



## The Ottomans in Greece – Archaeological Perspectives

Prof John Bintliff, Leiden University

"A popular but still frequently even academic view of the Ottoman era in Greece, after 1453, is of an unrelieved era of wicked Turkish oppression lasting till 1830 or longer. Amongst the supposed characteristics of the period are:

1. A population nadir which stays low throughout the period
2. The Greek population flees at once to the hills to plan their C18th-C19th commercial rise and then the Revolution
3. The Ottomans were a barbarous people with little cultural achievement in Greece, and worse still – exercising a negative effect on the gifted Greeks by banning the construction of churches and converting most existing examples to mosques
4. No notable changes over time occurred within the Ottoman period of rule except due to the initiatives of their subjects

But oddly, the Ottomans' own perception of themselves was one of a cultivated society, whilst even the briefest trip to Old Istanbul is enough to convince anyone of their undoubted artistic and architectural talents. Actually both the traditional Greek and West European view of the Ottoman Empire stem from the final era of its decline, where indeed there was widespread arbitrary violence and corruption, a lack of economic, technological and political progress compared to the West. However, in the C16th and C17th Westerners had a very different, and frequently admiring view of the Ottoman world.

This very different and nuanced history is absolutely in line with the now very considerable information available from the Ottoman Imperial archives, and the gradually rising but still very rare archaeological data from rural and urban studies from within the Empire."

## **The Notion of 'Divide' between East and West in the Late Ottoman Empire**

**Dr Benjamin Fortna, SOAS, University of London**

Given the importance of the late Ottoman era for the 'creation,' 'making,' or 'emergence' of the Modern Middle East (the choice of metaphor can often act as a gauge for the degree of agency historians have wished to attribute to the area's inhabitants), the way that period is depicted is crucial to our understanding of the region, both then and now. Perhaps the most telling aspect of the history of the modern Middle East is the degree to which that amorphous but potent phenomenon known as 'the West' has been credited-or blamed-for effecting change in the region. While it would be foolhardy in the extreme to imagine the history of the region without the many Western influences over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is also deeply problematic to attribute too much power to Western agency. A version of the region's history in which the most important thoughts, actions, transactions, and mentalities are depicted as reactions to external stimuli is unsatisfactory.

This paper focuses on the prevalent notion of divide or split in late Ottoman society in the historiography of the period and attempts to reveal some of the pitfalls that such a problematic notion entails. As a corrective, I try to demonstrate that even among the groups and institutions most often cited as symptomatic of such a putatively bifurcated society in the rather selective account that amounts to the received wisdom on the subject, namely, in some of the most westernized elite and elite organizations where we would expect such a reading to be most clearly reflected, even there we find deep contradictions which render the entire notion practically-and practicably-untenable. The paper juxtaposes the expectations raised by the notion of divide against examples of late Ottoman experience drawn from three different areas: 1) the political opposition movements; 2) the new schools frequently assumed to have reoriented an entire generation of Ottoman subjects towards West; and 3) lived experience of the Istanbul elite. The conclusion is that late Ottoman society was far more able to assimilate political, social and cultural difference than their observers have given it credit.

## **Dialogues between Christians and Muslims in the Abbassid era**

**Dr Erica Hunter, SOAS, University of Cambridge**

The Abbassid era was exemplified by a spirit of intellectual discussion with the new round city of Baghdad, becoming the heart of a great thrust of Muslim enquiry. The paper focuses on the two-day dialogue that took place in 782 CE between the Patriarch of the Church of the East, Timothy I (incumbency 779-823) and the Caliph, al Mahdi. Down the centuries, both Syriac and Arabic accounts transmitted this renowned debate, which analysed tenets of the Christian and Moslem faiths and made an integral contribution to the formulation of definitions of orthodoxy that emerged in the Abbassid period. Whilst Islam and Christianity were bonded by a shared sense of orthodoxy, paradoxically the definitions that emerged in the Abbassid period were applied to discriminate against people who

were perceived to be zanadika ‘heretics’ – an umbrella term applied to Zoroastrians, Sufi extremists, heterodox Mu’tazila and a variety of dualists.

