OTTOMAN BORDERLANDS
Issues, Personalities
And Political Changes

Edited by

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ISLAM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:
A SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR A NEW INTERPRETATION[*]

Introduction

The place, role and nature of Islam in the Ottoman Empire are closely linked to Turkey's process of modernization beginning with the Tanzimat and continuing through the Republican period to the present. Throughout the process, more correctly termed westernization than modernization, developments have made the issue subject to heated debate. Furthermore, Turkey's democratization problem has been closely related to this significant and highly controversial issue in many ways. For both these reasons, then, it is imperative to try to understand the nature and place of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, as it forms historical background of a "problematic legacy" of the empire.

It must be made clear that I cannot bring such a difficult and multifaceted subject to resolution within the limits of this study, but can only draw attention to the need to include in it the agenda of Ottoman history research. Westernization in Turkey must be dealt with in a broader context, developing a perspective on how it should be approached, handled and regarded as a problematic issue, and the potential difficulties with this broader framework need to be anticipated and discussed at some length, as well.

The Present State of Research and Pending Questions

Well-known works, including H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen's *Islamic Society and the West*,[1] Norman Itzkowitz's *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition*,[2] and Marshall G.S. Hodgson's significant *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*,[3] have dealt with various aspects of the role of Islam in the Ottoman Empire. Certain references in Halil İnalcık's book *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age (1300-1600)*,[4] and in his articles "Islam in the Ottoman Empire"[5] and "State and Ideology under Süleyman I,"[6] can likewise be cited. With

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[1] (Oxford, 1950), 2 vols.
[2] (Chicago, 1972).
[3] (Chicago, 1974), vol. 3.
[4] (London, 1973).
[5] *Cultura Turcica*, 5-7 (1968-1970): 19-29.

the exception of certain references in Hodgson's book, however, all of these studies focus on political-legal structures and institutions, rather than on the ideology, beliefs and practical dimensions of Islam in the Ottoman context. Islam in the Ottoman Empire, in fact, had a complex relationship to the state's domestic and foreign policy, international relations, legal and administrative structure and system of education and to the *madrasas*, the *ulama* class, Sufi circles and the common people. In short, Islam became an ideology and even a politics, encompassing almost the entire public sphere – including the status of non-Muslims – in the Ottoman Empire, and did so there to a greater extent than in any other Islamic state in history.

When the Ottoman Empire took dominion over a significant portion of the lands formerly ruled by the Umayyad and Abbasid Empires and later the Fatimid and Mamluk states, without a doubt, it inherited the political and administrative traditions of these Islamic states. Yet, it also was heir to the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) and appropriated some of its important structural features. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire directly or indirectly appropriated, then synthesized, elements from the political cultures of almost all of the empires in the Middle East that predated it. In other words, the Ottoman Empire, sometimes called the "Third Rome," reflected the state ideology and the political, administrative, financial and legal structures developed by the two classical Islamic empires – the Umayyad and Abbasid – and, through them, those of the Ilhanids, the Sassanid Empire, and finally Eastern Rome. For instance, Kınalızâde Ali Efendi's famous formula of the *Daire-i Adliye* (Circle of Equity), expressed in his *Ahlak-ı Alâyî* (1572),[7] demonstrated the influence of classical Indian interpretations within the Ottoman understanding of state and suzerainty. But the empire was never an exact replica of any of the states or empires from which it inherited elements. Instead, by synthesizing widely diverse influences, the Ottoman Empire became a centralist, military patrimonial state, whose binding force for its three characteristic qualities was Islam, to a greater extent than in any previous Islamic state.

In the final analysis, the Ottoman Empire can be safely regarded as an Islamic state as much as were the Umayyad and Abbasid Empires and other Muslim Persian, Turkish and Arab states. This conclusion rests not on the expression of faith or an ideological approach, but on the following historical and sociological facts:

1. It was founded by a Muslim dynasty
2. The majority of the subjects it relied upon were Muslim
3. Its sultans eventually were accepted and identified by the Muslim public as the caliphs of the entire Islamic world
4. It took upon itself the duties of defending Islam and the Islamic world against the Christian West and of protecting Sunni Islam as the True Faith against heresy within the Abode of Islam

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[6] In his *The Middle East and the Balkans Under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society* (Bloomington, 1993), pp. 70-90.

