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The Modern Middle East

Final Paper: German-Ottoman Intellectual Ties in Recent Historiography

While the Middle Eastern front of World War I has historically been considered an understudied field, new research, especially through the past two decades, has begun to shed a considerable amount of light on the period. Using newly available sources, academics with increasingly broad linguistic abilities have begun to reassess traditional historical consensus regarding the Middle East ranging from topics as diverse as thirteenth-century intellectual developments to post-1948 Zionist historical constructions. The Ottoman role in World War I and the political development of the CUP and the Hamidian regime during the post-1908 period have likewise been subject to considerable reassessment in recent times. With respect to this period, the influence of German intellectual movements on late Hamidian (and later CUP) political ideology has been reconsidered by academics. Both the exact nature of German intellectual interference in Turkey during this period and, to a lesser extent, the outcomes of that influence have both garnered increased interest. Three recent studies have demonstrated that it was manifestly important: it had a marked influence on how the Hamidian *jihad* was spread to distant regions of the Islamic world, it played a critical role in the development of Turkish political ideology during the early Republican era, and it may have even had intellectual reverberations in Germany.

The most discussed result of German intellectual influence through this period should be mentioned before summarizing these three separate tracts. That is, of course, the Hamidian and CUP turn towards a policy of *jihad* during the Great War. While less attention has been devoted to internal currents such as Turanism, academics have reached a consensus within the last decade regarding the fundamental nature of the *jihad* policy with respect to German influence. Much of the seminal work seems to have been done by Mustafa Aksakal, especially including *Holy War Made in Germany? Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad*, which demonstrates convincingly and efficiently that the idea of declaring a *jihad* for political purposes can be traced to the individuals who held power in the Ottoman government by the start of World War I.¹ That piece was cited by Eugene Rogan in *The Fall of the Ottomans* and Faiz Ahmad in *Afghanistan Rising*, while other works of Aksakal's (such as his unpublished dissertation *Defending the Nation: The German Ottoman Alliance of 1914 and the Ottoman Decision for War* and *Holy War and Holy Peace in Modern Ottoman History*) have been cited by Sukru Hanioglu in *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Sean McMeekin in *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, and Mostafa Minawi in *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa*.² From these works, which represent both monographs and surveys, a relatively clear scholarly consensus has arrived at the conclusion that the traditional representation of CUP policy during World War I as '*jihad* made in Germany' is simplistic, and that while the CUP was initially reluctant to actually enter World War I and had to be pushed into it by the Germans, the triumvirate was not reluctant to declare a *jihad*. Indeed, Rogan emphasizes the fact that Enver Pasha had served with Libyan guerrillas in the 1911 war against Italy and had, from that experience, gotten the impression that most Arabs would respond to a call to *jihad* (even if he and

1 Mustafa Aksakal, "Holy War Made in Germany"? Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad," *War in History* 18, no. 2 (April 2011): 184-199.

2 Rogan, Eugene. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. Basic Books, 2015, 325; Ahmad, Faiz. *Afghanistan Rising*. Harvard University Press, 2017, 339; Hanioglu, M. Sukru. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2010, 229; McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power, 1898-1918*. Allen Lane, 2010, 382; Minawi, Mostafa. *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz*. Stanford University Press, 2016, 148.

Talaat personally had Turanist leanings, a fact which Rogan does not mention – indeed, neither that ideology nor Ziya Gokalp are mentioned once in *The Fall of the Ottomans*).³

