battle (at Meszökerestes). They were not enough, however, to persuade Mehmed to repeat his appearance, for though the war continued for another decade, no sultan appeared again at the front.

Finally, after thirteen years of struggle, the two sides felt exhausted enough to treat, and in 1606 they signed the Treaty of Szitvatorok. Neither side took major lasting achievements away from this war. Still, it was becoming clear that the balance of military might, which had for decades favored the Ottomans, was not so great as it formerly had been. The Habsburgs relieved themselves of the obligation to annual tribute, which they had paid since 1547, and the Holy Roman emperor now called the sultan his "brother" rather than his "father."

The Ottomans saved face by gaining some fortresses, taking back some castles, and reasserting control over the Danubian principalities. By this time domestic strife had grown very disruptive and disturbing to Ottoman self-confidence, so much so, that when the sultan had a grand royal mosque built (the Sultanahmet or Blue Mosque), it commemorated not the "victory" over the infidel but the suppression of Anatolian rebels in 1609.

8. The "Ottoman Decline" in Comparative Perspective

There are several reasons why the year 1600 is an appropriate point to conclude this overview. For one thing, the two previous decades were a time of major unrest, beginning in the countryside and known as the "Jelali revolts." In 1589 a long series of *kul* uprisings began when soldiers objected to being paid in debased coins, and, with increasing participation by city people, they continued through the next two centuries. Then, too, after a century of fairly stable money and prices, in the 1570s began a monetary instability, fueled by debasements and since 1585 by rising prices. Many villages were abandoned, their people gone to the cities, and migrations led to problems of provisioning and disrupted guild discipline in the cities.

The End of the Classical Age
It is too early to say what lay behind these phenomena, and in particular too early to blame the "rise of the Atlantic economy" for the late sixteenth-century Ottoman downturn. Even if the influx of American silver could be blamed for monetary instability, it was not behind the rural disturbances. As for population, it is hardly clear that the countryside was overpopulated, though bachelor males are heavily represented in the late sixteenth-

century urban tax surveys. If there was excess labor in the countryside, why were so many villages abandoned? One possible answer is fiscal pressure from the growing state, the chronology of which is uncertain.

Although fiscal oppression must have played a role in rural unrest, as it did in early modern France, the disturbances in Asia Minor were not peasant revolts. The rebels recruited primarily from temporarily unemployed mercenaries and displaced or disenchanted soldiers, who became all the more dangerous, as the use of firearms spread. Behind their actions lay not population growth but declining opportunities for employment by the state. The end of expansion implied that there were no new *timars* to be distributed. The value of the *sipahi* cavalry, moreover, declined with the spread of lighter firearms, and the state, as in France, resorted to tax farming and in fact reduced the number of *timars* granted. It preferred to enlarge the *kul* forces, who, unlike the *timar*-holders, were paid in cash, and to hire mercenaries on a temporary basis. The latter, out of work at war's end, would in earlier times have become frontier warriors—like the Cossacks, Uskoks, and conquistadors in other lands. They now turned to banditry and rebellion.

It all added up to both a decline and a perception of decline. The leading statesmen did not react with despair, but their confidence—like the official coinage—was being debased, and "decline and reform" grew into one of the most fertile themes in contemporary Ottoman culture. The whole complex had much in common with what was happening in contemporary Spain, where, as Ranke wrote, there came a new era "in which the Spanish monarchy, far from asserting its force over friends and foes, was rent and sub-divided by foreign politics, . . . and in which the Ottomans ceased to be feared, and began themselves to fear. These changes, we know, constitute, in no small degree, the distinctive features that mark, respectively, two periods in modern history."[33]

The Problem of the "Ottoman Decline"

Was this age, therefore, the beginning of an "Ottoman decline"? Until recently, it was taken for granted that this was so by Fernand Braudel, for example, whose *Mediterranean* describes an Ottoman empire in decline by the end of the sixteenth century. In *Civilization and Material Life*, written some years later, Braudel was ready to declare the same state "a viable entity until the nineteenth century." He thereby simply reflected the changing winds in Ottoman historiography, in which the notion of decline has become one of the most highly contested aspects of what increasingly looks like a dated paradigm. The revisionism has some obvious implications for the historiography of the era treated in this chapter.

