



Ottoman Diplomacy

Session VII-05, 2022 Annual Meeting
On Saturday, December 3 at 8:30 am

PANEL DESCRIPTION

N/A

DISCIPLINES

N/A

PARTICIPANTS

- Dr. Virginia Aksan -- Chair
- Dr. Emrah Sahin -- Presenter
- Ms. Jilian Ma -- Presenter
- Dr. Alison Terndrup -- Presenter
- Dr. Nihat Celik -- Presenter
- Mr. Ismail Noyan -- Presenter
- Mr. Fatih Dogan -- Presenter

PRESENTATIONS

- Dr. Nihat Celik

To Declare War or Not? Foreign Policy Decision-making in the Ottoman Empire

Decisions related to foreign policy are complex due to their often-dire consequences--such as war-- depending upon the historical period and the type of regime involved. Generally considered as an absolute monarchy where the monarch enjoyed absolute authority to rule, the Ottoman Empire throughout its existence was involved in many diplomatic crises. However, a close look at the decision-making processes in the Ottoman Empire reveals that the monarch was far from being the sole decision-making authority. It is, therefore, appropriate to ask what structures were employed or participated in the foreign policy decision-making process in the Ottoman Empire. This study aims to identify these structures and processes with a focus on the functions of ad hoc consultation councils. For this purpose, among many other examples, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783 will be employed as a case study to highlight the role of consultation councils. In order to identify the roles of different actors in the state bureaucracy and their varying attitudes in the face of the crisis, the theoretical framework of the bureaucratic politics model developed by Graham Allison will be employed. The paper will show the instances of groupthink in the decision-making process and sources of conflict between the different branches of the Ottoman bureaucracy. For this purpose, this study relies on published and unpublished sources from the Republic of Turkey's Directorate of State Archives and published archival sources from the British and French state archives. To complete the broader picture, secondary sources such as contemporary Ottoman official historiographies and memoires of the statesmen involved in the process will also be consulted. My main aim is to show that contrary to generally held assumptions, decision-making processes in the Ottoman Empire were quite complex and a range of actors, each with their own beliefs and approaches, were involved. The paper will also demonstrate that rational and material factors played a much more important role than spiritual and religious factors in decision-making. Finally, the paper will showcase a conflict with Islamic law and the realities of foreign policy, and how this conflict was solved through political flexibility.

- Dr. Alison Terndrup

Enamel and Brilliants: Snuffboxes in Ottoman Diplomatic Networks of the

Nineteenth Century

In 1806, the Ottoman Sultan Selim III sent a small, diamond encrusted box decorated with his tughra to his newly recognized ally, Napoleon Bonaparte. Over the course of the next century, Ottoman sultans would continue the practice of gifting small, finely made boxes – often termed “snuffboxes,” enfiye kutusu, or tabatière – to foreign sovereigns and their diplomatic representatives. These tokens of diplomacy and friendship arrived at the courts of France, Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and perhaps most surprising, at that of the recently crowned King Otto of independent Greece. In this paper, I argue that by analyzing the optics of this conspicuous gift-giving practice within its wider ceremonial context, we can better understand how these objects operated within the expanded Ottoman sphere. This analysis takes into consideration both the mutable material and dynamic social elements associated with this elite practice, viewing snuffboxes as symbolic nodes within a network of diplomatic alliances, personal friendships, and inter-imperial rivalries. This paper uses a combination of formal and text-based analyses to compare the visual, symbolic, and intrinsic value of individual items as they changed hands along political and diplomatic routes. This approach differs from previous studies, which have been limited to a discussion of the material qualities of snuffboxes and the specialized nature of their production techniques (including, for example, mid-nineteenth century advances in diamond-cutting and enamel-firing processes). This new approach casts these objects not as static, isolated, and immutable objects, but as works that could and often did change form (for example, acquiring new enamel, losing diamonds, becoming simpler or more elaborate) as they changed hands. The textual evidence for this paper includes archival sources as well as official and popular newspapers, the publication of which allowed descriptions of these gifts to reach a mass audience. Repetitive turns of phrase which functioned across languages and audiences developed to describe these once-ubiquitous boxes and the conditions of their official presentations. Formal similarities in phrasing across Ottoman and non-Ottoman newspapers reveal surprising parallels in how sovereigns used comparable strategies to style the representation of their power through gift giving. By highlighting the trend of sultans giving snuffboxes as diplomatic tokens, this paper opens new perspectives onto the interconnectedness of systems of the visualization of power in the nineteenth century.