[7] See Kınalızâde, *Ahlak-ı Alâyî* (Cairo, 1248), p. 49.

5. Its official discourse, especially after the second half of the fifteenth century, promoted the Islamic ideologies of *ghaza* and *jihad*

That the Ottoman Empire also encompassed a great many non-Muslim peoples is insufficient proof that the Ottoman Empire was not an Islamic state, for non-Muslim subjects were found in most Islamic states, including the Umayyad and Abbasid Empires, whose Islamic status is not questioned.

Acceptance of the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic state raises important questions about the nature and position of Islam in the empire. They must be answered, moreover, from the perspectives of the Ottoman government, all sectors of the society and outsiders of the time as well as from the viewpoint of modern historians.

Methodology and Approach

We can begin to show how the Ottoman Empire was seen through the eyes of both Europeans and the rest of the Islamic world by looking at how the "Islamic state" was conceived at the time. To see the extent to which Islam pervaded Ottoman life, two approaches need to be followed. First, it is necessary to evaluate separately the interrelated views and interpretations of Islam held by the officials in charge of the central administration, by the high *ulama* affixed to this bureaucracy, by representatives of Sufism (who generally maintained a certain distance from both of these circles), and finally by the common people. Second, it must be kept in mind that, the views of Islam held by the various sectors were not immutable and did not follow a straight course in changing according to the political and social circumstances.

Were we to assume that the Islamic mentality, understanding and interpretations of Osman and Orhan Gazi and those surrounding them were the same as those in the periods of Sultans Mehmed II, Selim I and Süleyman the Magnificent, and to suppose, for instance, that they followed the same course in the modernization period, we would fall into grave error.

Analyses that neglect either or both of these approaches are contrary to the sociological and/or historical principles but unfortunately are all too common among conservative historians in Turkey.

Islam in the Ottoman Empire was experienced, interpreted and reflected in a multitude of areas. Among them were state ideology, domestic and foreign politics, the administrative system and institutions, the system of jurisprudence, legal and judicial organizations and institutions, the offices of the *shaykhu'l-Islam* (*şeyhülislam*) and the provincial *mufti*s; intellectual life, culture and art, the *ulama* and Sufi sectors and the beliefs of the common folk. Because the range is so great that Ottoman historical research has avoided the topic, there is a clear need for detailed monographs examining each different dimension of Islam's influence in the Ottoman Empire.

Four basic sectors within the Ottoman world produced interpretations of Islam: the central government, or state, the *madrasa*s, or the *ulama*, the *tariqa*s and *tekke*s,

or the Sufi circles, and the folk sector, which was the heir to a traditional culture informed in large part by mythological elements and sustained by cultural factors from the vast milieu stretching from Central Asia to the Balkans. With respect to the last two sectors, it is unavoidable to note the division between *orthodox (Sünnî) Islam* and *heterodox (Rafızî) Islam* although this often escapes attention.

Arising as the result of a long historical process, both heterodox and orthodox Islam still share a common base on some points. For example, among Sunnis, Alevi-Bektashis and even Sufi circles, beliefs and practices associated with a common cult of saints closely resemble each other (with certain exceptions). The *ulama* sector, condemned those beliefs and practices as causes of infidelity and heresy, but despite such opposition, carried out by Ibn Teymiyye in the thirteenth century and Birgivî Mehmed Efendi in the sixteenth, the practices have continued through the centuries. They have not engaged the interest of Ottoman historians, however, attracting only some limited attention in the fields of anthropology and folklore.

Each of the Ottoman world's four sectors interpreted Islam according to its own methods and style. The famous sixteenth-century polemical exchange between Birgivî Mehmed and Ebussuûd Efendi strikingly illustrates the difference in Islamic interpretation between the *ulama* who were not incorporated into the state and the *ulama* who were. To demonstrate the differences between the perception of Islam held by the *ulama* sector and those held by Sufi circles, we can take the controversy over the concept of *vahdet-i vücud (wahdat al-wujud:* unity of existence), upon which were founded the views of most, but not all, Sufi circles on the relationship between creator and created. That concept generally had drawn severe reactions from the *ulama* sector since the first century of Sufism, as in the case of Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922).