For one thing, traditionally the course of Ottoman history from 1400 to 1600 has been conceived in terms of power and glory which masked a series of failures that led eventually to decline and ultimately to the underdevelopment of the entire Middle East. There was military grandeur, true, political stability, and some prosperity, but no capitalism, oceanic expansion, printing press (until 1721), Renaissance, or Reformation. The subjection of this perspective to critical revision nowadays is part of the much larger reassessment of the views associated with "orientalism," the viewing of the east in terms of what it is not, i.e., the west.

New Perspectives on Ottoman and European History

The present state of revisionist research makes possible only tentative remarks, and it is important not to lapse into the apologetic position of "proving" that the Ottomans were just the same as the west, or just as advanced. Yet, some preliminary findings enable us to begin moving away from essentializing contrasts.

The European conceptualization of the Ottoman system as an "anti-Europe"—Braudel's term—is most deeply rooted in the sphere of politics: freedom vs. despotism, the rule of law vs. tyranny, and free property vs. state ownership. This vision of "Europe and the Orient" has been since the sixteenth century a most persistent conception, and it remains influential in the study of politics, economies, and histories. One well-received recent work on comparative politics, for example, convincingly develops the point that there existed a rule of law in late medieval and early modern Europe. The writer then adds:

> Many opponents of the prince were imprisoned or had property seized without due process. In speaking of the rule of law in this time, it is only meant that such trangressions, if routine, entailed the probability of noble and burgher opposition, from which monarchs and emperors of the Middle East and Orient had little to fear. The edifice of law was in effect an objective, structural restraint on the crown and other powerholders.[34]

The final point, about the Orient, is not developed or argued, it is simply a given of history. Another writer, Perry Anderson, deals with the Ottoman state as an "Asian colossus," whose "contours provide a strange contrast with those of the European Absolutism that was contemporary with it. The economic bedrock of the Osmanli despotism was the virtually complete absence of private property in land."[35] His evidence for this state-

ment, it turns out, consists of disappointingly uncritical readings of early
modern political writers: Niccolò Machiavelli ("they are all slaves"), Jean
Bodin ("when [the timariots] die, their heirs can inherit only their movable
goods"), and Francis Bacon ("*nobility attempers sovereignty*").

What European writers never appreciated was the presence of social in-
stitutions and practices that delineated a public sphere of political negotia-
tion. Guilds represented their members before the *kadis*, market supervi-
sors, and agents of the central government; Sufi orders, in the persons of
influential *sheykhs*, spoke in the name of some sector of public opinion;
and the spokesmen of the charitable institutions (*waqfs*) and non-Muslim
communities did not just bow and comply. In this category, too, belong
other institutions and practices, such as village headmen, whose roles are
little understood. Enough is known, however, to make untenable facile
references to a despotic apparatus which penetrated all levels of public and
social life. There was a finely tuned legal machine with widely shared
standards and symbols of justice, which totally escaped students of orien-
tal politics from Machiavelli to Max Weber. Indeed, the Ottoman empire
was not unlike the later Roman empire in that, although it is convention-
ally depicted in terms of corruption and tyranny, its upper classes and
some of its subjects considered it to live under the rule of law.[36]

Limits on the practice of absolutism doubtless differed between the clas-
sical Ottoman state and, say, seventeenth-century France. Mehmed II, for
example, the most "despotic" of the Ottoman sultans in this era, under-
took an extensive program of confiscations justified by appeal to the pub-
lic good, but his program had to be rescinded. His grandson, Selim, whose
reputation is embodied in his epithet, "the Grim" or "the Terrible," could
not return to Mehmed's policy but had to live with Bayezid II's compro-
mise, since it was based on the law of the realm and the moral standards of
his culture. Instead, Selim proclaimed an equally despotic program of con-
verting Istanbul's remaining Greek churches into mosques. When he justi-
fied this step by the argument that the *sharia* permitted the confiscation of
the properties of non-Muslims, his legal advisers said that his reading of
the *sharia* was excessively literal.

