

1. Introduction

In the last decades there has been an impressive upsurge in Ottoman studies on an international scale. Ottoman studies – particularly in the United States and in Turkey – have been a success story. Besides these positive aspects certain lacunae and desiderata in Ottoman studies remain. Example given, Ottoman studies on the Arab, Anatolian and Balkan provinces may have to a great extent overcome the limits of the respective national historiographies, but they still cling to a kind of academic parochialism: Egyptians or historians with an Egyptian background are working exclusively on Egypt, Syrians or historians with a Syrian background are working exclusively on Syria, and so on and so forth.

American academe in particular rewards in-depth research but concentration on neatly delimited fields of study can lead to an unhealthy segmentation of research. Historians of the Ottoman empire will have to develop a greater capability to communicate not only with historians of other provinces and regions of the Ottoman empire, but also with historians in other fields, most prominently perhaps with those of the Hapsburg and Russian empire. In order to fulfill this aim Ottomanists will have to broaden their scope *inside* the field of Ottoman studies. We know of the necessity to bring together the perspective of the centre and the periphery. One other possible way will be to venture on comparative work looking for similarities and differences in various provinces, features, institutions. When Ottoman history shall become part of European world history (and that is obviously a major wish of many historians of the Ottoman empire) we will have to know much more about the similarities and differences between empires such as the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman one. Whereas historians of the Russian and Austrian empire can communicate with each other, historians of the Ottoman Empire are too often ignorant about European history and are not aware of the research being done, especially on the Austrian and Russian empires.

For the sake of variation I may point here – besides my personal preference for doctrines, ideologies and nationalisms – to some 'material' factors influencing Ottoman studies. As already said, we have seen in the last decades a large output of studies on the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire, but on the other hand Ottoman studies on the Balkans (with some prominent exceptions as those of Ottoman studies in Hungary) have stagnated. A major reason for this setback is the dissolution of academic institutions in all post-communist states and the economic and intellectual breakup of many states in the wake of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Furthermore and very simply, recruitment mechanisms play a role in the *relative* decline of studies on the Balkans. If a student of Egyptian or Syrian history from Egypt respectively Syria wants to write a dissertation at an English-speaking university about his country in Ottoman times he will – besides his maternal language Arabic – need only English (and possibly Ottoman). On the contrary, students of the European provinces of the Ottoman empire are confronted with a overwhelming multitude of languages.

Furthermore, Ottoman historians in Europe and North America are mostly organized in units which emphasize the study of the Middle East and Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Persian). From almost 3000 persons registered with the Middle East Studies Association of North America around the year 2000 only 3% expressed interest in the Balkans. Very simply, Balkan history is mostly taught in the framework of Slavic studies or East-European history. These two largely segmented units, Ottoman studies and East-European studies, lack common ground and contribute thus to the neglect of a field that in principle is so important to Ottoman studies – the Balkans.

2. The Ottoman empire in the Arab world and the Balkans – a largely invisible heritage

Not only due to the complete rejection of the Ottoman heritage, but also because of massive demographic change and a complete transformation of state elites it is hard to detect traces of an 'imperial' Ottoman heritage in the Balkans. Maria Todorova has been pointing at three characteristics of Balkan societies (with the exception of Rumania) being owed to Ottoman presence: (1) the lack of a feudal society, (2) the existence of a more or less free peasantry, (3) the subordination of the town under the central state. Todorova adds the thesis (still of heretic nature in Southeast Europe) that the Ottoman empire have not left their remains on the Balkans but that the Balkans are largely an Ottoman heritage.¹

But besides these more or less evident traces what has remained? What about the reflections of Ottoman rule in the respective historiographies? In the successor states of the Ottoman empire in the Balkans and the Arab world and their respective 'national' historiographies Ottoman rule was understood as a period of stagnation. Particularly strong was the rejection of the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans where the newly founded successor states made their legitimacy rest on their moral and cultural superiority in comparison to the Ottoman *ancien regime*. The condemnation of the 'Ottoman yoke' served to justify the existence of the national state. Negative projections concerning Ottoman rule have a strong hold on societies and state ideologies until today.

