

From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks

Author(s): Asli Çirakman

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***Aslı Çırakman***

FROM TYRANNY TO DESPOTISM:  
THE ENLIGHTENMENT'S UNENLIGHTENED  
IMAGE OF THE TURKS

This study aims to examine the way in which European writers of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries represented Ottoman government. The Ottoman Empire had a special place in European experience and thought. The Ottomans were geographically close to Western Europe, yet they were quite apart in culture and religion, a combination that triggered interest in Turkish affairs.<sup>1</sup> Particularly important were political affairs. The Ottoman government inspired a variety of opinions among European travelers and thinkers. During the 18th century, the Ottomans lost their image as formidable and eventually ceased to provoke curiosity in the European public. They were no longer dreaded as the “public calamity”; nor were they greatly respected as the “most modern government” on earth. Rather, they were regarded as a dull and backward sort of people. From the 16th century to the 19th century, the European observers employed two similar, yet different, concepts to characterize the government of the Ottoman Empire. The concept of tyranny was widely used during the 16th and 17th centuries, whereas the concept of despotism was used to depict the regime of the Ottomans in the 18th century. The transition from the term “tyranny” to that of “despotism” in the 18th century indicates a radical change in the European images of the Ottoman Empire. Although both of these terms designate corrupt and perverse regimes in Western political thought, a distinction was made between tyranny and despotism, and it mattered crucially which term was applied to the Ottoman state. European observers of the empire gave special meanings to these key concepts over time. “Tyranny” allowed for both positive and negative features, whereas “despotism” had no redeeming features. Early modern Europeans emphasized both admirable and frightening aspects of Ottoman greatness. On the other hand, the concept of despotism was redefined as inherently Oriental in the 18th century and employed to depict the corruption and backwardness of the Ottoman government. This transformation was profoundly reflected in the beliefs of Europeans about the East. That is, 18th century thought on Ottoman politics contains a Eurocentric analysis of Oriental despotism that is absent from the discussions of Ottoman tyranny in earlier centuries.

Aslı Çırakman is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, Bilkent 06533, Ankara, Turkey; e-mail: casli@bilkent.edu.tr.

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## IMAGES OF TURKISH TYRANNY

Although European thought affords readily recognizable images of the Turks, a coherent or constant image of them emerges only in the 18th century.<sup>2</sup> Sixteenth- and 17th-century observers tend to perceive the Ottoman system of government as tyrannical. The concept of tyranny, however, was not applied consistently throughout this period. Observers recognized that the Ottoman regime was similar in some respects to the European governments of the 17th century. Francis Osborne, a well-known English political writer, argued that the tyranny of the Ottomans was not much different from other European monarchies and sometimes was less cruel.<sup>3</sup> In the eyes of European observers, the difference between the Ottoman government and that of the Europeans often lay in the observable unity, success, and might of the former when compared with the latter.

The form of regime, tyrannical or otherwise, was felt to be unconnected to the unity, success, and might of a government. Non-tyrannical European empires, it was held, could have similar strengths if they did not occupy themselves with religious and political controversies. This was the point of the Duc de Rohan, a Huguenot statesman and general. His ideas on the interests of princes and on the balance of power in 17th century Europe were quite influential.<sup>4</sup> The problem with European rulers, he suggested, was that they could not understand that “the Princes command the People, the Interest commands the Princes.”<sup>5</sup> His simple formula stated that “the diversitie of Religion ought not to cause any diversitie of opinion in things that concerne the common good.”<sup>6</sup> The interest of a prince lay in the preservation of the unity of his state. This was also the concern of the Ottoman sultans. For this, they were either praised as mighty emperors or stigmatized as tyrants.

“Tyranny” was a well-defined term throughout the Renaissance and Reformation periods. It was generally described as an unlawful, arbitrary, and coercive regime. Tyranny was by definition an illegitimate form of government and a corrupted form of a well-ordered and good regime such as a monarchy or a republic. Further, tyranny as a corrupt regime was also perceived as quite distinct from absolute rule. The latter was sometimes even seen as necessary to the stability of legitimate political regimes during the 16th and 17th centuries, whereas the former was regarded as unstable and temporary.

Tyrannical rule implies endless wars, sedition, assassinations, pillage and desolation of cities, cruelty, corruption, and excess.<sup>7</sup> A tyrant rules in an impious and unfaithful manner.<sup>8</sup> For Jean Bodin, a tyrant violates the laws of nature, denies his God and his faith, and makes the laws to serve his convenience. He is a usurper and builds his prosperity on the ruin of his people. He bases his rule on their fear, and he makes war on his subjects when he sees fit, surrounding himself with foreign guards.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, Machiavelli, “Brutus,” and Bodin decline to classify the Ottoman Empire as a tyrannical regime. Among other European observers of the empire, however, the concept of tyranny was used both to characterize the regime and to emphasize a particular arbitrary or cruel practice, behavior, or attitude. Those who applied this term to the Ottomans during the 16th and 17th centuries often did so inconsistently and arbitrarily. Tyranny, in the Turkish case, connoted quite different features from what it was theoretically supposed to denote. In this regard, one can

observe two paradoxes in the images of Ottoman tyranny. First, although “tyranny” is a pejorative term, in the Turkish case, strangely enough, it implied the greatness, success, and stability of the empire, regardless of the feelings (whether admiration or contempt) that these qualities might generate in the writer. Hence, European observers seem to disregard the definition of tyranny as a weak, corrupt, unstable, and temporary regime. Second, tyranny is assumed to be an illegitimate form of regime, but Europeans treated the Ottoman Empire as a legitimate government in both domestic and international relations during this period.<sup>10</sup>

Why then did the European observers identify the regime of the Ottomans as a tyranny? Despite their common adherence to the concept of tyranny, it is in their various answers to this question that the very considerable differences between 16th- and 17th-century observers of the Ottoman Empire lie. In general, 16th- and 17th-century observers of the empire understood tyranny as absolute rule based on the cruelty of the ruler. This sketchy conception seems to be their only ground of agreement.

Sixteenth- and 17th-century writers focused on specific aspects of the Ottoman regime rather than on carrying out the sort of broad theoretical analysis and comparison of political structures and belief systems that became common in the 18th century. The views of the writers in this period were shaped by their personal experience and casual observation of Turkish affairs. Observers based their comments on the nature of Turkish politics on various practices and events at court, along with victories and defeats. This kind of circumstantial observation and reasoned commentary shaped the fluctuating image of Turkish tyranny. I have found that the prevailing images of Ottoman government in this period are unsystematic and sporadic.

An analysis of the 16th- and 17th-century perceptions of the Ottoman system of government in the writings of Venetian ambassadors is instructive.<sup>11</sup> These envoys were initially motivated by empirical observation, which emphasized realistic and immediate concerns. Lucette Valensi maintains that there is a rupture in Venetian discourse after the victory at Lepanto (1571) against the Turks.<sup>12</sup> Ambassadors thereafter increasingly spoke of the decline, corruption, and tyranny of the Ottoman system. These themes were, however, repeatedly accompanied by other, more nuanced views in the writings of 16th- and 17th-century intellectuals and observers. The themes of decline and corruption became much more pronounced in the 18th century and were associated with despotism.