While a scholarly consensus regarding the origins of the *jihad* has emerged, historians have only just now begun to trace its implications, including how it was spread on the ground. Recent monographs have treated the outcomes of German influence in late Hamidian ideology only sparingly, and often in the context of broader discussions. This may be partially ascribed to the recent streak in emphasizing the Ottoman origins of the *jihad* which has arguably nurtured a perspective that tends to leave German influence by the wayside. Recently, Sean McMeekin has actually noted, in *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, that “what is missing from the story [of the legacy of the first World War in the Middle East] is the colossal and almost totally forgotten role of imperial Germany in the drama”.⁴ A prime example of this legacy, one which McMeekin cites later in the same paragraph, was the immediate outcomes of the Germany-supported Ottoman *jihad* in the wider Islamic world. While the political theory of this doctrine had its origins in the Ottoman empire, recent historians have arguably neglected or at least intentionally de-emphasized the very real role that Germany played in developing and spreading the doctrine. Faiz Ahmad, who explicitly and rigorously refutes the notion of a German *jihad* in *Afghanistan Rising*, charts, in the same work, the relatively famous Niedermeyer-Hentig expedition (or, as Ahmad prefers, the Kazim-Niedermeyer expedition) to the emir of Afghanistan in 1915.⁵ Ahmad argues that the long-term effects of that expedition have been neglected by historians who have instead focused on the failure of the expedition to achieve its stated goal of bringing Afghanistan into the war, citing in particular the convening of ‘Ottoman military officers, Afghan volunteers, and Deobandi clerics’ in Kabul, if only for a brief time, that ultimately enabled “a group of staunchly pro-Turkish and Muslim modernist Afghans to seize power in Kabul and steer Afghanistan toward a new horizon”.⁶ While the historiography on this particular expedition is relatively dense, the long-term effects of the German presence in Kabul are scarcely discussed by Ahmad. It seems unlikely that some influence did not materialize from direct Afghan contact with the Germans, especially considering that the emir of that country – who came into power ultimately as a result of ‘a group of staunchly pro-Turkish and Muslim modernist Afghans’ taking power – became increasingly infatuated with the west as his reign progressed and even became the first Afghan head-of-state to visit Germany (and a host of other states) during his well-documented European tour of 1927/28.⁷ In this way, some gaps could be filled with respect to the German influence and the spreading of the *jihad*, although this scholarship may already exist, and it may only be an impression communicated by recent works that it does not.

One facet of the German intellectual penetration of the late Hamidian regime which has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention has been its later effects on early Republican political culture and ideology. This particular development has been touched on by Sukru Hanioglu in *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, particularly with respect to German *Vulgarmaterialismus*, or what Hanioglu describes as the ‘vulgarized nineteenth-century German derivative’ of French materialism.⁸ Hanioglu emphasizes the influence of Ludwig Buchner and Ernst Haeckel, which may have “provided a

3 Rogan, Eugene. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. Basic Books, 2015, 56.

4 McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power, 1898-1918*. Allen Lane, 2010, 341.

5 Ahmad, Faiz. *Afghanistan Rising*. Harvard University Press, 2017, 141-142.

6 Ibid., 26-27, 160.

7 Ibid., 250.

8 Hanioglu, M. Sukru. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2010, 210.

blueprint for the radical reforms later implemented by Mustafa Kemal”.⁹ He further notes that the “winds of materialism continued to blow long after the Young Turk Revolution and into Republican times”, ultimately having “a profound influence on the *weltanschauung* of the founders of the Republic and on the ideology they fashioned to build modern Turkey”.¹⁰ Of course, this conclusion naturally ascribes a great deal of intellectual importance to what was ultimately an amalgamation of French and German ideas, however Hanioglu also demonstrates that it had practical effects namely in the economic sphere. While economic liberalism actually enjoyed a period of patronage through the CUP’s early direction especially from 1908 to 1913 under the auspices of Mehmed Cavit, Hanioglu notes that it ultimately ‘contradicted the *weltanschauung* of the CUP’ and so was abandoned in favor of a statist approach (indeed, Mehmed Cavit probably only retained the favor of the triumvirate during the Great War due to his personal friendship with Talaat Pasha and he was executed by Mustafa Kemal not long after the end of the ‘Revolutionary’ wars). In this way, Hanioglu has clearly demonstrated both the intellectual and the practical relevance of German ideologies in shaping early Republican thought.

