, which destroyed grain crops and brought starvation and pandemic, cities turned against the countryside. The townsmen of Mosul, Aleppo and Diyarbekir turned away starving villagers at the city gates. In Damascus the *ayan*-paşa As’ad al-‘Azam robbed what remained of peasant stocks to feed townsmen.²³ Plague, which visited with horrifying regularity, reconnoitred Alexandria and Cairo seven years before Napoleon’s invasion of 1798.²⁴

Clearly, too, these macro-environmental factors inform the longer-term shifts in power between city and countryside and between central state officials and local agents. The growth of an urban middle class during the century lent Middle Eastern cities a social and political coherence despite these natural disasters, the irregularity of governors’ visits and the changing fiscal demands of the central state.²⁵ New consumer patterns and long-distance trade links between the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean spurred commercial manufacturing. Northern Europeans consumed raw, finished and semi-finished commodities, including dye-stuffs, cotton yarn and mohair textiles produced in cities from Alexandria to Aintab and Ankara. Wealthy urban residents carved out garden plots in the suburbs of Anatolian cities like Bursa and Tokat. The eighteenth century witnessed an unprecedented conversion of agricultural lands into mortmain estates (*evkaf*) in northern Syria.

Depending on the front, environmental conditions constrained the empire’s military logistics. The northward shift of the agrarian economy provided new opportunities for those who furnished foodstuffs, pack animals and fodder to armies composed of large infantry divisions.²⁶ It is little wonder that the great magnates arose in those regions closest to the theatres of warfare: the *ayan* and *derebey* of Rumeli and Black Sea Anatolia parlayed access to resources into new political status.²⁷ By contrast, military recruitment in more sparsely populated regions of West Asia and the Tigris–Euphrates required other defensive strategies and occasionally the arming of urban populations, both Muslim and non-Muslim, against bandit attacks.²⁸ Intermittent warfare with the Safavids’ successor dynasties, the Afshars, Zands and Qajars, curtailed Istanbul’s plans to settle tribal confederates, as these populations supplied cavalry for campaigns. In

the Syrian desert, in Upper Egypt and along the Kurdish frontiers, Istanbul relied on a semi-permanent mobilization of pastoral populations to guard trans-imperial communications, commerce, and the pilgrimage caravans to the Hijaz.

In compensating for settlement patterns and restricted transportation in West Asia, the empire applied tried and tested policies of 'provisionism'.²⁹ With meeting military priorities and satisfying the consumption patterns of the Ottoman elite as its primary goals, provisionism entailed channelling inter-regional and long-distance trade through administrative cities in order to maintain supply and to facilitate collection of tariffs.³⁰ Although local manufacturers and farmers were pressed to provide for state needs during wartime, the mutual dependency between these producers and the state allowed room for negotiation. Rural folk were commissioned to staff post-stations and protect caravansarays in exchange for tax immunities. Urban guilds which produced sailcloth for war at or near cost were rewarded with guarantees of an adequate supply of raw materials. Local courts supported the prerogatives of guild masters and were vigilant in preventing unincorporated and unskilled producers, including women, from undermining guild monopolies over production.³¹ Provisionism reinforced the social and political clout of the guilds in Ottoman cities well into the next century.³²

THE OTTOMAN OLD REGIME: A NEXUS OF INTERESTS

Establishing the Mediterranean-wide economic and institutional co-ordinates of the long eighteenth century does not absolve historians from the daunting task of identifying the specificity of the Middle East's political organization. Scholars of the post-classical period have not shied away from the question of the changing nature of the Ottoman state.³³ Yet, in some senses, the very attempt to pin down the 'state' in an imperial context of this scale may be an exercise in futility. Any taxonomy or classification of this early modern polity – whether 'dynastic' state, enlightened despotism or absolutism – to the extent that it pretends to define a structure that responded to diverse populations and conditions spanning continents and centuries belies historical realities. The Ottoman old regime straddled old and new.³⁴ On the one hand, *mutatis mutandis*, the Ottoman 'state' retained in the eyes of beholders, near and far, discernible characteristics and links with the past which were more than simply force of habit, discourse or the beneficence of its imperial elite.³⁵ On the other hand, although the provincial 'state' endured in classic institutions such as the *timar* system until the nineteenth-century *tanzimat*, actual administrative practice was turned over to relatively recent, contractual agents who quantitatively, and hence qualitatively, transformed the very nature of the relationship between state and society.