Early modern observers usually made the case for tyranny with reference to the absence of a noble class and to the “arbitrary” management of private property, while they greatly admired the absoluteness of the emperor and the loyalty of his subjects. Sir Paul Rycaut, an English consul at Smyrna from 1667 to 1678, quotes Francis Bacon’s observation that “a monarchy where there is no nobility at all is ever pure and absolute a Tyranny as that of the Turks.”<sup>13</sup> True, Ottomans did not allow the emergence of an aristocracy with European rights and duties toward the sovereign. Instead, there were the *timar*-holders—that is, a military class who maintained security in Ottoman lands and joined campaigns in times of war. *Timar*-holders were authorized by law to supervise the manner of possession and transfer of land. They were not supposed to use the land for their own benefit or to cultivate it.<sup>14</sup> As Halil İnalcık points out, in their control of the land and the peasants, *timar*-holders cannot

be compared to Western feudal lords. *Timar*-holders were authorized to collect the assigned tax revenue but had no specific rights to land or peasants. Further, it was one of the essential characteristics of the Ottoman *timar* system that there were no inheritance rights in land.<sup>15</sup> Although the ownership of land belonged to the state, peasants acquired actual possession and usufruct rights through sales contracts and fixed tax revenues from the Ottoman state. Peasants could not sell or transfer their estates, though they could inherit them.<sup>16</sup>

The Ottoman military class had the status of *kul* (i.e., slaves). As the elite of Ottoman society, they nevertheless enjoyed many privileges. Giovanni Botero understood this very well. For him, although all other princes in the world fell short of the Grand Signor in terms of magnificence, greatness, and might, his government was mainly in the hands of his slaves “who thinke it as great an honour so be stiled, and so to live, as they do with us, who serve in the highest places of Princes Courts.”<sup>17</sup>

The absence of nobility was not always equated with tyranny. For those who were well informed about Ottoman affairs, it pointed to one of the strengths that Europeans lacked. A system of meritocracy prevailed among the Ottomans. As the Austrian ambassador Ogier Ghislain Busbecq declared, “Turks esteem no men for their birth, but only for their own performd Accomplishments.”<sup>18</sup> Busbecq visited Turkey in the 16th century during the reign of Süleiman the Magnificent. At that time, there were converts from Christianity among the sultan’s slaves. A century later, they were gradually replaced by people from among the Turkish subjects. Some of the sultan’s slaves were educated at court and eventually became his officers as the distinguished members of the military–bureaucratic class. Busbecq described this system in the following words:

Thus in that nation, Dignities, Honours, Offices etc. are the Rewards of Virtue and Merit; as on the other side Improbability, Sloth, Idleness are among the despicable things in the whole World. And by this means they flourish, bear sway and enlarge the bounds of their empire every day more and more. But we Christians to our shame be it spoken, live at another manner of rate.<sup>19</sup>

Consul Rycout asserted that it was entirely due to the existence of tyranny that the Turks preserved the unity and greatness of their empire.<sup>20</sup> The absence of a nobility in the Ottoman case contributes to the unity of the empire and, at the same time, marks its regime as tyrannical. Another advantage of tyranny for Rycout is that it brings success and greatness to an empire. The endurance and stability of the empire is also sustained through tyranny—through the “cruelty of the sword in the most rigorous way of execution, by killing, consuming and laying desolate the countries.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Rycout believes that one might still “admire the long continuance of this great and vast empire, and attribute the stability thereof without change within its self, and the increase of dominions and constant progress of its arms, rather to some supernatural cause than to the ordinary Maximes of State or the wisdom of its Governours.”<sup>22</sup> These maxims prescribed an arbitrary and cruel government, absence of nobility, severity of justice, and blind obedience of the sultan’s subjects:

But not only is Tyranny requisite for this people, and a stiff rein to curb them, lest by an unknown liberty they grow mutinous and unruly, but likewise the large territories and remote parts of the Empire require speedy preventions without processes of law, or formal indictment:

jealousie and suspicion of mis-government being license and authority enough for the Emperour to inflict his severest punishments: all which depends on the absoluteness of the Prince; which because it is that the Turks are principally supported in their greatness, and is the prime Maxim and Foundation of their state.<sup>23</sup>

Rycaut, while defining the Turkish government as a tyranny, did not care to contemplate on what basis a tyrannical regime (which, in theory, is unprincipled and is supposed to be unstable, weak, arbitrary, and temporary) generated widely accepted rules of conduct and general laws in the Turkish case. As will be discussed later, Rycaut's analysis of Turkish politics provided inspiration and guidelines for 18th-century writers. Not only were his remarks concerning Turkish government copied; but they also attained a canonical status in the next century, when despotism was redefined as an Oriental form of regime.

The concept of tyranny was more generally used in its adjectival form to emphasize some of the detested features of Ottoman politics and society. Here, tyranny is employed as a morally charged concept. For instance, Francis de La Noue, inspired by Lutheran ideas, wrote one of the most popular propaganda pieces against the Turks. For him

[T]he Turkish kingdome [is] a terrible tyranny, whose subjects were wonderfully enthralled: their wars destitute of all good foundation: their politique government being well examined to be but a baseness: their ecclesiastical regiment to be none.<sup>24</sup>

La Noue argues for the necessity and justice of war against the Turks when he calls the Ottoman government a "tyranny."<sup>25</sup>

According to 16th- and 17th-century writers, Turkish tyranny may also indicate slavery and the oppression of Christians and may justify warfare. Travelers were astounded by the conversion and enslavement of Christians, which, though not consistently practiced, were lamentable and despicable enough. The famous traveler Nicolas de Nicolay vividly describes the tyranny over Christians in the following words:

[Christians] are also constrained to giue and deliuer their owne children into bodily seruitude & eternal perdition of their soules, a tyrannie I say again, most cruell & lamentable & which ought to bee a great consideration & compassion unto all true christian princes for to stir & prouoke them unto a good peace & christian unities & to apply their forces iointly, to deliuer the children of their christian brethren out of the miserable seruitude of these infidels.<sup>26</sup>

Here Nicolay refers to the levy of Christian youth—that is, *devşirme*—which, he says, deprives the Christian subjects of their young men while increasing the strength of the empire. Although the system of *devşirme* is condemned as a brutal and tyrannical act that disrupts and destroys Christian beliefs, it is also admired as a system of meritocracy,<sup>27</sup> because the converted Christians are educated at court according to their abilities and become the bureaucratic and military elites of the Ottoman government.<sup>28</sup> These were referred to as the "renegade Christians," and they were the slaves of the sultan. The tribute children "become Turks without realizing it, never knowing a father other than the Great Lord at whose expense they live, nor a fatherland other than the one upon which they must depend for their pay and advancement."<sup>29</sup>

Tyranny may refer to the oddity that most of the positions of power are filled with converts rather than with natural subjects. Richard Knolles, a famous 17th-century