Lastly, the effects of the German Empire’s specific political adventures into Ottoman affairs during this period may have even had reverberations in Germany itself, primarily relating to Germany’s vision of the east and the *Drang nach Osten*. This effect is explored briefly by Sean McMeekin in *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*. McMeekin essentially approaches the German view of the east in World War I and World War II as two manifestations of the same outlook, the *Drang nach Osten*, and identifies a ‘Wilhelmine *Drang nach Osten*’. McMeekin goes so far in his connection between the two phenomenon as to note that “Germany’s pan-Islamic *Drang nach Osten* would repeat itself twenty years later, the first time as farce, the second as tragedy”.¹¹ However, unlike the second *Drang nach Osten*, which was highly militaristic, the ‘Wilhelmine *Drang nach Osten*’ was, according to McMeekin, intellectual to the extent that it was conceived of as a civilizing push to the east rather than a demographic push to the east.¹² McMeekin does not confront the full implications of this connection directly. He notes that the German public generally and the Kaiser specifically did not blame the ‘pan-Islamic *Drang nach Osten*’ for their defeat in the war, turning their attention instead to the Jews as early as December 1919, however McMeekin does not comment decisively on whether or not the German experience with the Ottomans may be used to partially explain why public attention turned on the Jews in spite of the fact that Zionism had much of its early roots in Germany.¹³ McMeekin goes on to discuss the influence of Amin al-Husseini on Hitler, Eichmann, and Himmler, as well as his project to form several mostly Muslim SS divisions in Bosnia, although he does not explicitly cite this policy as a derivative of the ‘Wilhelmine *Drang nach Osten*’.¹⁴ Whether or not this connection has been directly evidenced, McMeekin’s notes certainly seem to point in that direction.

With all of these forward-thinking intellectual projects (looking forward to Republican Turkey and Nazi Germany), it seems natural to expect an assessment of German-Ottoman/Turkish intellectual exchange extending back in time as well. However, as noted, these projects have not constituted significant studies: in the cases of Faiz, Hanioglu, and McMeekin, they formed only asides in what were ultimately separate narratives. In this vain, relatively little work has been devoted to examining

9 Ibid., 185.

10 Ibid., 138.

11 McMeekin, Sean. *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power, 1898-1918*. Allen Lane, 2010, 339.

12 Ibid., 2.

13 Ibid., 358.

14 Ibid., 361-363.

the German-Ottoman intellectual connection back in time, and this lacuna in the intellectual narrative, as it were, is apparent when approaching the literature.

It may be pertinent to introduce here what I have found to be the deepest evidence of a substantial German-Ottoman intellectual connection. Ahmad Resmi Efendi, who led the Ottoman delegation at the 1774 Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, was the Ottoman ambassador to Vienna in 1757 and to the Berlin of Frederick the Great in 1763, and he wrote detailed impressions of both trips, especially of the latter one to Prussia which was even read in the west during his own time.¹⁵ That work was hugely influential in the Ottoman administration: the extent of his praise for the Prussians has been seen as evidence by some historians that Resmi began the centuries-long trend of Ottoman reformists' looking to Germany for a modern military apparatus.¹⁶

In light of evidence such as this which seems to suggest a deeper German-Ottoman connection, it is possible to identify moments when authors have reached back in providing for its origins that seem to imply a deeper continuity in that connection and which also evidence the disjointed nature of how various historians conceive of the connection. For example, Eugene Rogan in *The Fall of the Ottomans* states that the "German-Ottoman friendship ran relatively deep" but only discusses this in the political context relating to how "in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II made a state visit to the Ottoman Empire".¹⁷ Hanioglu makes it clear in *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* that "the penetration of German *Vulgarmaterialismus* ... had already begun during the Tanzimat, and gained considerable traction in the 1870s and 1880s" but does not delve deeper into that penetration and largely restricts his discussion of *Vulgarmaterialismus* to the later Hamidian, CUP, and Republican periods.¹⁸ In the context of Ottoman colonialism, Mostafa Minawi in *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa* notes how Ottoman colonial practices became increasingly shaped by western standards and political expectations after they agreed to the 1885 General Berlin Act. Particularly relevant here are Ottoman legal attempts to render the German '*hinterland*' (critical in defining colonial claims during that period) into a politically advantageous term that would have allowed for the Ottomans to extend their legal claims to the Libyan '*hinterland*' as far as the Lake Chad basin.¹⁹ Specifically, the Ottomans attempted to render the term into their own political context ("*Devlet-i Aliye'nin Trablusgarb hinterlandi*")²⁰ in a manner that would provide for their legal aspirations. While perhaps not as evincing of an intellectual connection as the penetration of *Vulgarmaterialismus* into Ottoman intellectual life that had already well begun by 1885, Ottoman attempts to grapple with the German terminology of the General Act may be viewed within the broader trend of the German-Ottoman connection if that connection itself is evidenced through the nineteenth century.