The growth of Ottoman absolutism during the fifteenth and sixteenth
centuries might well be seen in a larger context. It was characterized by
such common early modern features as bureaucratization, legal codifica-
tion, and the search for more efficient tax collection. Might the Ottoman
and European trends have been linked by similar forces or even contacts?

Contacts between the Ottomans and Europe

Recent Ottoman historiography tends to emphasize the porosity of the boundaries between the eastern Mediterranean world and Europe and to reject essentialization of the contrast between the two worlds. Trade, migrations, diplomacy, and even war (and enslavement of prisoners) crossed the boundaries. Trade continued the late medieval pattern of Italian merchants enjoying charters and privileges in the Levantine port cities that connected to the caravan routes and kept growing. The sixteenth century brought new actors, from different European countries, onto this scene, who obtained similar charters. By the end of the era, the Ottoman state recognized the appearance of the early modern world's little tigers by extending trading privileges to Queen Elizabeth of England's subjects in 1581 and to the Dutch early in the next century. European traders, however, by no means displaced Ottoman merchants, nor were the latter exclusively non-Muslims (as nineteenth-century accounts alleged).

The sixteenth century also saw the revival of the land routes across the Balkans, traveled by European and Ottoman merchants, Muslim and non-Muslim, and by mid-century the Levant's connections to the Asian trade also revived from the initial shock from the Portuguese voyaging around Africa. This may be the reason why the Ottomans did not continue to challenge Portugal for control of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Generally speaking, Ottoman trade policies centered on infrastructural support for trade, on the securing of ports and sea and land routes and on the construction of bazaars and caravansarais—naturally with expectations of profit to the treasury. Several governors thus endowed Aleppo for its role as a major entrepot of the silk trade; Sarajevo and Novi Bazar were created partly to serve the trans-Balkan carrying trade; and a Jewish merchant, an Ottoman district governor in Dalmatia, and the Venetian authorities cooperated to build up Split as a rival to Dubrovnik.

Beyond these contributions to the infrastructure of trade, plus provisioning which favored imports, we have as yet no larger picture of Ottoman commercial policy. Recent emphasis on early modern developments in world trade, plus the growing understanding of eventual western dominance as the outcome of an interactive process, makes urgent our need for comparative studies of commercial policies. We know little or nothing about the merchants' practices or about the legal institutions at their disposal, and the question of technological diffusion through commerce also remains to be explored. It is nonetheless already becoming clear that in the sixteenth or even the seventeenth century, the eventual supremacy of European merchants was by no means a forgone conclusion.

A closely related topic concerns science and technology. Sixteenth-century observers, certainly, would not have understood the modern orientalist depiction of the Ottomans as an essentially inward-looking society, which did not want to learn, and, but for a few enlightened statesman, would never have learned, from the west. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Charles V's envoy who visited the Ottoman realm in the mid-sixteenth century, wrote that

> no nation in the world has shown greater readiness than the Turks to avail themselves of the useful inventions of the foreigners, as is proved by their employment of cannons and mortars, and many other things invented by Christians. They cannot, however, be induced as yet to use printing, or to establish public clocks, because they think that their scriptures would no longer be scriptures if they were printed, and that, if public clocks were introduced, the authority of their muezzins and their ancient rites would be thereby impaired.[37]

The inventions themselves aside, why did Busbecq write only of the Ottomans' readiness to borrow and adapt things invented by others? The question contains two issues, one about technological innovation and the other about openness to using the inventions of others. Was Busbecq biassed in that he failed to concede the former to the Ottomans? Probably not. However, the role of the craftsman, the technician, and the innovator in Ottoman society, and attitudes toward their skills, have hardly been investigated, and what is known does not support a categorical statement.