English historian, provides a pure and unambiguous application of the term, saying that it is one of the defining characteristics of the concept of tyranny that the ruler surrounds himself with foreign guards as he makes war on his subjects.<sup>30</sup> Knolles borrows this definition from Bodin and claims that the preservation of Turkish tyranny depended on two things: disarming the common subjects, and arming and putting all things that concern government in the hands of renegade Christians<sup>31</sup>—that is, the *devşirme*. Here it is not the act of conversion but the fact that the ruling elite is recruited among converts that qualifies the Ottoman government as a tyranny. Knolles comes closer to the Greek understanding of tyranny when he depicts the way in which Turkish monarchs assume power, which is “against the law of nature, murdering of son by father, father by son, brother by brother for the safety of the crown.”<sup>32</sup> It was in fact the legal right of an Ottoman sultan to kill his brothers and uncles after mounting the throne in order to prevent antagonism and conflict over his succession.<sup>33</sup> Francis Osborne points out that Turks are not the only people who practiced such “private execution.” Venetians practiced it, and even Queen Elizabeth ordered the execution of her sister Mary, Queen of Scots. Thus, the emperor of the Turks strangles his kindred “to break the neck of all disputes apt to result from contrary claims,” which the Protestant Osborne admits is a tyranny “no different than the Catholick King, no less than that of France and those smaller ones in Italy.”<sup>34</sup>

The 17th-century traveler Henry Blount thinks that Ottoman government is violent but not as pernicious as Christians imagine. The sultan in the eyes of his people is as absolute as a tyrant and as happy as a king. The government is “a sweet monarchy” for the Turks, whereas for the Christians it is “heavy.” He hesitates to call the government a tyranny for the following reasons:

Nevertheless the Grand Signior hath not the inconvenience of the Tyrants, which is to secure themselves against their people by strangers who are chargeable & perfidious; for he without charge, is held up by Plantations of his own People, who in descent, and interesse are linket with him; neither had he the uncertaintie of a civill Prince, who much subsists on fickle popular love; for he reigns by force; and his Turkes are a number able to make it good.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly Osborne believed that the Ottoman sultan “is able to promote his own Interest and willing to make his subjects so far happy as it may suit an Absolute power.”<sup>36</sup>

Another believer in the absolutism of the monarch was Rene de Lucinge, an ambassador to France from Savoy who had served in various campaigns against the Ottomans. In a treatise on how to wage a successful war against the Turks,<sup>37</sup> he explained the greatness and the stability of the empire without using the term “tyranny,” even though his explanation could very well have fallen within its definition during this period. Lucinge believes that the absolute authority of the Ottomans depends not only on the fact that all land belongs to the prince, but also the fact that the subject’s life depends on the prince. However, he also points out that the sultan maintains the general peace and tranquillity throughout his domains via an equal distribution of justice, which in turn sustains general obedience and loyalty of his subjects.<sup>38</sup> Blount makes similar points but does not use the term “tyranny.” In an interesting way he implies that the empire owed its greatness and stability to the warlike and violent acts of its absolute rulers.<sup>39</sup>

One may again observe that the term is implied but not invoked as when it makes

one imagine unfamiliar characteristics of a regime. For instance, Jean Dumont calls Turkish rule despotic by singling out all the characteristics of tyranny:

The Turkish empire according to the primitive and fundamental constitution of the Government is absolutely and entirely despotic; that is supreme and arbitrary power is lodged in the person of the emperor whose will is the only law by which he rules. He is not curbed by any written law or custom and those whom he oppresses have not so much as a right to complain. He may take away any man's estate and either keep it or give it to another.<sup>40</sup>

Here Dumont ignores the fact that Ottoman sultans were bound to obey custom and written laws (i.e., imperial laws and decrees). According to custom and law, the state retained ownership of the conquered lands, while handing over rights of possession and usufruct under certain conditions, the most important of which was the right of "reclamation."<sup>41</sup> The military class—that is, the *timar*-holders—did not possess land personally but controlled it by active service and, when dismissed, would lose their income. Contrary to Dumont's belief, they remained eligible for another *timar*. Throughout the 17th century, tax-farming, which implied a lifetime relationship to the land, gradually replaced the system of *timar*. Tax-farmers were state officials or, sometimes, agents of state officials. They paid money in advance to the state for the privilege of taxation, and they had to recover their expenses as quickly as possible. For this reason, unlike the *timar*-holders, tax-farmers were engaged in the production process.<sup>42</sup> The position of the tax-farmer was closer to the traditional absentee-landlord class of Western Europe.<sup>43</sup> The Ottoman state permitted tax-farming because of the income it brought the treasury. In this process, not all *timar*-holders were losers; wealthier ones could turn to tax-farming. This kind of complicated land regime led many European visitors and thinkers to believe that the management of property in the Ottoman Empire was arbitrary, but even in the terms of early modern European discourse, it is unclear that Dumont's description was accurate or warranted.

The multiple meanings of tyranny as applied to the Ottoman government might be understood within the context of debates that were going on in Europe at that time. In the 16th century, a tyrant was defined as an absolute and arbitrary ruler who disregarded private ownership of property; whose rule was unlawful, impious, and unjust; and who employed persons of low or unknown birth rather than nobles for higher offices.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, tyranny was considered to be a matter of degree. For Bodin, a ruler "may conduct himself as a despot to some of his subjects, a king to others and a tyrant to the rest. For instance he may tyrannize the rich and the nobility, but be a beneficent protector of the poor."<sup>45</sup>

In the 17th century, tyranny was not defined solely as unlawful or arbitrary rule. It could refer to absolute rule, as well. The controversy about the government of the Turks arose from this ambiguous nature of the concept. In the case of the Ottomans, what is named tyranny may be legitimate and legal rule. The management of property through *timar*-holders, the creation of bureaucratic cadres out of converts, and the speedy and severe exercise of justice by the sultan's judges were some of the customary and legal principles of the Ottoman way of governing. They rendered the existence of a nobility superfluous and thus were stigmatized as tyrannical.

Turkish "tyranny" implied not only a terrifying experience, an oppressive regime, and an exotic ensemble of political and social relations, but also the legitimacy and

success of the empire. One can argue that this circumstantial application of the term to Ottoman rule was a result of the range of ambiguous impressions that these writers had about the Turkish way. When evidence of Ottoman decline and corruption emerged during the 18th century, the terms in which the Turkish way of government was imagined began to be drastically transformed.

During the 18th century the concept of tyranny, implying in part awesome power and success, was replaced by the concept of despotism, signifying Oriental wickedness and corruption. The proper 16th- and 17th-century definition of the term “despotism”—that is, absolute government by right of conquest in a just war<sup>46</sup>—had not made it appealing to early moderns as a way of describing the Ottoman regime. Obviously, in the eyes of Western observers, the Ottomans’ conquests did not count as just war, and they characterized those conquests neither as usurpation nor as unjust war, which might have qualified their argument on tyranny and made it more consistent with its conventional usage. One could argue that the concept of despotism became a plausible way of depicting Ottoman politics only when it was redefined and classified as an inherently Oriental form of government by Montesquieu in his *The Spirit of the Laws*.