Circles falling afoul of Sunni Islam were always met with suspicion and tight control by the Ottoman political power, which had based its state ideology on Sunni Islam. The central administration occasionally suppressed by force the social movements arising within these circles and marginalized the circles themselves by defining them in official documents by terms emphasizing their heterodoxy and heresy, such as *râfızî, zındık, mülhid,* and *hâricî*.[8]

The respective interpretations of Islam produced by the state, *ulama,* Sufi and folk sectors can be labeled political, *Madrasa* or scriptural, *Tekke* or mystical, and popular Islam. The first two existed almost completely within Sunni Islam (as they did in most Islamic states, with the exception of the Fatimids and Safavids), while the last two existed partly within Sunni and partly within heterodox Islam.

There will no doubt be certain objections to such a four-fold analytical method: Were the rules, fundamentals of belief and worship, and code of ethics of Islam not definite? Did the sectors producing these interpretations believe in different Gods and prophets, and worship in different ways? Were the ethical views of these groups so different from each other? If considered carefully, such objections will be seen to

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[8] See, for example, A. Yaşar Ocak, "Türk heterodoksi tarihinde *zındık, hâricî, râfızî, mülhid ve ehl-i bid'at* deyimlerine dair bazı düşünceler," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12 (1981-1982): 507-520.

stem from a superficial approach perceiving Islam as a mere cult and looking at the issue only in terms of beliefs and practices. Islam, however, is not just a cult consisting of faith and worship; it is also a worldview, a mentality, and a vast universal culture resulting from a long historical process. Even in terms of the cultic aspects of Islam, variations have always existed in the understanding, perception, interpretation and practice. Thus, the term "Islam" used here includes the whole of the perceptions, interpretations and practices reflected in the behavior of the above-mentioned sectors, which has taken the form of a guiding worldview, a mentality which has been in time internalized by the believers. In short, what is referred to here is Islam as a culture.

However relative, speculative or hypothetical it may seem at first glance, such a four-fold classification and denomination is in a sense no more than the confirmation of a sociological fact of the history of the Ottoman Empire. An approach based on this classification will greatly facilitate future analyses, and will allow us to view the role and place of Islam in the Ottoman Empire from as broad a perspective as possible, with due respect to the historical complexity of the subject. While the various understandings of Islam produced by these four sociological categories should be the subject of separate monographic studies, Ottoman studies can only be said to be at the outset of this task.[9] We have not even been able to put forth a sound history at the macro level, from the state sector to the folk base, of Sunni Islam, the form of Islam we feel we know best. Moreover, just as there are unfortunately few studies of the mental worlds of these four sectors, we still cannot say that Ottoman Sufism has been analyzed, understood and explained from the perspective I have mentioned, despite the many studies that have been made on the various Sufi orders over the years. This is even the case with Bektashism, the most studied representative of this category. Thus, if we are to believe our contemporary scholars, the Islam of the classical period of Ottoman history came down to the period of modernization "showing hardly any intellectual development." Only when this Islam is broken down into its types can we see how it functioned as a state ideology, a strict legalism and conservatism, an introverted mystical movement and a veneer over folk beliefs. Only further studies in this field can test this hypothesis.

Political Islam

Political Islam can be defined as the reflection of Islam in the domestic and foreign policy and in the diplomacy of the Ottoman state. It was the form Islam took when it became a practical political medium in these spheres, and thus politicized. In short, state Islam was the form Islam took in becoming the state ideology. Political Islam, then, includes the ways in which the Ottoman state administration understood and interpreted Islam as a basic political medium, the kinds of meanings and

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[9] For an assessment of the literature, see A. Y. Ocak, "Türkiye'de 1980 sonrası Osmanlı dönemi akademik nitelikli tasavvuf tarihi araştırmalarına genel bir bakış," (paper presented at Dünden Bugüne Osmanlı Araştırmaları Sempozyumu, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi, İstanbul, 24-25 Şubat 2001), (forthcoming).

functions it assigned to Islam in the process, and the methods it used to develop institutions for this purpose. This interpretation and practice by the state mechanism produced a powerful, peculiar political function for Islam, an example of which is hardly to be found in previous Islamic states. This function is expressed in the terminology used in many official documents issued for both internal and external affairs. A clear example of this is the term *Padişah-ı İslam* used in reference to the Ottoman sultan.