By referring to the complex of state-like qualities of Ottoman rule as an old regime, we might recognize an entity which was far more extensive than the central state.³⁶ The old regime was the sum both of the official, chartered cadres of the bureaucracy, military units and state judiciary and of all those who contributed to its continued functioning. However, its centralized apparatus, which after 1703 was again firmly rooted in Istanbul's city quarters, remained limited in its reach and scope, despite the plurality of force it enjoyed and its continued symbolic legitimacy.

Under the old regime, rule referred to the intersection of hierarchies of cadres, organizations of command and techniques of influence. Beyond the site of the dynasty and court, the imperial city served as the base for military personnel, bureaucrats,

grandees, palaces and parade grounds. It housed great concentrations of wealth and productive capacity. Ruling was also an information industry, a clearing house of techniques and terms, a keeper of accounts and records. Rights and privileges were inscribed in the Istanbul archives; hierarchies were articulated in public rituals and honours, honorary robes and pageants. Importantly, power was redistributed in the form of such writs, as well as in a central bank of credit and specie, which linked central state elites to provincial partners.³⁷

In the eyes of its provincial subjects, the state, as it existed under the old regime, was no mere abstraction. Peasants and townsmen witnessed the passage of imperial armies *en route* to distant regions, the retinues of incoming governors, inspectors, tax agents from the fisc and others entrusted with gathering men, beasts and materiel in kind for the front. Treasury officials collected the compensatory military service taxes from non-serving members of the old cavalry hierarchy. In Anatolia and Syria, *sancakbeyis* and *sipahis* were fixtures of village life or joined the nobility of the cities. The *kadi's* court remained for Muslim, Christian and Jew alike a ubiquitous and abiding expression of imperial sovereignty. In some frontier areas, such as the Kurdish *hükümet*s of the south-eastern provinces, Istanbul's establishment of an Hanafi judgeship (in a Shafi'i culture) preceded the formal division into districts (*sancaks*). Although the university of al-Azhar produced eminently qualified judges for the Egyptian courts, the Ottoman legal school's hegemony stretched into other areas of Maliki-dominated North Africa.

Over the seventeenth and, particularly, the eighteenth century, the *kadi* and his tribunal picked up the slack between older and newer forms of rule. The judge acquired an increasing competency and range of responsibilities. Handbooks helped prepare him to deal with the finer points of statute and novel forms of contracting and taxation. The court recorded the apportioning of cash taxes, including the *avarız*, among towns and villages and established the liabilities, based on personal wealth, of non-Muslims under the post-1691 poll tax (*cizye*). Customs tariffs, market prices and commercial taxation remained under the *kadi's* supervision. He forwarded complaints against officials and adjudicated blame in civil suits, while also functioning as notary of records who registered incoming orders, receipts for payments and contracts. The judge was intimately involved in family matters: in divorce, inheritance and other property arrangements, including *evkaf*.³⁸ In the absence of consuls of the European nation in question, he ruled on treaties.

The *kadi* thus represented imperial rule in the provinces, or, as Najwa al-Qattan put it with respect to the Damascus tribunal, the 'territorialization of the law'.³⁹ But his court also expressed the limits of rule. While the *kadi's* competence in areas of jurisprudence increased, his powers to enforce the law did not grow commensurately. Imposition of severe physical punishments, including the death penalty, remained the task of secular (*'urfi*) powers such as the governor. To summon suspects to court or to carry out sentences, the *kadi* depended on military officers, including Janissaries, to arrest, detain or banish offenders. If Istanbul developed specialized units which functioned as servants of the court and as an urban police,⁴⁰ in the provinces and the countryside the division of labour between law and enforcement remained ill-defined.

