

# REVIEWS



***The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformations in the Early Modern World.*** By **Baki Tezcan.** New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. ix+284. \$103.00, hardcover.

In this post-revisionist account of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Ottoman Empire, Baki Tezcan deals with major transformations of Ottoman politics and society. He argues that the development of a monetized market economy led to the establishment of a politically inclusive “Second Empire” (1580–1826), in which a unified legal system limited the power of the dynasty. He characterizes these transformations as proto-democratization and modernization.

The seventeenth century has been understudied for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, until recent decades historians perceived this period as one of decline. Even though the decline paradigm was undermined, Tezcan argues that no new paradigm has replaced it. Accordingly he aims to introduce a new grand explanation of the period’s changes. His book is also relevant for broader debates in European, economic and global history on the “price revolution” or the “crisis of the seventeenth century.” There is a consensus on the increased prices yet the reasons and the consequences of it are disputed greatly.

Earlier scholarship pointed towards the flow of bullion coming from the New World as the cause of the price inflation. Later, the velocity of the circulation of money and demographic and ecological changes were added as explanations. Jack Goldstone provided a new framework by comparing Stuart England, the Ottoman Empire and Ming China. In all of these countries crisis led to increased rivalry among elites and rural misery, which led to popular rebellions and the reconstruction of states. The reconstruction was colored by ideological change Goldstone argues: while in England the appearance of radical, heterodox movements and ideologies created an apocalyptic, future-oriented reconstruction of the state, in the Chinese and Ottoman states it was cyclical, i.e. oriented toward restoration of a perceived golden-age.

Tezcan’s book follows Goldstone’s comparative approach to explaining the seventeenth century crisis. However, he put forwards an explanation that challenges not only the decline paradigm but also Goldstone’s cultural essentialism. Tezcan argues that the inter-elite struggles and creation of new elites paved the way to a politically more inclusive environment, which he calls “the political nation”. In this new system, new configurations of the elites, army and society increasingly limited the powers of the dynasty. He asserts that there was a rise

of Islamic law, yet this was not a sign of decline or religious fanaticism, but a result of the expansion of the political nation under market-oriented society. Tezcan argues that we should look at the Ottoman seventeenth century as a period of proto-democratization as we look at the English Glorious Revolution that occurred around the same time.

“The Second Ottoman Empire” also deals with the question of the state, its characteristics and its relationship with the society. Unlike the Marxist understanding of the state, which was rigid and static, Tezcan describes evolving state actors and institutions. Tezcan can be considered closer to the Idealist perspective, which views the state as a body driven by intentions and rationality. The dynasty and its allies, which Tezcan calls “absolutists”, tried to control the state and society whereas the “constitutionalists” tried to limit the powers of the state and include greater portions of the society. He traces the demise of the timar as a natural change due to monetization and not a sign of decline, in line with Metin Kunt. He underlines the rise of vezir/pasha households like Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, but also includes the rise of jurists’ households as new power holders in the society. He views the janissaries not only as a part of the army but as socio-economic actors. The expansion of the janissaries with the infiltration of “ecnebi” into the “askeri” class shows the army’s capacity for transformation and proves the proto-democratic qualities of the era. The janissaries defined and defended their economic and political interests vis-à-vis the state and they were not childish rebels as the older literature defines them. Their dynamic agency allowed them to embark on a new episode of Ottoman history, namely that of regicide and a revision of the succession rules. Earlier scholarship treated another section of the army—the sekban—as units created for wars with the Habsburgs, but which ended up exacerbating the celali rebellions. According to Tezcan, the monetization of the economy led the local power holders to consolidate their power through creating sekban groups. Thus he portrays a changing state in which the sultan no longer was at the top of a pyramid structure but at the center of a spider web structure with many power lines. In this analysis the killing of sultan Osman II, who was considered as a rebel, becomes an example of the struggle for power between many old and new power holders, which was set in motion by the economic transformations of the empire.

One of the problems of the book is Tezcan’s assertion that the political and social transformations are due to the transition from a “feudal” to a monetized market economy. He does not explain what he means by the development of a market economy and monetization or why he uses the heavily charged term “feudal”. Nor does he explore the reasons for this monetization and the development of a market economy. One can argue that he belongs to the category of scholars who are more interested in the consequences than the causes of the seventeenth century crisis. However he does not engage with the crisis of seventeenth century literature and the concept of “the price revolution” is completely

absent. Neglecting the causes of the social and political changes he describes undermines his quest for a new grand narrative.

The second problem of the book is that it uncritically accepts the existence of a single path for modernization; that of England. Scholarship has moved away from a Eurocentric approach, which questioned why the Ottoman Empire did not share European experiences such as the industrial revolution and democracy, focusing instead on what actually happened in the Ottoman Empire. In this respect Tezcan's unilinear vision of modernization becomes very questionable. On the other hand, in his conclusion Tezcan interestingly argues that the institutions of the second empire led to its decline, by delaying the emergence of modern capitalism and industry. Yet the book goes to great lengths to prove that the transformations were not signs of decline but actually helped the empire to be more inclusive. He argues that the rise of the rule of law bolstered the legitimacy and longevity of the state. Therefore it becomes clear that trying to prove that the Ottoman Empire's historical processes were actually similar to England's is an apologist stance that does not contribute to our understanding of the history of the Ottoman Empire.

Nonetheless Tezcan makes a great number of revisions to many historiographical debates. In particular, as the title of the book suggests, he counters the standard periodization of Ottoman history with its terms such as "classical age," which suggests a golden age followed by inevitable decline. The economic transformations pave the way for a socio-political one in which the patrimonial empire (1300–1580) gets replaced with the "Second Empire" (1580–1826), which is politically more inclusive and socially less stratified.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature of a neglected period of Ottoman history. His close pursuit of the life of Osman II, the institutional changes both within and without the palace, and the rise and integration of the new elites is admirable. It is too early to say if this periodization will catch on in the literature, yet it definitely will make scholars and students think carefully about periodization. It is not clear if the decline paradigm will be replaced with a new one, or if a grand narrative is even necessary. Nonetheless, Baki Tezcan has clearly paved the way for fruitful and interesting debates.

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