In the Ottoman Empire, there was an assimilation of the state with Islam that had not occurred in any other Islamic state in history, including that of the Abbasids. Islam in the Ottoman Empire became an inseparable part of the state's self-definition, legitimization and political affairs. This was Ottoman Islam, an interconnectedness in which the state was dominant and religion, like everything else, was for the sake of the state. As a result, in the Ottoman understanding of sovereignty, the sultanate was a "divine" institution.

Any appearance that the Ottoman understanding of the sultanate was the legacy of a deeply rooted tradition of Islamic politics is, in my opinion, deceptive. Because the "tradition of Islamic politics" was heavily influenced by the political views of ancient India, the Sassanid Empire and even Eastern Rome,[10] it was a new synthesis of political mentalities and practices considerably altered from the political understanding formed at the time of the Prophet within the theoretical scriptural framework of Islam itself.

The institution of the sultanate actually is not at all compatible with Islam but had been accepted since the Umayyad period as Islam's form of political organization and had been religiously legitimized with the famous fabricated *hadith*, "The sultan is God's shadow on earth (*zıllullah fi'l-âlem*), in whom all creatures take refuge." It should not be underestimated how deeply rooted the influence of this fabricated *hadith* became among the Muslim public over the centuries. Its existence among the Anatolian Seljuks is seen in the passages found on coins and in the inscriptions on architectural works. Thus the sultan and sultanate were accepted in the Ottoman Empire as identical with Islam, and Islam was used as a source of legitimization.[11]

Ottoman Islam bestowed sacredness on the concept of sovereignty and, at the same time, performed an active function by providing a means of governing. Islam's ability to perform this double function developed only as the result of a process that ran parallel to the political, administrative and institutional developments accompanying the state's transformation from a small tribal principality on the Byzantine frontier into an empire.

The politicization of Islam in the Ottoman understanding of state and sovereignty coincides exactly with the period of Mehmed II (the Conqueror). As it formed the mentality of the empire that was making its center of dominion the old Byzantine capital of Constantinople, Islam took on an ideological, politicized, and

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[10] See Halil İnalcık, "Kutadgu Bilig'de Türk ve İran siyaset nazariye ve gelenekleri," in *Reşit Rahmeti Arat İçin* (Ankara, 1976), pp. 259-271.

[11] On this, see Tursun Beğ, *Tarih-i Ebu'l Feth*, ed. Mertol Tulum (İstanbul, 1977), pp. 10-15.

Sunni character. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, Islam began to be the political, social and legal organization of the state and society. Specifically, the form of Islam applied to was the classical Sunnism of the *madrasas* so Sunni Islam, represented by the Hanafi school, emerged as the official religion of the state.

The Ottoman state, however, never used its official religion to convert the non-Muslim communities under its dominion. Rather, Islam in the Ottoman state was the means for legitimizing the very act of taking of the non-Muslims under the state's sovereignty. Bringing the non-Sunni (heterodox, i.e., Kızılbaş) groups into the fold of Sunni Islam was an entirely different matter especially in the sixteenth century. For the Ottoman state, that Muslim subjects of the empire were Kızılbaş meant not only that they deviated from Islamic belief, but also that they rejected being Ottoman subjects to support the Shah instead of the Sultan.

Because Islam in the Ottoman Empire was under the control of the state and dependent upon it, the *shaykhu'l-Islam* was not a kind of pope or patriarch at the head of a spiritual authority. With few exceptions, he never went beyond being personally bound to the sultan and representing the highest level of the religious bureaucracy. There was no possibility he could exceed his role as a means for legitimizing the policies of the state. Islam in the Ottoman state had no material means to carry out administration itself and no spiritual authority over the state administration.