“Despotism” implied a theory of society and a rational analysis of the intellectual and moral capacity of Orientals. It suggested a static and slavish society, a backward and corrupt polity, with arbitrary and ferocious rulers governing servile and timid subjects. In contrast, the concept of tyranny had neither been used to indicate a geographically bounded regime nor presumed to define constant features of a people and society. It was a term designed to depict the behavioral pattern of some vicious rulers. In the 18th century, it ceased to be used to characterize the Ottoman form of government.

There is a unity and coherence in the 18th century European image of the Ottomans that derived from the widely adopted idea of Oriental despotism. By the same token, the existence of diversity in the 16th- and 17th-century images might have been due to the absence of such an elaborated analytical framework. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the deductive and rationalistic method applied by 18th-century writers led them to arrive at a quite distinct understanding of Ottoman society from the more empirical and historical approach evident in previous centuries.

#### DESPOTISM: A POLITICAL REGIME OR A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS?

It has been argued that during the 18th century, despotism either was meant to designate the model of French monarchy with reference to the rule of Louis XIV or was employed to differentiate Asian governments from those of Europeans.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the comparison of French absolutism to the “Turkish tyranny” was a recurring theme in the pamphlets written against the rule of Louis XIV at the end of the 17th century.<sup>48</sup> Throughout these debates, the term “despotism” was used to emphasize the absence of political liberty. However, the contrast between despotism and liberty had a political, rather than a social or cultural, connotation. In Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* it acquired a new formulation, so that despotism characterized not only a particular polity but also a particular society and climate.

Montesquieu is perhaps one of the first Enlightenment thinkers who posited an unbridgeable gap between Eastern and Western societies—their manners, customs,

and political life. This problematic idea became popular among observers of Turkish politics. Montesquieu held that one could define the nature of any particular state, society, or individual with reference to an ahistorical, constant criterion such as climate or religion. Despotism was exclusively defined as an Oriental regime to be encountered only in Asia; it corresponded to the warm-climate zone.<sup>49</sup>

Montesquieu's information on Oriental governments was limited to what Rycout and John Chardin had written about Turkey and Persia.<sup>50</sup> Montesquieu made use of facts gathered by travelers to confirm his pre-established principles. In fact, relying on travel books as a repository of "facts" was becoming a general trend among the natural scientists and political thinkers of the 18th century.<sup>51</sup> Travelers provided a vast range of data in the fields of religion, morality, politics, and natural sciences that eventually led to the formulation of general principles and theories. Ironically, 18th-century travel accounts on the Ottoman Empire themselves increasingly relied on these theories and abstractions rather than on experience and observation for analysis. Contrary to the trend toward empiricism elsewhere, the theorist rather than the traveler provided the significant "facts" on the nature of Oriental societies. Indeed, Montesquieu's treatment of travelers' accounts has its own peculiarity: they provided convenient incidents that made his abstract, ahistorical principles concrete and vivid.

Montesquieu's analysis of Eastern regimes was original only in the sense that it was much more systematic, deterministic, and coherent than its predecessors. He argued that Oriental people were bound to be ruled by no other regime than despotism. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, Rycout and early-18th-century commentators, such as Aaron Hill, Pitton de Tournefort, and David Jones, had already singled out those tyrannical-despotic maxims of government which Montesquieu turned into "laws" of Oriental society and behavior in his rationalistic framework of analysis.<sup>52</sup>

Climate for Montesquieu is a constant and independent variable allowing him to explain the differences among peoples and their respective tempers. Asia corresponds to a warm-climate zone, and all those countries that he identifies as despotic are "exceedingly Hot." These include Turkey, Persia, India, China, Korea, and Japan. Climate affects people as collectivities, so it follows that "the effeminacy of the people in hot climates has almost always rendered them slaves, and the bravery of those in cold climates has enabled them to maintain their liberties."<sup>53</sup> Surely, for Montesquieu this is "an effect which springs from a natural cause." Hence, it is not a coincidence that the principle of despotic government is fear. Despotic government requires the most pronounced passive obedience; "man is a creature that blindly submits to the absolute will of the sovereign."<sup>54</sup> Thus, despotic power is self-sufficient. Order is maintained through fear and blind obedience so that these governments do not need laws and there is no tendency or urge to change or develop:

If to that delicacy of organs which renders the Eastern nations so susceptible to every impression you add likewise a sort of indolence of mind, naturally connected with that of the body, by means of which they grow incapable of any exertion or effort, it is easy to comprehend that when once the soul has received an impression it cannot change it. This is the reason that the laws, manners and customs, even those which seem quite indifferent, such as their mode of dress, are the same to this day in Eastern countries as they were a thousand years ago.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, it is beyond the control of people to change their habits, manners, and customs; their situation of slavery; or the arbitrariness of their government, because

change or improvement is arrested by the inconveniences of climate. Then, “power in Asia ought to be despotic.”<sup>56</sup>

What is unique about Montesquieu’s categorization of political regimes with respect to climate, religion, and laws is that it supplies him with a powerful means of classification. This classification offers a principle of conduct for each regime—these principles being fear, honor, and virtue. He assumes a moral distance separating the East and the West. It is crucial that the images of the East represent those qualities that Europe could not possibly have. There is a demarcating line between Asia and Europe: Asia is weak because a servile spirit prevails there, whereas Europe is strong by virtue of its liberty.<sup>57</sup> Pronouncing essential differences between the East and the West was treated as a mission through which one could identify oneself and the others once and for all.

Nicolas Boulanger, an 18th-century political thinker and engineer, contributed to Montesquieu’s vision of Asian regimes as necessarily despotic. Climate is one factor that induces despotism; another is idolatry. In Asia, monarchs are treated as “visible gods”; there “one makes the whole; and the whole is nothing.”

In such distressful regions man is seen to kiss his chains, without any certainty as to fortune and property, he adores his tyrant; and without any knowledge of humanity or reason, he is reduced to have no other virtue but fear.<sup>58</sup>

Boulanger pronounces on the essential difference between the East and the West: “[E]very object impresses on the mind of a young Asiatic that he is a slave, and ought to be so: the European learns, from everything around him, that he is a rational being.”<sup>59</sup>

Both Montesquieu’s and Boulanger’s definition of despotism as an inherently Oriental type of rule, deriving from climate and theology, became a landmark verdict on the nature of Eastern societies. The popularity of the idea was perhaps rooted in their depiction of it as a natural and authentic form of regime, not as a deviant form or as a corrupt version of a moderate regime. Despotism is defined as having specific characteristics, such as the arbitrary rule of the sovereign and the complementary servitude of the subjects, sustained by either fear or idolatry. Their presentation of despotism as an extreme and exotic form of regime enabled these writers to criticize its milder manifestations in Europe and to champion those values and virtues that they believed would spare their societies from the burden of despotic rule. These writers held that Europe enjoyed the advantage of better climate and better laws and conventions that enabled political development. It can be argued that the Ottoman government and society were regarded as the very antithesis of a free society in which “rule of law” prevails. As Patricia Springborg argues, “Oriental Despotism” was invented in post-Reformation Europe as a counterpart to “Western Republicanism.”<sup>60</sup> The Enlightenment concern about good government, rule of law, and freedom and liberty of the individual provides the backdrop for the analysis of Oriental societies.