Further, efforts to rein in the Janissaries in Istanbul, and to maintain an equilibrium between those who judged and those who enforced the law in the capital, had unforeseen consequences. The number of Janissaries in provincial cities more than

tripled during the first half of the eighteenth century as Istanbul shed unwanted military units and officers. In Egypt, an Anatolian immigrant and janissary commander, Muhammad Kazdağlı, following the Cairene manner, established a powerful retinue which dominated the other six janissary corps and eliminated local rivals. Yet not all janissary contingents came out on top. Once the new governor of central Iraq, Hasan Paşa (r. 1702–24), and his son and successor, Ahmed Paşa (r. 1724–47), established their own household of military retainers, Baghdad's garrison became obsolete. The corps resettled in Mosul.⁴¹

New to these societies, military elites employed a variety of devices, both symbolic and social, with which they legitimized otherwise dubious mandates to exercise power. While some developed hybrid identities grounded in religion or noble provenance, other officers clung to their Turkic ethnicity as a badge of privilege, as did the Algerian corps, who replenished their ranks strictly from Anatolian recruits.⁴² Conversely, the Janissaries in Tunis chose assimilation, freely admitting into their ranks the offspring of marriages between officers and local women. In Damascus and Aleppo, the janissary corps replicated themselves along parallel organizational lines, all the while distinguishing the 'local' (*yerliyye*) order from outsiders. Yet both corps claimed commanding officers in Istanbul.⁴³ In fact, almost all provincial units, including the Kazdağlı *beys* of Cairo, maintained close ties with an Istanbul commander, the palace or other imperial elites.⁴⁴

In addition to respecting the military hierarchy, officers posted in Kurdistan and Syria served as on-site agents for important central state households, the vezirial *kapı*.⁴⁵ Here it is important to recognize the similarities and differences between the provincial and Istanbul-based 'imperial' *kapı*. In both instances, the *kapı* fostered interdependence among leaders and subordinates. It served as a means of capital accumulation, allowing the elite who faced expropriation after death to perpetuate their wealth and connections beyond a single generation. Despite such parallels in operation and organizational form, the imperial household – led by a high-ranking administrative, military or naval official – possessed a superior capacity because of its position within the sovereign order. Anchored by a permanent staff in Istanbul, the imperial *kapı* welded associates and clients into cross-cutting power networks which radiated across 'traditional' chartered estates and into multiple provinces through a variety of agents.

The imperial *kapı* remained a pillar of old regime rule. The need to integrate and support its many members entrained other institutional developments. Among these characteristically old regime innovations was the lifelong revenue contract (*malikane mukataa*). As in the French tax-farming system, life leases represented a pre-modern form of 'privatization' of state resources which spurred a notable expansion of the empire's financial infrastructure. An initial allocation of approximately 1 million *kuruş* of revenue receipts auctioned as life leases in the first decade of the eighteenth century represented only a fraction of the imperial budget. Nevertheless, the state put some of the most valuable high-yielding revenues in the Balkans and central Anatolia at the disposition of the central state elite.⁴⁶ Imperial households relied upon Christian and Jewish bankers and bookkeepers, who maintained accounts, furnished down payments for new contracts at the treasury and covered operating expenses, and upon local stewards and sub-contractors, who collected rents and transferred funds in letters of credit, cash or goods to Istanbul. Subdividing shares of large contracts both cemented ties between households and paid salaries.

The auction, administration and remittances of the largest life-lease contracts on state revenues represent a veritable microcosm of the old regime's system of rule. The elite household and retainers of the pashas were only some of the individuals who benefited from these contracts. The annual remittances on some of the empire's most valuable tax farms were earmarked as salaries and stipends for other state cadres. For example, the yearly income of the life leases on the taxes on tobacco, snuff and coffee which entered the ports of the eastern Mediterranean was distributed to the imams and religious dignitaries who staffed the largest mosques of Edirne, Istanbul and Bursa. Over the century, both this state-supported *ulema* and their female dependants – widows and unmarried daughters – enjoyed daily stipends from contracted state assets which also maintained vezirial *kapi*.⁴⁷

VERNACULAR GOVERNMENT

Istanbul's central apparatus, its cadres and institutions, continued to rule the Middle Eastern provinces throughout the long eighteenth century. Yet rule was only one dimension of old regime power. Actual governance, which I have termed 'vernacular government', entailed the ordinary, quotidian exercise of political power in the cities or in the countryside.⁴⁸ Those who controlled day-to-day affairs were often not members of official organizations but took their place in these provincial apparatuses via the incremental changes that occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and compromises between state and society. Istanbul regulated relations within and between vernacular governments in the Middle East and North Africa directly and indirectly, by dispatching governors and other officials from Istanbul or by cultivating competition among rival provincial elites and their households.⁴⁹