- Ms. Julian Ma

Travel Mobility between China and the Ottoman Domain in the Late Nineteenth Century

Focusing on the mobility of the flow of people between China and the Ottoman

domain from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, this paper will explore the routes, transportation developments, service networks, states' aspirations of shaping the travel process and obstacles in the journeys conducted by both Chinese and Ottoman travellers who went to each other's lands. Travellers moved through the space between China and the Ottoman Empire by diverse routes and modes. Meanwhile, from the mid-nineteenth century, the technological innovations of transportation and expanded network services facilitated the mass movement between these two lands. In tandem with the widespread use of trains and steamships, a very competitive market around the pilgrimage was formed. The competition, in turn, contributed greatly to the enhancement of mobility of the flow of people between East and West. These factors constitute the mobility that shrunk the space separating the two lands and thus provided the opportunity for a tangible Sino - Ottoman engagement. The analysis will be achieved through a close reading of Chinese and Ottoman travellers' travel accounts and related archives. Through the discussion of multi-dimensions of travel mobility, it reveals the social situations and travelling conditions in the vast space between China and the Ottoman lands. It is this mobility that connected the people of these two lands and provided the possibility for their physical interaction. This mobility would shape travellers' senses and practices, influencing their perception of space, time and feelings regarding each other.

- [**Mr. Ismail Noyan**](#)

[Application of Tanzimat Reforms and Protégé issue at the Habsburg Ottoman border in the 1860s](#)

Drawing on primary sources on Ottoman Turkish and French (such as local petitions, inspection reports, correspondence between local officials and the Ottoman central government as well as consular correspondence), this paper examines the protégé [or: protection] issue in the early 1860s with reference to governmental practices and the application of Tanzimat reforms on non-Muslim borderland subjects of the Ottoman Empire in Liyubuška (Ljubuski in today's Bosnia-Herzegovina). Historians of the Late Ottoman Empire have argued that the protection (*himaye*) issue was a consequence of external factors: it was because of their growing military and economic power that European empire states like Britain, France, or Russia were able to renegotiate the Capitulations from the late 1700s and to expand their influence within the Ottoman Empire by issuing berats (certificates of protection) to (mostly non-Muslim) Ottoman subjects. By contrast, this paper focuses on Tanzimat state building, that is, internal Ottoman factors, as a crucial bone of contention of the protection issue. I explore Ottoman government efforts in the early 1860s to

return to the status of Ottoman subjects non-Muslims from the Bosnian town of Liyubuška who had opted for Austrian subjecthood (*tabiiyyet*) but continued to live on the Ottoman side of the Habsburg-Ottoman border. I argue that local non-Muslims went further than seeking Austrian berats. Rather, they took the more radical step of acquiring Austrian subjecthood (*tabiiyyet*) to benefit from the favorable economic conditions of the Habsburg Empire (i.e. paying less or no taxes) and thus to avoid the pressures of an increasingly intrusive Tanzimat state, especially high taxes, the requisitioning of pack animals by the Ottoman provincial government and forced labor (*angarya*). As the Ottoman central government strove to make these new protected subjects of the Habsburg empire return back to their ‘principal nationality’ (*tabiiyyet-i asliyye*), inspector Ahmed Cevdet Efendi (1823-1895) suggested not only to eliminate forms of injustice and maladministration at the provincial level but also assure those people that these would not re-occur under the auspices the Tanzimat reforms. Further, Cevdet Efendi argued that unofficial concessions such as lowering the taxes for these borderland peoples and not levying the military service exemption tax (*iane-i askeriyye*) would encourage them to return to Ottoman subjecthood. Thus, the protégé experience in this imperial borderland in the early 1860s suggests that both the causes of and solutions for the protégé ‘problem’ lay at governance practices and reforms of the empire rather than external factors.