This attempt to portray Eastern regimes as the opposite of Western types of government did not survive unchallenged. Voltaire admitted that neither he nor Montesquieu nor Europeans in general knew much about the East. He doubted that the influence of climate could be so constant and held that despotism does not exist naturally but it is a corruption of a better system of government.<sup>61</sup>

The 18th-century French political theorist, lawyer, and journalist Simon-Nicolas-

Henri Linguet also launched a controversial challenge to Montesquieu's theory of Oriental despotism. He argued that all of the governments in Europe except the Turks' were despotic.<sup>62</sup> This counter-intuitive challenge was contrary to mainstream ideas, and Linguet knew more of French and European politics than of Oriental regimes. Like Montesquieu, Linguet did not have extensive up-to-date information about Turkey but wrote about it for polemical purposes. He portrayed a happy and peaceful Orient. This was as much a fantasy as the corrupt and stagnant Orient of Montesquieu. The way in which Linguet, Montesquieu, and Boulanger depicted the Ottoman government was simplified so as to help them to deal with their real problem—European political systems.<sup>63</sup> Although they adduced different facts, they wrote about the same Oriental regime in order to point out the defects and virtues of their own society. Their "Ottoman Empire" was more a product of their imagination than a real place. Their shared literary strategy was to exaggerate the unusual in order to criticize the familiar.

One may argue that the concept of despotism was particularly significant and useful for those who wished to express their discontent with Western forms of government. Depicting the Ottoman government—positively or negatively—was a safe way to demonstrate the absurdities of absolutism and arbitrary government. In this sense, Montesquieu's, Boulanger's, and Linguet's theoretical interest in Oriental regimes might have covered their desire to change their own system in certain ways. In this way, the concept of despotism provided a rich source of polemic for those who were not particularly curious about or interested in Oriental regimes. This tendency is more visible in France than in England, because literate Englishmen were less discontented with their government. Similarly, Montesquieu's political position was different from those of Boulanger and Linguet. He was part of the political establishment, whereas Linguet and Boulanger were more independent in their political affiliations. This was reflected in their style of criticism.

#### OBSERVATIONS ON THE 18TH-CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Later 18th-century writing on Ottoman government tended to adduce casual observations in support of Montesquieu's theory of despotism. There is a significant transformation in the image of Turks. The decline of the Ottoman Empire as a major political force in Europe was not perceived as an outcome of historical, social, and political factors; instead, it was attributed to imagined ahistorical, fixed, and essential qualities of Turkish social and political life. The sense of external threat was lifted after the second siege of Vienna in 1683, and this may help explain the waning curiosity about the Ottoman way of life during the 18th century. European observers tended to ignore the major transformations in Ottoman institutions. Ottoman willingness to adopt European ways during the 18th century passed unnoticed or was discredited. In the previous centuries, European observers looked for reasons for the success or failure of Ottoman ambitions, whereas in the 18th century, commentators were self-absorbed even as they demonstrated the deficiencies and failures of the Ottoman system. This means that they looked on others as a foil against which to display Western accomplishments, whereas in the previous centuries Europe was simply preoccupied with self-preservation. The latter concern had provoked greater respect for the Turks than did what followed it.

Travelers to the Ottoman lands provided lively examples of despotism in their accounts that eventually substantiated the analysis made by Montesquieu. Travelers displayed an interest in anticipating and establishing those conditions and features that enabled Turks to endure a predefined despotic regime. In other words, in the mind of the 18th-century observer, the general principles of social and political association can be rationally established with reference to constant ahistorical criteria—such as human nature, climate, or religion. In fact, this seems to be a reflection of Enlightenment assumptions about the constancy of nature in the physical sciences, which was extended to include the constancy of the intellectual and moral disposition of human beings in the “social sciences.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, one can infer the laws of history and human nature that determine varying forms and conditions of social and political life. This rationalist attitude is also apparent in the 18th-century study of the Ottoman Empire as an Oriental society, the laws of which are derived from the “facts” of human character under certain constant pressures. This kind of classification also enabled the writers of the 18th century to deduce moral and political lessons from their analysis of a very different way of life, one assumed to display a pattern of human errors, ignorance, and feebleness. Certainly, there was detailed observation, but there was also a common prejudice: Europeans knew what they were going to see.

Francis Baron de Tott is perhaps the most loyal follower of Montesquieu’s theory of despotism. He is also one of the most famous visitors to the empire. He stayed twenty-five years in Istanbul. For de Tott, despotism is a psychological feature of Turkish people that, under the influence of climate and the belief system, propagates itself as a way of life and as a political regime. The Turkish temper fluctuates among humiliation, slavishness, and overwhelming pride and ferociousness. Ferocity makes Ottoman rulers despotic, while the servile spirit of the people and their blind obedience is grounded in their belief in predestination. He puts forward his case in the following words:

If the climate which the Turks inhabit relaxes their fibres, the despotism under which they groan transports them to violence. They are not unfrequently ferocious; . . . their system of predestination adds to their fierceness; and the same prejudice that in a cold climate would have rendered them courageous, in a hot one produces nothing but rashness; the burning fever which elevates their brain makes them despise everything that is not Turkish; and from that mode of reasoning with themselves, pride and ignorance are the natural result.<sup>65</sup>

Convinced that it was the essential character trait of the Turks, de Tott saw despotism in Turkey wherever he looked.<sup>66</sup> William Eton, another long-time resident of Turkey, shared this vision of despotism, calling de Tott’s account of Turkish despotism the most accurate in fact and crediting Montesquieu’s analysis.<sup>67</sup> Eton identified the influences that contribute to the rise and fall of nations as climate, situation, economy, and population, of which he gave a detailed account in his investigation of the Turks. But all of these influences together are subject to what he called “the energies of mind,” which takes its peculiarity from religious and political institutions, from historical events, from arts and sciences, and from general manners. In this context, Eton held that Ottomans were dominated by a religion “whose absurdity is obvious to all enlightened Europeans.”<sup>68</sup>

The despotism of the sultan is closely related to the superstition of the people and is firmly rooted in the prejudices of the Turks. He defines despotism and its manifestation in Turkey in the following manner:

But if by despotism be meant a power originating in force, and upheld by the same means to which it owed its establishment; a power scorning the jurisdiction of reason, and forbidding the temerity of investigation; a power calculated to crush the growing energies of mind, and annihilating the faculties of man, in order to insure his dependence, the government of Turkey may be the most faithfully characterized by that name.<sup>69</sup>

Eton's description of despotism emphasizes not the qualities that this regime possesses, but those qualities that it does not possess. Clearly, the reference point in Eton's mind is the British government, which is supposedly marked by the rule of reason, improvement of the arts and sciences, and development of liberty.

Another English traveler, William Hunter, shared this judgment about the Turks: he believed that the Turkish government was the most unnatural, irrational, and inhuman regime on earth.<sup>70</sup> He labels the Ottoman government despotic and oppressive because, as he claims in line with Boulanger, the Turkish sultan is deemed omnipotent and is adored like a god; he has the power of life and death over all his subjects, and there is no appeal against his decision.<sup>71</sup> Further, the absence of a nobility contributes to the corrupt nature of the government.