Mapping vernacular governments across the geopolitical structure of the empire allows us to consider some basic sociological differences between them. At the frontiers of empire where security concerns were paramount, such as in Iraq and Egypt, military cadres took charge and often used their geopolitical roles as a means of wresting greater independence from the centre. In the Middle Eastern interior, a distinct political zone shaped by large commercial and manufacturing cities and towns stretching from Palestine and northern Syria to eastern Anatolia, governments tended to be less militarized. The local sources of wealth, historic ties with the centre, the presence of major religious institutions, and the importance of the guilds and mercantile classes, as well as the existence of earlier forms of administration, often yielded a more inclusive form of administration. Here the regulating mechanism was found neither in the janissary barracks nor in the governor's compound. It depended on a relatively new fiscal institution, an intendency or '*ferme générale*', composed of a block of tax farms and including some of the most important cash revenue sources, urban and rural, located in and around the province's administrative capital.

Despite analogous form and function, official documents refer to these intendancies with different terms. Depending on fiscal precedents, the '*ferme générale*' might be called a *defterlarlık*, a *voyvodalık* or a *muhassıllık*.⁵⁰ The largest share of the intendency resembled the classic *mudaraba* partnership.⁵¹ It paired one or more central state investors with an active partner, the intendant who was paid by salary or with a share of the profits. Diyarbekir's *voyvodalık* was cobbled together from a variety of revenues which had provided the salaries for now defunct offices, as well as rural revenues from crown

lands. In 1697 the primary investor in the *voyvodalık* was none other than the imperial treasurer, while the *voyvoda*, Isma'il Beg, was a scion of the Kurdish Milan (Millu) tribe.⁵² Over the century, the intendancy's jurisdiction grew at the expense of the governor's authority. Diyarbekir's intendant collected important cash taxes and revenues from tax farms, oversaw the customs station and raised troops; he disbursed salaries and subsidies to *ulema* and sheykh's of the most important Sufi confraternities.

Although such intendantcies were also found in Ottoman Europe, the distinguishing features of those institutions in the Middle East lie in the multiplicity of relatively small life leases of minimal value of which they were composed. Many of these small life leases were the result of a piecemeal conversion of crown lands, tribal dues and other agrarian revenues into short-term tax farms. Rather than being reassembled into large blocks of taxes, these small assets were auctioned off to the gentry separately. Encouraging local participation in tax collection and administration was the stated intent of the life-lease system: the 1695 edict authorizing empire-wide application of the life lease made no mention of highly placed elites. Rather, it referred to the positive role that the *ayan* (i.e., Muslim gentry) of eastern Anatolia, Syria, Kurdistan and Iraq would play in restoring agricultural lands to prosperity. Long term, quasi-proprietary self-interest, with guarantees for inheritance, argued the edict, would end the vicious cycle of ruined fields and peasant flight provoked by the avarice of short-term tax farmers.⁵³

If the central state's promotion of life-leasing derived primarily from financial expediency, the provincial gentry did not ignore the opportunity to become imperial partners. The life lease ennobled a venal enterprise: it accorded the gentry privileges and responsibilities on a par with those enjoyed by a *sipahi* with respect to a *timar*. Unlike the three- to six-year term of previous contracts, the gentry could be assured of state support for their continued claims as they divided shares among family members and passed down contracted assets on villages and fields to their children. Entrusted with state resources, the gentry became an integral part of vernacular government. As a political and sociological process, contracting blurred the lines between the state elite, or *askeri* estate, and the provincial gentry, or *beledi* (as they were described in the Arab provinces) estate.⁵⁴

However comparable the forms of provincial governance, particularly those within the Middle Eastern interior, understanding the make-up of vernacular government requires examination of a single intendancy. Aleppo, one of the major entrepôts between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and a city of some 100,000 by the end of the century, presents one of the better studied cases. Gentry families assumed an increasing role in local government. The auctions served as a redistributive hub which legitimated their participation. The records of the first provincial auction, dating from 1696 and 1698, reveal that, initially, central state elites and provincially based *askeri* and bureaucrats dominated the bidding. Nonetheless, many other investors appear to have been drawn from local society and included members of Aleppo's homegrown *ulema*. Six years later, the number of provincial contractors increased: in 1703, the 153 contractors without formal affiliation to the central state outnumbered *askeri* contractors three to one.⁵⁵

Over the century, participation in tax collection and rural administration by the urban gentry and *ulema* continued to grow along with the capital they invested in Aleppo's life leases.⁵⁶ Despite unpredictable conditions, the agrarian economy held

great attraction for these families. Arable land in adjacent districts was converted into *evkaf* at a rapid rate in the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ Villages supplied staple goods for the urban population and in areas like Antakya produced such cash crops as cotton and tobacco. Although scholars have identified a handful of prominent gentry clans who, alongside the local Janissaries, dominated the agricultural sector through large numbers of life leases,⁵⁸ because of the variable scale and value of *malikane*-ized revenues on villages and fields, the auctions of small rural tax farms continued to furnish an entry point into the rural economy for individuals of more modest background.