## **Geographic Inscriptions**

**Dr Martina Rieker, American University Cairo**

This paper is an engagement with recent attempts to critically engage the organization of knowledge production around geographical area. Within these ongoing vibrant debates this paper specifically engages the trajectories of Mediterranean Studies over the past twenty years with a particular focus on the impact of 9/11 on attempts to rethink critical geographic inscriptions. The argument developed in this paper begins with an engagement with the early 1900s UNESCO sponsored debates on how to commemorate 1492 outside the overdetermined colonial/postcolonial, victim/aggressor narratives. While acknowledging the violences of the past, the UNESCO ‘memory of the future projects’ that developed out of these debates were concerned with how one might gain new critical purchase within a politics of commemoration. In other words, echoing what the Jamaican critic James Scott would later term the need to go beyond the endless repetitions of a Saidian move into articulating scholarship for an “after the postcolonial.’ The ‘Memory of the Future Debates’ and the most-well-known initiative that emerged from them, “The Routes of Dialogic Projects” were covalent with a parallel debate within the academy often termed Ocean Studies . This paper traces the re-emergence of Mediterranean Studies (especially Southern Mediterranean Studies) from the margins of French Anthropology in the 1980s to a critical tool through which to rethink a contemporary geographical imagination. Drawing Appadurai (2000) and Sassen’s (2001) work on the research imagination, this paper concludes with a series of critical questions as to the trajectories of post-area studies geographic inscriptions in the post 9/11 world.

## **Cultural Identity and Assimilation in a Christian-Muslim Frontier Society: The Case of Medieval Islam’s Caucasian Marchlands**

**Dr A.C.S. Peacock, University of Cambridge**

The interaction of the Islamic and Christian worlds is an area that has long attracted attention. The Crusaders in the Levant, the Arabs in Spain and Italy, and the Ottomans in Europe have attracted scholarly attention since the nineteenth century, and recent years have seen ever more nuanced and sophisticated contributions to our understanding of the complex and subtle relations between these worlds. The border between Byzantium and Islam in southern Anatolia, a particularly crucial frontier for both the Caliphate and the Byzantine empire, has been the inspiration for some particularly insightful scholarship. Yet another vital frontier region has rarely attracted much attention – the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia. There can be no doubt of the importance of the Caucasus as a transit point linking east and west throughout the Middle Ages. It was one of the principal routes for the transport of the valuable north European exports, especially furs, for which the mediaeval Islamic world proved to have and insatiable appetite. Even western travellers heading to the east, missionaries or traders such as William of Rubruck had to pass through the Caucasus. It was also

of great strategic importance. In the early Middle Ages, the Caucasus formed the frontier between the Caliphate and the great rival empire of the Khazars of the south Russian steppe, while later it was constantly disputed between the two great Mongol empires of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Ilkhanate of Iran and the Golden Horde in Russia.

Yet the Caucasus was not merely a contested borderland and a trade route. Its indigenous peoples formed a substantial reservoir of manpower in the armies of numerous pre-modern Muslim states, most notably the Fatimids of Egypt and the Levant and the Ottoman and Safavid empires. Substantial numbers of Muslims settled in the Caucasus, starting with the Arab tribes who moved to Armenia, Daghestan and the Caspian coast under the Umayyads in the seventh and eighth centuries. Later, in the eleventh century, the Caucasus, especially Georgia and contiguous territories in Eastern Anatolia, was the first region in the Middle East to be settled in substantial numbers by the nomadic Seljuq Turks. Whereas in most of the Middle East such processes eventually resulted in Turkicisation or at least islamisation – in most of Anatolia, for instance, despite the persistence of a substantial Christian population, especially in urban areas, until the population exchanges of the twentieth century – in the Caucasus independent Christian kingdoms managed to survive these waves of migration. Many of these were obscure and petty principalities, such as Siunik in Armenia, whose survival may perhaps be attributed to their remoteness and poverty, making them unattractive targets for the ambitions of neighbouring Muslim states. However, this was by no means always the case, and the rise of the Kingdom of Georgia under the Bagratid dynasty in the eleventh century gave the Middle East an indigenous Christian power capable of challenging the Muslim hegemony in the region. In the hundred and fifty years before the Kingdom's conquest and division by the Mongols, Georgia expanded to control directly or indirectly most of the south Caucasus, and posed a major threat to the interests of the major Muslim states of the day, the Ayyubids of the Levant and the Great Seljuqs and their successors in Iran. Nonetheless, this cannot be seen as a simple confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Georgia's very power was based on structures and institutions borrowed from its Muslim neighbours, its army contained substantial Arab contingents, and like Muslim ones, was based on a royal guard of slave soldiers, and Georgia's Muslim population continued to be favoured by its rulers who used Arabic as a diplomatic language and Georgian kings were praised by Muslim court poets in Persian verse.

## **Different people, different paradigm? Egypt and beyond in the Late Bronze Age**

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A consideration of the nature and extent of regional interaction in the Eastern Mediterranean and South-West Asia during the Late Bronze Age (c. 1500-1000 BC) presents us with a pattern of relationships which have a distinctly different emphasis to the bipolar Muslim/Christian, East/West paradigm which (with its

own particular nuances) has dominated modes of thinking about the region for most of the last two millennia.