When did science and technology become "European" from an Ottoman point of view? The Ottomans do not, for instance, seem to have associated gunpowder and firearms with the Europeans during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In oceanic discoveries, however, a European advantage was recognized. Piri Reis, the Ottoman sailor-cartographer who in 1513 drew, following a Columbus map, one of the earliest surviving pictures of the New World's coastline, observed that the infidels had recently scored some enviable advances in geographical knowledge. He then moved immediately to a type of argument later to appear repeatedly in Islamic westernization discourse, that the new discoveries were based on ancient learning from a book stolen from the Near East. In other words, to import infidel knowledge was really just to reappropriate one's own. Once again, the evidence suggests that the whole notion of "westernization," implying an essential difference between east and west, needs to be rethought for the whole period before the eighteenth century.

It is true, certainly, that Mehmed II was more interested in what the "Franks" were doing than most of his successors were, but this does not mean that the Ottoman court's interest in European culture can be reduced to a linear process of decline since his time. Piri Reis, for example, produced his map not on command but on his own initiative as a navigator, having acquired the necessary information from the fluid world of the Mediterranean sailors. He did present it to Sultan Selim upon the conquest of Egypt, which is why it is preserved in the palace library.

Some of the interest in things western was revived at court during the first third of Süleyman's reign. Under the grand vezirate of Ibrahim Pasha (1523-36) in particular, the links seem to have been active to various European artists, sources of luxury goods, and European mercantile communities at Istanbul. A son of a Venetian doge, for example, was one of the sultan's closest advisors and his appointee to oversee the most prestigious new conquest, Ottoman Hungary. The grand vezir himself, a native of the island of Parga in Venetian territory, was largely responsible for the good standing of this son of a doge and more generally for the links with European politics and culture. Ibrahim watched "ballet" performances with classical themes held in the Frankish quarter of Istanbul.

The Ottoman Identity

Yet, to look at contacts and interaction is not enough, for the main point is to go beyond construing these relations in terms of two clearly delineated and separate entities—Europeans and Turks. We must reconstruct the Ottoman point of view, taking into account that inclusiveness was one of the most basic forces in the Ottoman identity.

Ottoman inclusiveness should not be attributed only to the *kuls* of the Porte, themselves of non-Turkish birth, for many who joined the Ottoman enterprise and acquired *timars* or other military or civil posts also came from non-Turkish, non-Muslim backgrounds. They all eventually became as Ottoman as anybody else. This fact is of vital significance for our interpretation of the political struggles within the Ottoman elite, which are often anachronistically seen in ethnic terms as conflicts between the *devshirme* and the old Turcoman families, that is, between non-Turks and Turks. Many *timar*-holders were also of non-Turkish origins, as were many members of the *ulema*, the ranks of which were not closed to those born to, say, Arabic-, Kurdish-, or Greek-speaking families.

The Ottomans, after all, did not call themselves "Turks," nor their land "Turkey," for these were European terms which ethnicized—much as the eastern use of "Franks" for Europeans did—what was basically a supra-

ethnic identity. Indeed, the still current uses of "Ottoman" and "Turk" or "the Ottoman empire" and "Turkey" as interchangeable terms is comparable to the use of "Italy" for the Roman empire or "Italians" for the ancient Romans.[38]

The worst consequence of continuing this ethnicization of the Ottoman tradition is that it masks the imperial character of Ottoman history. One illustration must serve to support this point. Sinan Pasha, baptized "Scipione" as son of a Genoese nobleman and a Turkish woman, was captured by Muslim seamen and presented to the Ottoman court, where he grew up and graduated to a distinguished career as admiral and vezir. A loyal and successful Ottoman and a Muslim, he maintained a lively correspondence with family and friends in his native Genoa.