In this way, academics have yet to trace that connection from the first (?) contacts provided for by Resmi Efendi which seem to have laid the groundwork for what was not a sporadic series of intellectual engagements, as one might read from these monographs, but was rather a long-term and identifiable albeit flexible and perhaps even inconsistent pattern of intellectual engagement. Seeing as

15 Heywood, Colin. "Kucuk Kaynardja" In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 5. Leiden: Brill (1986), 312-313.

16 Uyar, Mesut, and Edward J. Erickson. *A Military History of the Ottomans: from Osman to Atatürk*. Santa Barbara (California): ABC-CLIO, 2009, 116.

17 Rogan, Eugene. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. Basic Books, 2015, 34.

18 Hanioglu, M. Sukru. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2010, 138, 145, 185.

19 Minawi, Mostafa. *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz*. Stanford University Press, 2016, 9, 44-46.

20 Ibid., 49.

academics have already identified several critical results of this engagement, it may be premature to continue investigating these outcomes before identifying their ultimate source and whether or not a sharper line may be drawn from earlier engagements such as Resmi Efendi's.

Afterthought: Sonderweg

Attacks on German *sonderweg* have primarily been directed by Marxist critics. They assess the validity of this historiography, in part, by judging whether or not the unification of Germany was a bourgeoisie revolution.²¹ The classic Marxist critique comes from David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, who at once argue that the notion of any state taking a normative historical path is incongruous and (as the implicit Marxist assumption) that all states have experienced or will experience bourgeoisie revolutions.²² In this way, they at once attack the idea that a 'normal' path exists and the idea that it does not exist (specifically, "German unification was more bourgeois than the English and French revolutions").²³ This critique has been extended to the notion of Ottoman *sonderweg*, where the Marxists argue that the Young Turk Revolution was a bourgeoisie revolution, and so its path was not unique.²⁴ The Marxist critique seems to be very much *of* Marxism to the extent that it is very difficult to reconcile with what some might derisively term as 'classical logic' and what others might term as 'logic'. Critiques or even engagements with Ottoman *sonderweg* outside of the Marxist field have been hard to come by. Hanioglu argues that "one should [not] approach late Ottoman history in a simple-minded historicist manner, seeing that the path of Ottoman history as predetermined [*sic*"]".²⁵ Although Hanioglu does not engage directly with the question of whether or not the Ottoman historical trajectory was 'unique', this excerpt demonstrates that he would clearly stand in opposition to the premise that it may be circumscribed or wedded to the German trajectory, and it could thus be read as a subtle affirmation of the uniqueness of the Ottoman experience. While I do not agree with the Marxist historiography, I would not refute the premise of Blackbourn and Eley that no state takes a normative path, and while I would seriously challenge the notion of a German-Ottoman *sonderweg*, I do suspect that, as with many such historical theories, it may be grounded in an accurate perception, namely that there was a unique, albeit not in the *sonderweg* mold, German-Ottoman intellectual path that has yet to be explored in full.

21 Ucar, Onder. "The Historiography of [the] Young Turk Revolution and the Problem of Bourgeois Revolutions." Ph.D. thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010, 33, 135-136.

22 Ibid., 33.

23 Ibid., 36.

24 Ibid., 98-99.

25 Hanioglu, M. Sukru. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2010, 210.

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