- **Mr. Fatih Dogan**

[Lawmaking in an Ottoman Frontier Province at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century: The Mufti of Akkirman, His Fatwas and Authority](#)

Lawmaking on the Frontier: The Fatwas of an Ottoman Provincial Mufti, Ali Akkirmani (d. 1618) Fatwas played a major role in the formation of Ottoman legal norms. However, to date, Ottoman historians have largely limited their examination of these sources to the fatwas of the chief muftis (*şeyhü'lislam*). The role of provincial muftis (*kenâr müftüsü*) and their fatwas remains neglected. What role did these muftis play in the formation of legal norms at the edge of the empire? How did they engage with the central authority and local officers? What functions did their fatwas perform? And what was their authority and role in the legal process? In this paper, I address these questions through an analysis of the fatwas of Ali Akkirmani, an Ottoman imperial man, a scholar-bureaucrat, who received his education and began his teaching career in the madrasas of Istanbul before taking up a post as professor and mufti in his hometown, the frontier city of Akkirman, in 1592. He kept the post for about thirty years, until his death in 1618. As mufti, he issued fatwas on questions of various types posed to him by common people, notables, officers, judges, etc., which were collected

posthumously in 1630 under the title *Fetâvâ-yı Akkirmani*. I explore how Akkirmani interpreted and adapted the learned sharia law and imperial law to augment his own juristic, imperial, and socio-political authority and to position himself as a critical player in the formation of legal norms on the Ottoman frontier focusing on examples drawn from that work's chapter on international law (*Kitâbu's-Siyer*). In his fatwas, he was careful to stay within the bounds of the Islamic jurisprudential tradition (fiqh), using its concepts and referring to its founding and later authorities; but he also drew heavily on the fatwas of the Ottoman chief muftis and the decrees of the sultans (ferman), thereby positioning himself as a scholar-bureaucrat and spokesperson for the imperial center. Relying on this authority, Akkirmani used his office to create an alternative legal platform distinct from the courts and the official legal hierarchy, intervening in the legal cases of everyone from commoners to local officials with his fatwas. Vis-à-vis the center he adopted a different strategy, augmenting his authority by reminding his interlocutors that he was a native of Akkirman and thus knew better than they how to localize juristic and imperial legal knowledge.

- Dr. Emrah Sahin

[Ottoman Foreign Policy Traditions: A Critical New Approach](#)

This paper is a critique of Ottoman foreign policy as we know it. From Daniel Goffman to Gabor Agoston, Nuri Yurdusev, and Ussama Makdisi, the field's practitioners afford us an interpretive lens to look at the various pragmatic, performative, and operative aspects of Ottoman diplomacy. But the extant studies typically approach the Ottoman foreign affairs as coefficient of regional politics and produce somewhat binary representations of it, eventually reducing the field to little more than an intellectual endeavor wherein the debates continue over whether the Ottoman polity was sultanic or consultative, unilateral or interdependent, conventional or unconventional, and ecumenical or pragmatic. By proposing foreign affairs as an area that is underrated and yet important, relevant, and worth systemic attention, I apply process-tracing, interpretive, script theory, and comparative modeling to contemporary, international, and imperial archival sources with focus on the dynamics of Ottoman affairs from 1789 to 1902. It is my contention that the Ottoman state edifice developed over time a range of holistic, heuristic, and experiential visions. For analytical purposes, I classify these visions into three schools as the Mahmudian, Mejidian, and Hamidian traditions. My presentation will define what these traditions are, how they mean in context, and why they failed -- all with a view to conceptualizing the implications of these traditions in the late and post Ottoman empire.



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