This does not mean that the problematic aspects of the relationships between Ottomans and Europeans disappear. For one thing, there is no Ottoman counterpart to the voluminous literature in various European languages about "the Turks." Although this difference is important to understanding the different roles of education and knowledge about the other in the age when the two worlds competed for hegemony, it cannot be reduced to an Ottoman lack of "curiosity" about foreign lands, as often is done. A Venetian or French diplomat may have needed to learn Turkish, but the Ottoman court was easily supplied with servants competent in European languages. For example, when the court interpreter Ferhad, a Hungarian by origin, died in 1576, his son was brought to Istanbul from his *timar* in northern Anatolia and given his father's position, because of his knowledge of Hungarian affairs and the pertinent languages.[39]

Focus on such examples, of course, makes it easy to confine the area of shared discourse to those who were of European origin, that is, to an "anomalous" stratum of renegades. The point is that the renegades could strike Ottoman roots so easily just because they were not anomalous, because they already had much in common with numerous others in this society, in which migration and conversion were common. There was a shared discourse even beyond the migrants and converts, because there were shared interests.[40]

Shared Discourse of the Ottoman and European Worlds
The roots of shared discourse and interests lay not only in interactions but in a complex of common traditions of the ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean civilizations and of the Abrahamic religions. For example, the Jewish physicians who came into the Ottoman empire from Iberia after 1492, whatever their unique qualities, were also steeped in the familiar

humoralism of Galenic medicine. Emigrés and visitors from Europe would hardly feel totally lost, moreover, in an intellectual world that shared a respect for ancient Greek learning in general and Aristotle in particular. A late sixteenth-century wave of political pamphleteering, for example, included a Turkish translation (from Arabic) of Aristotle's *Politics*.

Ottoman scholars were not necessarily removed from the current scene of science in Europe either. When Taqi ad-Din arrived at Istanbul from Egypt in 1577, he not only brought a deep knowledge of medieval Muslim astronomy, which the Europeans also knew, but he was reputed to be aware of developments among the Franks. Does this make Ottoman astronomy as "advanced" as European astronomy? Not necessarily. Among other things, we must note that Istanbul's observatory was not, as other establishments of that nature were, turned to long-term astronomical observation—it was pulled down sometime after 1579. The efforts of Taqi ad-Din were up-to-date for his time—his measurements of the supernova of 1579 were as accurate as Tycho Brahe's, and they should not be judged by the standards of the subsequent Scientific Revolution in Europe.[41]

In religious thought and philosophy, too, some things were shared. Despite the differing traditions of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic piety, parallel developments occurred. For example, the neoplatonic revival of late medieval Europe has its counterpart in the Muslim world, where Sufi metaphysics, also imbued with neoplatonism, dominated intellectual life. Further, the waves of apocalypticism in Europe and in the Ottoman world during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century were not only synchronous, they apparently were in contact with one another.[42] The heresies, too, had much in common, else how could Bedreddin have attracted such strong followings among the Christians of the Balkans?

Shared Rhythms of the Ottoman and European Worlds
Beyond shared elements of culture, the shared rhythms of a number of Eurasian commonwealths lend some justification to the term, "the early modern world." The Ottoman empire partook of many of the changes generally thought of as characteristic of early modernity, including some of the most important economic and social ones. Population growth and urbanization, along with commercialization and inflation of prices, affected both the eastern and the western Mediterranean regions. The Middle East, which lay between different zones of the Old World, naturally felt the acceleration of world trade. One does not have to be a monetarist, for example, to acknowledge the impact of American silver via Europe on Ottoman markets in the later sixteenth century. Money flowed across all borders,

and the German *groschen* lent its name to the *gurush*, which the Ottomans used for centuries.[43] Curiously enough, these developments are seen as signs of both European growth and of Ottoman decline.