Arab historiography does not condemn Ottoman rule on the whole, but tends to be critical. Prominent historians such as Abdalkarim Rafeq have explained the quietism of the Arab population with the destructive influence Ottoman rule had by corroding established norms of justice and equity in Arab society. When Albert Hourani dismissed in 1970 the term *inhiyat* ('decline') and spoke about the deep (be it negative or positive) imprint the Ottomans had left he caused much of commotion. A substantial part of Arab historians working on the former Ottoman lands have in the following decades turned to a more self-critical attitude and an open-minded research agenda. In the political and public sphere, however, recurrence to the Ottoman period is made again and again with the inherent aim of rejection or manipulation. It is still seductive to exculpate oneself for any kind of present malaise by referring to an alleged Ottoman debt of misadministration and misrule.

But how can one as a historian make the Ottoman heritage truly visible? Up to present most of the hints to the Ottoman heritage in the Arab world have been of a largely impressionistic kind and of most general nature. Authors, most of them being historians of the Ottoman empire, repeat common good on late Ottoman history and then indulge themselves into speculations about Ottoman left-overs. Roderic Davison, for example, sees specific traits in the political routine of Arab states that are going back to the Ottoman period: The insistence to be acknowledged as a legitimate state, the quest for foreign loans, the manipulation of religious emotions and the tactics of retreating only reluctantly and tenaciously when being exposed to foreign pressure – such as the Sublime Porte did in the 19th century. Davison, proofing his academic honesty, remarks in the end that such characteristics are common to many states in the world.²

One may indeed speculate that the politics of bargaining and compensation in Arab politics is owed to Ottoman state tradition. And why should not the radically secular (and radically brutal) elites of Iraq and Syria in the 20th century be heirs to the Young Turks since a great part of the military elite in states such as Iraq and Syria were educated at Ottoman military institutions? But how can we prove it? How can we find clear indications?

1 Maria Todorova, *The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans*, in: L.C. Brown, *Imperial Legacy*, pp. 46-77, here p. 60

2 Roderic Davison, *Ottoman Diplomacy and Its Legacy*, in: L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Imperial Legacy. The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, New York 1996, pp. 174-199, here p. 191.

3. How can we possibly grasp the Ottoman heritage?

When we want to ask ourselves how to grasp the Ottoman heritage we have also to ask what we want to grasp. It is comparatively easy to identify Ottoman heritage in architecture, popular culture and the vocabulary of the respective languages. One may look into the material remains of the Ottomans such as architecture and will then be able to produce impressive work – as has been shown, for example, by Machiel Kid.

We will have to keep in mind that, when we are investigating into the remnants of Ottoman history, culture or institutions in the successor states of the Ottoman empire, we are facing the collective memory, the manipulations and the evocations of a largely imagined Ottoman past. To elucidate my argument let me give two examples from two completely disparate contexts:

(a) Already at the beginning of the 1980s Andreas Tietze counted 65 books and 350 articles being written on Turkish loanwords in Balkan languages. Despite this overwhelming mass of Turkish loanwords in the Balkan languages we lack until today any attempt to understand the stylistic and emotional use of Turkish loanwords. We know that there are roughly 500 Turkish loanwords in Ivo Andrić's famous novel *The Bridge of the Drina* (*Na Drini ćuprija*),³ but we are completely ignorant concerning their literary function or their emotional status.

(b) Israel is, as Jordan and Libanon, said to have inherited some features of the Ottoman millet system or to put it more generally: to have a confessionalist heritage. But indeed in Israel an ethno-national definition of nationality rules who is an Israeli with full republican and social citizenship rights. The rejection of non-Jewish Israelis from full citizenship rights is concealed and blurred by the feigned acknowledgement of and reference to an alleged pre-statehood Ottoman practice of confessionalism.

What we will learn when analyzing Southeast European and Arab historiographies of the Ottoman rule is not the 'material' history of the Ottoman presence but most different and contesting representations of an imagined Ottoman past.

3 Alf Grannes: *Turco-Bulgarica. Articles in English and French concerning Turkish influence on Bulgarian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1996, p. 87