The concept of Oriental despotism is occasionally regarded with skepticism. Sir James Porter, British ambassador to the Porte, rejected the characterization of the Ottoman government as despotic. However, his ideas were denounced by other 18th-century observers—except Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron—on the basis that he was only an ambassador and he could not be as perceptive and insightful as other observers who actually interacted with common people.<sup>72</sup> According to Porter, the government of the Turks had been grossly misrepresented: the Ottoman Empire was “much less despotic than the government of some Christian states.”<sup>73</sup> He saw Montesquieu's account as exaggerated and fictional. Porter claimed that “Montesquieu excluded the Turks from all the advantages of civil law, including the right to private property, and wrongfully assumed that the Grand Signior swallows up every right of the subject throughout the empire.”<sup>74</sup> The question for Porter was whether a monarch was limited by law or compact, the absence of which distinguishes a regime as despotic. Despotism for Porter was “a government in which there exists neither law nor compact, prior to the usurped power of the sovereign; on whose arbitrary will the framing, or execution of laws depends, and who is bound neither by positive divine injunction nor compact with the people.”<sup>75</sup> However, in Turkey, as Porter believed, there was evidence of both a code of laws and a compact between the sultan and his people, “binding both and sealed in heaven.”<sup>76</sup> This evidence helped him define Turkish government as a “species of limited monarchy” in which religious elites (ulema) played the crucial “limiting” role. Porter perceived the ulema as

a body of men equal if not superior to any nobility, jealous of their rights and privileges, and who stands as an immediate order between the prince and people. . . . [T]hey serve, however, as a barrier and fence against the monarch's exertion of power, directed by his pleasure and will; and point out the right of resistance, when he exceeds the due limit of his authority.<sup>77</sup>

Eton perceived such balance of power between the sultan and the ulema in a different manner: for him, it was “a balance of intrigue and artifice, whilst there is in both parties, a perfect accordance of despotism, a mutual defect both of the means and inclination to benefit the community.”<sup>78</sup>

The counter-balancing power of the ulema against the sultan was not a principle of government, as Porter believed; rather, this group’s joining actively in political conflicts and popular unrest was a new political behavior. During the 18th century, one can observe increasing conflict among the elites of Ottoman society and their opposing visions. The growing influence of the bureaucracy on the central administration simultaneously undermined the authority of the religious elites, who started to seek the support of the dissatisfied and impoverished lower ranks of the military and the bureaucracy.<sup>79</sup> During this period, the ulema and the janissaries joined occasionally against the reform tendencies of the viziers and the sultans.<sup>80</sup> This is revealed in Porter’s perception in a quite remarkable manner:

Hence when the people are notoriously aggrieved; their property, or that of the church, repeatedly violated; when the prince will riot in blood, or carry on an unsuccessful war; they appeal to *law*, pronounce him an infidel, a tyrant, an unjust man, incapable to govern and in consequence depose and imprison, or destroy him.<sup>81</sup>

Lady Mary Wortley Montague, one of the most insightful and perceptive travelers in 18th-century Turkey, observed similar political behavior but painted it as more ferocious. She admitted that Turks did not revolt against injustices by means of “huz-zaiing mobs, senseless pamphlets and tavern disputes about politics,”

But when a minister here displeases the people, in three hours he is dragged even from his master’s arms. They cut off his hands, head and feet, and throw them before the palace gate, with all the respect in the world; while the Sultan (to whom they profess an unlimited adoration) sits trembling in his apartment, and does neither defend nor revenge his favourite. This is the blessed condition of the most absolute monarch upon earth, who owns no Law but his Will.”<sup>82</sup>

Here an explanation is required: how could such an oppressed and servile people revolt against their all-powerful despots? De Tott calls such incidents “the despotism of the oppressed.”<sup>83</sup> When people express their grief and despair, “they assume the character of their superiors.”<sup>84</sup> De Tott believed that in a society as despotic as that of the Turks, all the victims of oppression have the desire to become oppressors—and that is what, strangely enough, holds this society together. Although fear, as Montesquieu argued, is necessary to perpetuate despotism, the desire to oppress and to become the despot is far more crucial for de Tott in the maintenance of the political system.

Despotism and slavishness are interchangeable or oscillating qualities of the Turks. It was an 18th-century habit to identify the Turks as passive, timid, and servile toward their superiors, but ferocious and despotic toward their subordinates. According to William Hunter:

Such glaring instances of oppression and rapaciousness on one side and of submission and pusillanimity on the other are so continually occurring, that one is led to despise the predominant disposition of the people. Haughty, cruel and overbearing when in power; that power annihilated, cringing, humble and irresolute, their different situations only serve to delineate the various shades of a weak and vitiated mind.<sup>85</sup>

In this way, the theory of Oriental despotism also implied an early version of the theory of the authoritarian personality.<sup>86</sup>

Both Montesquieu and his followers attempted to account for the endurance of despotism with reference to fear or blind obedience. Coercion seemed to be the only means of attaining blind obedience, though it was asserted that climate, religion, and the character of a people—their ignorance and slavishness—played an important role in the maintenance of despotism. The question of legitimacy, or the source of people's consent, was not an appealing matter of inquiry. It was believed that despotism was a corrupt, hence illegitimate, regime. To some, this may seem to be the major defect of the theory of despotism. How could such a feeble regime last over centuries?

A Greek Ottoman tackled this problem. Elias Habesci observed that the Turkish government did not rest on such simple premises as fear and feebleness. On the contrary, the government was capable of maintaining its interests without endangering the legitimacy of the system. Habesci was a Greek secretary to the Grand Vizier during the reign of Mustafa III (1757–74). For Habesci, Turkish despots were devious but elaborate—and skillful. In his inquiry, he searched for the source of legitimacy and demonstrated the way in which the arbitrary will of rulers was justified. This is a crucial aspect of his attempt to qualify Montesquieu's thesis that despotism is an attribute not only of the political regime but also of society at large. He declared that the Turkish government rested on a system of slavery; indeed, it was an "empire of slaves."<sup>87</sup>

In this society of slaves, Ottoman laws were designed to support the maintenance of the absolute power of the sultan, the oppression of the people, and the enriching of the imperial treasury.<sup>88</sup> In other words, these were the *raison d'être* of the Ottoman state. One way to preserve the absolute power of the sultan was to prevent his officers (i.e., his slaves) from acquiring too much influence; thus, their offices were rotated frequently. This provided economic gain, on the one hand, because the new officer was obliged to make very considerable presents to the sultan; on the other hand, it served a political demand by preventing the officers from adopting ideas adverse to that blind obedience and slavery. Further, according to the spirit of despotism, these ministers of state "upon their promotion are obliged to oppress and rob the people they govern" in order to cover the cost of their promotion. This, in turn, depressed and broke the spirit of the people "by frequent vexations and extortions" so they were accustomed "to bear the yoke of slavery without murmuring."<sup>89</sup> However, the political system did not intend to depress people too much, for that could be dangerous. When pashas plundered too much, people complained. Then, "they are indeed effectually removed, by taking their heads from their shoulders and the sultan at once demonstrates his love to the poor ruined people, by his act of opulent justice, and fills his coffers by the seizure of the immense riches of the criminals."<sup>90</sup> Thus, it was not simply fear that defined the spirit of despotism, for there were more intricate and sophisticated policies to ensure its endurance.