Another ‘snapshot’ of Aleppo’s governing classes is furnished by a register of 1787, which records the names and rural assets of life-lease shareholders. One notable change in their make-up is the commanding presence of religious dignitaries (*seyyid*, *şeyh* and *efendi*). The value of their investments had reached 47,248 *kuruş*, or 24 per cent of the sureties in the local system. Now they rivalled the collective rural assets of the local gendarmerie. Janissary officers, who repeatedly used their control over the city’s food supply to their political advantage,⁵⁹ held 58,653 *kuruş* in investments. The gentry, provincial elites who belonged neither to the ranks of local *ulema* nor to any central state cadre, held the smallest portion of rural investments: 30,909 *kuruş* (17.5 per cent). Overall, tax farms tended to be held in partnerships. Of 283 life leases on agrarian revenue sources, only ninety-three were held by a single contractor.⁶⁰ As table 27.1 suggests, the number of partners in a given lease was inversely proportional to the value of the investment.

Table 27.1 also illustrates the different scale of economic (and political) involvement of rural contractors in the intendency of Aleppo. A breakdown of lease-holders based on the value of their investments is deliberately intended to counterbalance a bias in analysis which has favoured preconceived cultural cleavages, specifically the tendency to divide Middle Eastern elites along ‘religious’/‘non-religious’ or central state/provincial lines.⁶¹ Instead, by viewing this population in terms of their investments, we can better appreciate how the life-lease system both maintained and subverted hierarchies of power and privilege. On the one hand, the lease-holders of the upper tier enjoyed undeniable economic dominance: individually, their average investment was more than three times that of the middle tier and twenty-eight times greater than that of shareholders of the lowest tier. The lowest tier of investors held only 7 per cent of the wealth invested in rural life leases in Aleppo. On the other hand, in terms of sheer numbers, the lower two tiers represented the vast majority of life-lease holders. Fully half of all lease-holders in the province were found in the lowest tier, holding contracts valued below 200 *kuruş*.

When cultural and political profiles are added to this economic breakdown, we can better appreciate the profound occupational heterogeneity of Aleppo’s governing

Table 27.1 Shares in rural-agrarian *malikane* tax farms in Aleppo, 1787

<i>Value in kuruş</i>	<i>Number of shareholders</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>Value of sureties</i>	<i>% of total</i>
High: 1000+	38	17%	75,640	55%
Middle: 201–999	88	22%	51,582	38%
Low: 7–200	136	61%	9,587.5	7%

Source: BOA, Maliyeden Müdevver Defterleri, no. 9565, pp. 136–48.

classes. Although the central state elite (largely resident in Istanbul) retained control over the most valuable provincial resources, the lower tiers were marked by relative parity of investments among culturally and politically distinguished groups, all of whom were resident in the city itself or in neighbouring towns or villages. The middle tier was the most diverse: the *ulema* and *eşraf* (with an average of 472.5 *kuruş* per person) held about 41 per cent of all investments, while the gentry (an average of 359.4 *kuruş* per person) and Janissaries (averaging 533.2 *kuruş* per person) roughly split the remaining two-thirds (i.e., 59 per cent) of investments.

These fiscal records have, admittedly, a limited utility in understanding the political sociology of the Middle Eastern provinces. They cannot fully illuminate the complexity of ties binding the gentry, the *ulema*, the Janissaries and central state personnel. The increasing prominence of Aleppo's *ulema* among rural contractors may be due to their relations with the city's *müftü*, the *nakibüleşraf* or the *kadis*.⁶² Although the web of social and political relations among these actors remains only partially documented, the intendancy's records do strongly suggest that the life-lease system contributed to a political process which transformed the relationship between Istanbul and provincial society. It enhanced the status and influence of Muslim contractors of more modest social backgrounds in and beyond Aleppo while giving them a real stake in the Ottoman order. This 'petty gentry',⁶³ no less than the *sipahi*, governors, Janissaries, judges and great provincial families, governed the empire.