In Ottoman culture, too, there are clear signs of a "modern" mentality in the sixteenth century. New cultural forms deliberately departed from the past or sought competitive dialogues with the "classics." A group of literati in early sixteenth-century Bursa, for example, decided not to continue reproducing new versions of the same old (Persian and Arabic) stories. One member produced an amusing novella—a sort of tongue-in-cheek counterpart of Martin Guerre's story—in which the themes of love, communication, and identity are explored in the midst of an original narrative. This "Bursan realism" also gave rise to new uses of a recently created Persian genre, the versified "city thrillers," of which dozens were set in western Anatolian and Balkan cities during the sixteenth century. Often they open with descriptions of monuments, soon moving on to depictions of flirtatious young men and women.

The Ottoman imperial identity and ideology nonetheless found its principal expression not in literature but in monumental urban architecture. The Ottomans took pride in grand cityscapes, especially the internationally famous one of Istanbul, and dotted them with an architecture of "fresh idiom," as one Ottoman writer described the style of Mehmed II's complex at Istanbul. Recent studies have begun revising the traditional judgment, that Ottoman architecture was a traditional and non-western style, through the study of its connections with contemporary building in Renaissance Italy. The best Ottoman work, which was achieved around 1550 by an architect called Sinan, can be seen as part of broader Mediterranean architecture of the Renaissance era, which consciously departed from medieval traditions and looked for freshness of expression. Sinan's autobiography leaves no doubt that he engaged in self-conscious dialogue and competition with the monumental traditions of late Antiquity and early Byzantium.

The sixteenth-century growth of schools, based on notably the charitable institution of the *waqf*, and the spread of written at the expense of oral culture, notably in histories and hagiographies, indicate a growth of literacy and suggest a secularization of culture. The maxim, religion subsumes everything in Islam, is generally invalid, but particularly so for the Ottoman empire, which was built over a long period of experimentation in frontier circumstances. The Ottomans emerged from this experience with a cultural bricolage of classical Islamic legal traditions with Inner Asian and Byzantine elements, and the syncretic nature of their achievement is es-

pecially clear in the realm of law, where the *kadis* were expected to adjudicate cases on the basis of the sacred *sharia*, local custom, and the written codes of *kanun*.

Elements of desacralization can also be observed in social life, notably in the transition from *ahi* confraternities to guilds, which combined traditional religious elements with a professional life which was trans-religious, at least in the trades practiced by adherents of more than one faith.

The most obviously desacralizing agent in Ottoman life of this period, however, was the coffeehouse.[44] The bright idea, according to Ottoman historians, came to two enterprising Syrian merchants, and the first coffeehouses appeared in Istanbul in the 1550s. They were soon all the rage, for reasons which remain little understood, but the initial reaction of the *ulema* allows no doubt that these new sites of sociability were considered dangerously beyond the control of the *sharia*. Women, of course, could not enter the coffeehouses, but they did use the public baths, which had similar social functions.

The sixteenth century also saw a widening gulf between elite and popular cultures, as the latter's beliefs and practices came under a new criticism from the former. Some of this criticism, perhaps, was related to the more structured orthodoxy required in the classical age, because of the challenge from dissents, especially the Safavid "heresy."

It remains now to ask whether the regional identities in the three Muslim empires of this era—Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal—present us with a parallel to the emergence of proto-national identities in Europe. No unifier ever threatened this configuration, for the Muslim world knew no world conqueror after Timur. The changes between his time and the end of this era are revealed by the accounts of the two peerless travelers of the pre-industrial Muslim world, Ibn Battuta of the fourteenth century and Evliya Chelebi of the seventeenth. Their respective imaginations of "the world to be seen" display quite different sets of criteria. Ibn Battuta left his North African home to see the whole Muslim world and a bit more, going all the way to China. Evliya Chelebi spent even more time on the road and wrote an even longer account, but his horizons remained within the boundaries of the "well-protected Ottoman domains" (with side trips to Austria and Iran). When Chelebi wrote of imaginary journeys, they carried him not to other Islamic lands but to Europe and the Americas.