Hence, the European image of Oriental despotism is complete and coherent. Despotic society generates a vicious circle in which every slave is a potential despot of another. This renders the whole system corrupt in itself and the people as both servile and despotic. Obviously, the society is stagnant. The government of the Ottomans is peculiar for the insight that it reveals into European values: not only is Oriental gov-

ernment essentially bad, but it has virtually exhausted the store of badness in the European self-image so that no bad qualities are left that the Europeans can further enjoy.

The Eurocentrism of this approach is based on the deduction of moral principles from a priori logical analyses of ahistorical criteria such as climate, religion, and the character of people. In this sense, the 18th-century analyses relied on an abstract sort of reason rather than experience as a means of arriving at certitude. Various truth claims about the Ottomans were made through analytical judgment and deductive reasoning from principles that had already been established. In fact, one can argue that the 18th-century approaches to understanding the Ottoman Empire were particularly rationalistic because the stereotype of Oriental despotism, once established, seemed to apply with a special strength to the evil government of the Turks. In this context of analysis, any aspect of society was known in advance. Montesquieu posited a fit among the various aspects of civilization: every fact fitted its presupposed place within a coherent and congruent set of principles, which needed little verification through experience and observation. Facts were meaningful to the extent that they illustrated the logical validity of abstract principles. Such a rationalistic approach also informed the European self-image as indisputably civilized, progressive, liberal, and rational.<sup>91</sup> This is so because the distinction between European and Turkish identity is drawn with excessive emphasis on the negative, and odd qualities of the Turks, which all make sense to a Western observer when imagined and substantiated within the context of despotism. This depiction of despotism in Turkey established such an insurmountable structure that it simultaneously presented two different portraits—that of the Turks as stagnant and backward, and that of the European identity as very different and superior. One may also conclude that the ubiquitous assumption of modern Eurocentrism—that the West and the East are separate entities with different paths of development and forms of social and political association, and that the former is superior to the latter—was born with the Enlightenment assumptions of Oriental despotism.

It is useful to point out that careful observation of natural phenomena was increasing during the 18th century. However, there seems to be a counter-current in the observation of the Ottoman society. Although the Enlightenment thinkers were writing against the prejudices that had arisen from ignorance, superstition, and intolerance, they showed similar biases in understanding and evaluating other cultures. In other words, the prejudice they had against what they saw as prejudice was as dogmatic as the prejudices they were attacking.<sup>92</sup> Whereas the prejudices of 16th- and 17th-century writers were not often deeply grounded, they were rather unsettled and likely to alter when experience and circumstances challenged preconceptions. Such variety was reflected in the diversity and ambiguity of early modern images of Turkish tyranny.

#### NOTES

*Author's note:* I pursue certain points of this article at much greater length in a forthcoming book, *"Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe": European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (Peter Lang, 2001). I am grateful to Prof. J. A. W. Gunn for

his insightful comments regarding this article. I also thank Nevio Cristante, Cara Murphy Keyman, and the anonymous *IJMES* reviewers for their valuable suggestions. Needless to say, I am solely responsible for any error that may arise in the text.

<sup>1</sup>Contemporary commentaries on the Western perceptions of the Turks convey the political and social relevance of the Ottoman Empire in the popular as well as formal mind of the European public. Most of these sources focus on pre-18th-century images; thus, they overlook the remarkable transformation of the Turkish image in the 18th century. This study focuses on how European intellectuals of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries perceived the political life of the Ottomans and compared it with their own. For the 15th-century image of the Turks, see Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453–1517)* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967). For remarkable surveys of the Turkish image in French thought, see Clarence Dana Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature (1520–1660)* (Paris: Boivin, 1938); Orhan Koloğlu, *Le Turc Dans la Presse Française: Des débuts jusqu'à 1815* (Byrouth, 1971); Helen Desmet-Gregoire, *Le divan magique: l'Orient turc en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1980). For German images of the Ottoman Empire, see John W. Bohnstedt, *The Infidel Scourge of God: The Turkish Menace as Seen by German Pamphleteers of the Reformation Era*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new series, vol. 58, pt. 9, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968). For English images of the Ottoman Empire, see Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967; repr. from 1st ed., [Oxford 1937]). For other surveys of English images of the Turks, see Ezel Kural Shaw and C. J. Heywood, *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire 1500–1800* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Brandon Beck, *From the Rising of the Sun: English Images of the Ottoman Empire to 1715* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987). For European images of Islam, see Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, trans. Roger Veinus (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987). For a general survey of the image of the Turks in Europe, see Alexandrine N. St. Clair, *The Image of the Turk in Europe* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Contrary to Edward Said's account of "Orientalism" as a consistent and constant body of European experience and thought, this study reveals variety and a mix of positive and negative ideas about the Turks: see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>Francis Osborne, *Political Reflections upon the Government of the Turks* (Oxford, 1656), 17.

<sup>4</sup>For further information on Rohan and his literary impact, see J. A. W. Gunn, "Interest Will Not Lie: A Seventeenth-Century Political Maxim," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968): 551–64.

<sup>5</sup>Henri, duc de Rohan, *Treatise of the Interests of the Princes and the States of Christendome*, trans. H. H. (London, 1641), sig. A7r.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>7</sup>Nicollo Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie Walker (London: Penguin Books, 1988), bk. 1, discourse 10, 134–38.

<sup>8</sup>Hubert Languet (Stephanus Junius Brutus), *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: or, Concerning the Legitimate Power of a Prince over the People, and of the People over a Prince* (1579), ed. and trans. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Jean Bodin, *Six Books of Commonwealth* (1576), trans. and abr. M. J. Tooley (Oxford, 1967), 62–63.

<sup>10</sup>For further information, see Michael J. Heath, *Crusading Commonplaces: La Noue, Lucinge and Rhetoric Against the Turks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1986); Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 69–77.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1668), 69. For a similar argument, see George Sandys, *Sandys Travailles . . . Containing a History of the Original and Present State of the Turkish Empire, their Laws, Government, Policy, Military Force, Courts of Justice and Commerce* (London, 1670), 37.

<sup>14</sup>For further information on the *timar* system, see Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 46; and Halil İnalçık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society 1300–1600," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 114–18.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 108–10.

<sup>17</sup>Giovanni Botero, *Relations of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Commonweales through the World* (1601) (London, 1616), 333. This work is also known as *The Travellers Breviat*.

<sup>18</sup>Ogier Ghislain Busbecq, *Four Epistles of O. G. Busbequius Concerning His Embassy into Turkey* (London, 1694), 36.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 94–95. For a similar argument, see Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *The Six Voyages of John Baptiste Tavernier Through Turkey into Persia and the East Indies*, trans. J. P. (London, 1677), 30.