CONCLUSION: ON THE EVE OF THE *TANZIMAT*

This essay has offered a geographically nuanced perspective on state–society relations in the eighteenth-century Middle East. The circulation of goods, credit and specie globally, as well as within the empire, set some of the basic parameters of rule. One of the most profound influences on the political structure of an agrarian empire appears to have been the 'little ice age', a long climatic cycle characterized by lower temperatures and changing rainfall patterns which lasted into the nineteenth century. It restricted possibilities for revenue collection and dictated the zones of conflict with neighbouring states. Central state officials responded to new material conditions with policies of provisionism to assure supply-lines and privatization schemes to generate revenues. New actors in the provinces were drawn into local government as part-time soldiers, suppliers of war materiel, and long-term fiscal contractors.

The viability of the old regime depended on the elaboration of a partnership between those who ruled and those who governed. As a nexus of interests, Istanbul ruled through traditional means, including control over the administration of courts and the determination of claims. The imperial centre preserved its control over information, privilege, credit and specie. For much of the century, astute vezirs and admirals could play off regional elites against one another, as exemplified by the willingness of the pasha-*bey* of Tunis, Hammuda ibn 'Ali ibn Husain (r. 1777–1814), to mobilize against the Karamanlis of Tripoli in 1795 and to contribute forces to suppress the 1810 revolt in Crete.⁶⁴ No matter how autonomous they appeared to foreign observers, the great magnates of the Black Sea remained beholden to their Istanbul bankers.⁶⁵ Yet in other parts of the Middle East, such as Aleppo, the intendancy exemplified a vernacular government, in which power was more widely dispersed and contested.

If we seek to understand why the partnership between those who ruled and those who governed began to dissolve, we must look beyond personalities to the upswing of the Mediterranean agrarian economy in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In Egypt, Ali Bey's programme of repressing the Bedouin and expanding cash crop production, perhaps more than his alliance with foreign powers, signalled the end of an era. These agricultural initiatives laid the foundations of Mehmed Ali Paşa's later state-building.⁶⁶ Commercial olive oil production subsidized the regencies of Tunis and Tripoli when returns from the traditional enterprise of piracy and slaving waned.⁶⁷ Whether or not they capitalized on new opportunities, provincial elites in Syria and Anatolia had little reason to relinquish hard-won positions in local governance to central state officials and officers.⁶⁸

More conciliatory policies from Istanbul at the end of the long eighteenth century might have permitted the empire's transition from a *de facto* power-sharing agreement into a constitutional federalism.⁶⁹ Faced with escalating costs for men and materiel to confront Russia, the architects of the new regime chose to concentrate power through the creation of new military units and the retraction of the life leases. In doing so, Istanbul severed the networks which undergirded households, bound cadres to one another, and tied the central state elites to their provincial partners. Despite his striking an agreement with leading magnates in 1808, Mahmud II's systematic campaigns against provincial governments sent an unambiguous message of the new regime's objectives: cities revolted against Istanbul-appointed governors and peasants rose up against new taxes.⁷⁰ Elimination of the janissary corps in 1826 left critical areas of administration understaffed and may well have facilitated Ibrahim Paşa's invasion of Palestine and Syria in 1831.

Without reconstructing a century of self-governance by magnates, townsmen, villagers, tribesmen and the gentry, neither social scientists nor historians will be able to grasp the multiple political contingencies of the Middle East's past. For now, it suffices to reiterate that the successes of the *tanzimat* period which gave rise to constitutionalism and citizenship were not the work of an Istanbul elite alone.⁷¹ Of course, Ottoman statesmen were loath to admit the role of their subjects in the empire's modernization. In 1827, when the governor-general Mehmet Emin Rauf Paşa arrived in Aleppo in search of conscripts for the sultan's new army, he disdained the self-possessed air of the urbane young men of the city's middle classes. Their unwillingness to submit to military command was owing, he opined, to the fact that they, like most of the local population, 'still relish[ed] the taste of their previous freedom'.⁷² Indeed, it was precisely this 'freedom' which prepared a generation to take up the administrative and legislative responsibilities of the first *tanzimat* advisory councils two decades later.⁷³

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Gibb and Bowen 1957; Lewis 1968.
- 2 Abou-el-Haj 1982; Fahmy 1997.
- 3 Alkan 2000: 89.
- 4 Owen 1978; Genç 2000.
- 5 Faroqhi 1992; Zilfi 1997.
- 6 Genç 1975; Gran 1979; Baer 1980.
- 7 Gerber 1994.