This paper will focus on a number of key elements within this interaction, concentrating particularly on the period c.1400-1200 BC when, arguably, the extent, intensity and range of participation in regional contacts was greater than at any time before the modern era. In particular this paper will take Egypt during the reigns of Amenhotep III to Ramesses II as the starting point to consider the key topics of the limitations of the evidence, participation, and agency.

I will argue that the key determinants in relationships between participants in the region during this period were access to raw materials and technological innovation. By contrast, political and religious ideology were comparatively unimportant issues as far as international interactions were concerned, despite being significant factors in the internal presentation of external contacts.

## **Hellenism, Orientalism, Imperialism**

**Dr Phiroze Vasunia, University of Reading**

How has Hellenism informed the relationship between East and West? This paper examines the construction of the East/West dichotomy through three moments in the linked histories of Orientalism and colonialism. First, it examines the relationship of Greece to Egypt in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and investigates Greek representations of Egypt from a cross-cultural perspective. The Greeks were obsessed with Egypt and they discussed the other culture in a variety of texts including Herodotus' *History*, the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides, and the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle. What is at stake in these portrayals of the other and how do views of Egypt intersect with the Greek concept of the barbarian? What are the ideological and cultural pressures that shape the relationship between Greece and Egypt? Second, the paper asks how modern discussions of Hellenism repeat many of the ancient configurations of identity, otherness, and cultural self-definition. Rather than understand the hybrid and fluid nature of cross-cultural interaction, some current notions of Hellenism map out the ancient dichotomy between Greek and barbarian onto modern distinctions between West and East. The paper asks how we might move beyond seeing Hellenism not just as forceful imposition but as a part of a complex negotiation between different cultures. Third, the paper looks at the role that modern colonialism has played in the shaping of Hellenism and indicates how the construction of the Hellenic past over the last two hundred years of imperialism and colonialism has left an impact on the scholarship. How has the study of antiquity been affected by colonialism and how to rethink the history of scholarship in the light of this history? I suggest that some of the defining elements of the East/West dichotomy can be understood more deeply if they are situated within the history of colonialism.

## Pirenne, Muhammad and Bohemond: before Orientalism

Dr Mark Whittow, University of Oxford

Henri Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1937; English translation 1939) is one of the seminal works of history written in the twentieth century. His argument that it was the Arab conquests of the seventh century, not the Germanic invasions of the fourth and fifth that broke the unity of the Mediterranean world remains valid. A world where what is now the Near East made up the core territories of an empire whose periphery lay on the Rhine and Danube was replaced by a new superpower, whose centre lay in Iraq, a much reduced Roman empire (medieval Byzantium) centred on Constantinople, and a new Frankish kingdom with its heartland in what had once been Rome's Rhineland periphery. Pirenne's famous dictum, "Without Islam, the Frankish Empire would have probably never existed, and Charlemagne, without Muhammad, would be inconceivable" deserves a place in any dictionary of twentieth-century quotations.

The new umma saw the world in terms of the Dar al-Islam and the rest, the Dar al-Harb. Even if the latter was not actually an abode of war, it was a space filled with fantastic and exotic barbarities that reinforced the Muslim sense of superiority. The old Roman empire had the hard task of adjusting to reduced circumstances. The Romans on the Bosphorus reinvented themselves as a New Israel, a Chosen People, whose embattled circumstances were proof of God's favour. They were punished for their sins because God cared about them.

Only in the west did past perspectives survive. For a Franco-Latin world whose geography was still shaped by the Bible and the texts of classical antiquity the Mediterranean remained unbroken in the imagination if not in reality. Indeed the lack of contact with reality rendered imagined unity easier to preserve.

In 1096 an expedition that would come to be seen as the First Crusade marched to the east. Where they were going was not a strange and new world, but the most familiar landscape imaginable; a Biblical world whose names were better known than anywhere other than their most immediate local surroundings. For the likes of Bohemond it was as if Muhammad had not happened.

The creation of the Crusader states did not prefigure nineteenth and twentieth century imperialism; still less did Crusader attitudes exemplify what Edward Said dubbed 'Orientalism'. But the Crusading experience did in due course fundamentally alter the Latin vision of the Near East. By the thirteenth century its inhabitants were no longer seen in uncomplicated terms as 'our brother Christians in the east'; a new sense of a Europe north and west of the Mediterranean had come into being. To paraphrase Pirenne, "Without the Crusades Europe – the Europe of the European Union – would probably never have existed."