<sup>20</sup>Rycaut, *The Present State*, 8.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 67–68.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup>Francois de la Noue, *The Politicke and Militarie Discourses of the Lord de la Noue*, trans. E. A. (London, 1589), 242.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 242–43.

<sup>26</sup>Nicolas Nicolay, *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages Made into Turkie*, trans. T. Washington (London, 1585), 69. For a similar argument, see Bartholomew Georgievitz, *The Offsprings of the House of Ottomano and Offices Pertaining to the Great Turkes Court*, trans. Hugh Gough (London, 1553). This was perhaps the most popular account of the miseries of Christian slaves in Ottoman lands.

<sup>27</sup>Busbecq, *Four Epistles*, 96; Sir Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant with Particular Observations Concerning the Moderne Condition of the Turks, and Other People under that Empire*, 4th ed. (London, 1650), 115.

<sup>28</sup>For further information on *devşirme*, see V. L. Ménage, “Some Notes on the Devshirme,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29 (1966): 64–78; Norman Itzkowitz, “Eighteenth Century Ottoman Realities,” *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 75–94; Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix, 1994), 77–79.

<sup>29</sup>Giovanni Botero, *The Reason of State* (1589), trans. D. P. Waley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 169.

<sup>30</sup>Bodin, *Six Books of Commonwealth*, 63.

<sup>31</sup>Richard Knolles, *The General Historie of the Turkes, from the first Beginning of that nation to the rising of the Othoman Familie* (1603) (London, 1687–1700), 982.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 981.

<sup>33</sup>İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 59–64.

<sup>34</sup>Osborne, *Political Reflections*, 38.

<sup>35</sup>Blount, *A Voyage*, 226.

<sup>36</sup>Osborne, *Political Reflections*, 114.

<sup>37</sup>Rene de Lucinge, *The Beginning, Continuance and Decay of Estates*, trans. John Finet (London, 1606).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 95–102. For a similar argument, see Osborne, *Political Reflections*, 114.

<sup>39</sup>Blount, *A Voyage*, 172–76.

<sup>40</sup>Jean Dumont (Baron de Carlsroon), *A New Voyage to the Levant: Containing an account of the Most Remarkable Curiosities in Germany, Italy, France, Malta and Turkey* (London, 1696), 232.

<sup>41</sup>İnalcık and Quataert, *Economic and Social History*, 104–106.

<sup>42</sup>Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 101–102. See also Ariel Salzmann “An Ancien Regime Revisited: ‘Privatization’ and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Politics and Society* 21 (1993): 393–423.

<sup>43</sup>Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*, 101.

<sup>44</sup>For further information, see J. A. Allen, *A History of Political thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1957), 321–30.

<sup>45</sup>Bodin, *Six Books of Commonwealth*, 57.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 57; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 139–42. For John Locke, despotism is a way to exercise power, not a political regime. It arises from a state of war rather than from mutual consent. Captives taken in a just and lawful war become subject to a despotic power as an effect of “forfeiture” until a covenant is made: John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), treatise 2, section 17, 382–83.

<sup>47</sup>For further information, see Melvin Richter, in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Weiner (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1973), s.v. "Despotism"; Franco Venturi, "Oriental Despotism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1964): 133–42; R. Koebner, "Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14 (1951): 271–302.

<sup>48</sup>For further information, see Venturi, "Oriental Despotism," 134; *La Cour de France turbanisée, et les trahisons demasquées*, (Cologne, 1686); Hubert Gillot, *Le Règne de Louis XIV et l'opinion publique en Allemagne* (Paris, 1914); P. J. W. Van Malssen, *Louis XIV d'après les pamphlets repandus en Hollande* (Paris and Amsterdam, 1937).

<sup>49</sup>For further information on Montesquieu's formulation of the concept of despotism as an Oriental regime, see Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail: La fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris, 1979).

<sup>50</sup>See Rycout, *The Present State*, and John Chardin, *Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies* (London, 1686).

<sup>51</sup>For further information, see R. W. Frantz, *The English Traveller and the Movement of Ideas: 1606–1732* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968).

<sup>52</sup>David Jones, *A Compleat History of the Turks from their Origin in the Year 755 to the Year 1718* (London, 1718–19); Pitton de Tournefort, *A Voyage into the Levant* (London, 1718); Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire in All Its Branches* (London, 1733).

<sup>53</sup>Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1749), trans. Thomas Nugent (New York and London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1966), 264.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Nicolas Boulanger, *The Origin and Progress of Despotism*, trans. John Wilkes (London and Amsterdam, 1764), 1–2.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>60</sup>Patricia Springborg, *Western Republicanism and the Oriental Prince* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

<sup>61</sup>For further information, see Voltaire, "Dialogues between ABC, first conversation on Hobbes, Grotius and Montesquieu," and "Thoughts on Public Administration," in *Voltaire: Political Writings*, ed. David Williams (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 87–100, 212–24.

<sup>62</sup>Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Du Plus Heureux Gouvernement ou parallele des constitutions politiques de l'Asie avec celles d'Europe* (London, 1774), 1:7–11.

<sup>63</sup>See Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, *Legislation orientale* (Amsterdam, 1778), for a rare truthful 18th-century account of Oriental governments.

<sup>64</sup>Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Sciences to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 348.

<sup>65</sup>Francis Baron de Tott, *Memoirs of the Baron de Tott on the Turks and Tartars*, 2 vols. (London, 1785), 1:7–8.

<sup>66</sup>On the despotism of the oppressed, see *ibid.*, 148; on despotism and public celebrations, see *ibid.*, 210; on despotism and public peace and security, see *ibid.*, 251; on despotism and justice, see *ibid.*, 233; and on despotism of the sultans and governors, see *ibid.*, 227.

<sup>67</sup>William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1798), 5.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>70</sup>William Hunter, *Travels in the Year 1792 Through France, Turkey, Hungary to Vienna* (London, 1798), 387.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>See Eton, *Survey*, 5, and Elias Habesci, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1784), 258.

<sup>73</sup>Sir James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government and Manners of the Turks* (London, 1771), xiv.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, xxx.

<sup>78</sup>Eton, *Survey*, 23.

<sup>79</sup>For further information on the conflicts of 18th-century Ottoman elites, see Virginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi 1700–1783* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), x–xv.

<sup>80</sup>Inalcık and Quataert, *Economic and Social History*, 640.

<sup>81</sup>Porter, *Observations*, 101.

<sup>82</sup>Lady Mary Wortley Montague, *Letters, written during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa . . . which contain . . . Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks* (Paris, 1779), 96–97.

<sup>83</sup>De Tott, *Memoirs*, 148.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>85</sup>Hunter, *Travels in the Year 1792*, 349. For similar arguments, see Porter, *Observations*, 5, and Edward Brown, *The Travels of Edward Brown* (London, 1753), 189.

<sup>86</sup>T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

<sup>87</sup>Habesci, *The Present State*, 258.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 264–65.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>91</sup>See Springborg, *Western Republicanism*, for an alternative line of reasoning about the formation of European self-image vis-à-vis the Orient.

<sup>92</sup>See Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1942).