- 8 Zarinebaf *et al.* 2005. New interpretations of mass movements, such as Wahhabism (Haj 2008), permit more sustained and comparative research on the ideologies and religious networks linking Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.
- 9 Pamuk 2000: 189.
- 10 On the collections of legal, bureaucratic and pious foundation primary sources available, see Hoexter 1998b.
- 11 Compare Açikel 2006 with Hathaway and Barbir 2008: 8.
- 12 Compare Sachsenmaier and Eisenstadt 2002 with İslamoğlu and Perdue 2008.
- 13 Wallerstein 1974; Tilly 1990.
- 14 Cf. İslamoğlu-Inan 1987; Keyder and Tabak 1991.
- 15 Raymond 1973–4; Panzac 1992; Eldem *et al.* 2005: 1–16.
- 16 Eldem 1999.
- 17 Masters 2001.
- 18 Abdullah 2001; Winter 2010.
- 19 Faroqhi 1992.
- 20 Khoury 2006.
- 21 Veinstein 1975; Keyder and Tabak 1991.
- 22 Faroqhi 1991.
- 23 Grehan 2007: 69.
- 24 Panzac 1985.
- 25 Hourani 1969; Meriwether 1999.
- 26 Sakaoğlu [1984] 1998.
- 27 Nagata [1982] 1999; Aksan 2007.
- 28 Murphey 1999: 190.
- 29 Genç 2000.
- 30 Erim 1991.
- 31 Akarlı 2004; Zarinebaf 1998.
- 32 Chalcraft 2004: 15–16.
- 33 E.g., Piterberg 2003; Abou-el-Haj [1991] 2005; Berktaş and Faroqhi 1992.
- 34 Salzmänn 2004.
- 35 Bonner *et al.* 2003.
- 36 Salzmänn 2004: 13–24.
- 37 *Ibid.*: ch. 2.
- 38 Ergene 2008.
- 39 Al-Qattan 2007: 202.
- 40 Zarinebaf 2010; Salzmänn 2000.
- 41 Mantran 1989: 353.
- 42 Shuval 2000c and his essay, chapter 18, in this volume.
- 43 Rafeq 1966.
- 44 Hathaway 1992.
- 45 Abou-el-Haj 1984: 9–13.
- 46 Genç 2000.
- 47 Salzmänn 2004: ch. 2.
- 48 *Ibid.*: ch. 3.
- 49 İnalçık 1977.
- 50 Beşirli 2005.
- 51 Çızakça 1997.
- 52 BOA, Bab-i Defteri Başmuhasebe Kalemî Defterleri, no. 1814.
- 53 Genç 1975: 245, 251.
- 54 Grehan 2007: 65; Abdel Nour 1982: 392; Meriwether 1999: 30–68.
- 55 BOA, Maliyeden Müdevver Defterleri [MMD] nos. 1637 and 730.
- 56 BOA, MMD nos. 4748 (1695–8), 1637 (1703), 9565 (1787). Aleppo's *malikane* tax farm sureties rose from 145,877 *kuruş* in 1703 to 196,683 *kuruş* in 1787 in comparison with Damascus, which rose from 39,296 *kuruş* in 1703 to 89,093 *kuruş* in 1787.

- 57 Thieck 1985.
58 Muhammad Çelebi Tahazade, a religious dignitary and former *nakibüleşraf*, alone possessed 18.5 per cent of total *malikane* contracts. The great gentry (the Tahazade, Şahbandarzade and Hünkarlızade families) held more than 50 per cent of the total *malikane* contracts on agriculture (ibid.: 129).
59 Meriwether 1987.
60 The absence of other names does not preclude subcontractors. In fact, many life leases were subcontracted to others.
61 Cf. Hourani 1969: 41–68.
62 Meriwether 1999: 30–68.
63 Meriwether 1987.
64 Moalla 2004.
65 Şahin 2005.
66 Cuno 1992.
67 Panzac 2005: 327.
68 Akarlı 1988.
69 Salzmann 2004: 187–91.
70 Rood 2004: 62, 74.
71 Abu-Manneh 1994.
72 Erdem 2002: 200.
73 Thompson 1993.