Paths of Ottoman and European Divergence

The fact that, in reality, these regional-imperial identities were much less tightly woven than were the proto-nationalities of Europe leads us to rec-

ognize the divergent elements in the histories, both in- and outside the Islamic world. Among the three major Muslim empires, to begin with, only the Iranian state maintained its integrity of territory and identity during the era of nation-states. The Ottoman empire, by contrast, dissolved and was dissolved into more than twenty nation-states, a process of which no end is yet in sight.

The religious realm also displays important divergences. At first glance the sundering of Catholic Christendom and the splitting of Sunni Islamdom seem similar as well as being contemporaneous. The Protestant Reformation and Safavid Shi'ism could and were seen as backstabbing treason by the Habsburgs and the Ottomans respectively, who were comparably eager to lead an imagined universal community of the faithful. A closer look, however, reveals very important differences. While the Ottoman repression of heresy could turn very violent, it had no institutional counterpart to the Inquisition. Moreover, the nature of the Safavid challenge demonstrates that the tribal element was still very strong, if declining, in sixteenth-century Middle Eastern politics.[45]

If the survival of tribal nomadism rendered the Middle East less modern than Europe, the treatment of religious minorities apparently better accords with modern expectations of religious toleration. The Ottoman attitude in this respect, however, simply continued the ancient Islamic principle of *dhimma*, the covenant assumed to exist between rulers of the dominant Islamic faith and people of certain other religions. The covenant provided autonomy to different communities in the practice of their faith and in managing their educational and legal affairs, so long as they remained loyal to the state, paid a special head tax, and conformed to certain norms of public behavior.

Beyond these generalities, the historian of the non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman empire must treat gingerly this subject, since it is dangerously open to either abuse or romanticization of the Ottoman legacy. Thus, while Balkan nationalisms have in general tended to portray Ottoman rule as an unqualified yoke, Jewish history has lent itself to images of the Ottoman empire as a pluralist utopia. The truth, needless to say, lies somewhere in between, although, however harsh their experience, until the twentieth century the Ottoman Jews escaped forced conversion or ghettoization.

The place of women in the Ottoman order, one defined largely by Islamic tradition, always seemed strange to westerners. The comparison, explicit or implicit, often begins with the veiling of women and the segregation of genders. Restrictions on the appearance in public and the mobility

of women were certainly much greater in Ottoman society, and in many other Islamic societies, than in Europe. While women may have played important roles in public life, they did so primarily from within the (sultanic or other) household, so that their activities were invisible except to family members and servants. Both Ottoman and European authors long regarded the "intrusion" of harem women in political life—beginning with Hürrem (Roxelana), Süleyman's slave-concubine and, later, wife—as illegitimate and a sign of decadence. Among European travelers, women's invisibility often turned into their sole or main mark of status in the Orient, a fascination not yet dead today. Yet, within the framework of legal inequality of genders, Muslim women did have access to property rights, divorce, conjugal rights, and although most of this lies beyond the scope of our treatment here, it might be noted that the comparison might look very different, if veiling and segregation were of lesser priority. On the other hand, it is true that, in Ottoman Muslim eyes, a social and religious life that brought the sexes face-to-face in a variety of ways clearly constituted a European peculiarity. Prince Jem, the royal hostage, expressed his astonishment at these liberties in a couplet: "Turned out to be strange, this town of Nice / One can get away with anything one commits." One wonders if, for all that, patriarchy was any less imposing among the Europeans.

<p style="text-align:center">░░░</p>

Many issues raised in these paragraphs remain to be studied, some for the first time. Some apparent parallels are bound to be found superficial on closer scrutiny, other, new ones may be yet discovered. There nevertheless remains the inescapable fact that the two worlds, western Christian and Ottoman Muslim, perceived each other as other, and that their historical trajectories *display enough significant divergences to validate this* perception. Yet, it also seems worthwhile to suggest that if the essentialized, bipolar view of the world—western and other—ought to be abandoned, if the unique qualities of modern European history are to be understood, rather than merely assumed, and if representations of otherness are to be studied as historical constructs, then Ottoman history can provide some of the most fruitful comparative agendas to historians of Europe.