The institution of the caliphate, which passed to the Ottomans after 1517, did nothing to change the position of Islam until the period of Abdulhamid II. It only further sacralized and consolidated the authority of the sultan, who was the representative of worldly power. The caliphate was represented by the sultan himself and no one else. That is, the sultan was the caliph as well.

Given that the state at all times used Islam as a means for legitimizing its own sovereignty and policies, in my opinion it is highly debatable to say that the Ottoman state was a theocracy. The *shari'a*, rather than proving that the Ottoman state was a theocracy, shows the sovereignty of the state over Islam, for the Ottoman government used the *shari'a* only in specific and limited areas such as personal and family law. Neither is the fact that the state always recognized the legitimacy of the *tariqas* and took great pains to maintain good relations with them a valid reason to speak of a theocracy. When Ottoman sultans were initiates or sympathizers of particular *tariqas*, the authority and power of the sultan increased in the areas where they dominated, profiting the state. On the other hand, if opponents of the Islamic understanding of the state arose within the *tariqa* circles, as did the Melamîs and Gülşenîs in the sixteenth century, the central administration took control of those circles and some times executed their leaders.[12]

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[12] See A. Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler Yahut Dairenin Dışına Çıkanlar*, 2nd edn. (İstanbul, 1999), pp. 251-327.

Madrasa or Scriptural Islam

The *ulama* long had considerable influence over Islamic societies at the level of the people and the state itself. The people believed the *ulama* best understood and interpreted the Islamic sciences and observed the mandates and prohibitions of Islam in the truest manner. However, this influence and respect also burdened them with a weighty responsibility, setting them up in the eyes of the people not only as figures requiring respect, but also as models for behavior, and as arbitrators to be referred to for their opinions on various subjects. With this image, the *ulama* rose to the position of mediator between the people and the offices of political authority so that the state and government had to pay heed to it. The respect that the state paid to the *ulama*, however, also helped it secure control of the people.

The source of the *ulama*'s authority to represent Sunni Islam was not so much a perceived religious and spiritual status, as it was for the Shiite *ulama*, but its members' own scholarly capacities and experiences. The stronger these capacities and experiences were, naturally the greater was the respect for and position of the *ulama*.

The *ulama* sector made the greatest contribution to a political dimension of Islam identified with the Ottoman state by producing a scriptural, or *madrasa*, Islam. This Islamic interpretation incorporated almost the entire theoretical and practical legacy of classical Sunnism, particularly the Hanafi school, by means of the *madrasas* in their role as educational institutions. From the formative years of the Ottoma state on, figures belonging to the *ulama*, such as İshak Fakih, Yahşi Fakih and Dursun Fakih, functioning in close proximity to the first Ottoman *beys*, furthered the institutionalization of the Ottoman *beylik* and helped with the resolution of legal problems. Although Âşıkpaşazâde classified the groups of Anatolia as consisting of *Gazis*, *Ahîs*, *Abdals* and *Bacıs*,[13] the chronicles and records in the archive documents and toponymic data clearly show the important place held by another group consisting of *fakih*s (or, in the language of the people, *fakı*).[14]

The *ulama* brought about the political, administrative, social and, with the exception of certain areas of sultanic law, legal organization of Ottoman society. Especially after Mehmed the Conqueror began implementing policies in state structure and administration, it became one of the most important social classes in not only Ottoman history, but in all of Islamic history (though not as important as the Shiite *ulama*). In the Ottoman Empire, the *ulama* undertook four basic duties:

1. The reproduction of Sunni Islam on an imperial scale, by referring to and utilizing the traditional knowledge taken over from the older Islamic *ulama*
2. Legitimation of all foreign and domestic policies and acts of the government

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[13] See *Aşıkpaşazâde Tarihi*, ed. Alî Beğ (İstanbul, 1332), p. 205.

[14] See, for example, *Hüdavendigar Livası Tahrir Defterleri I*, ed. Ö. L. Barkan and E. Meriçli (Ankara, 1988), passim.

3. Operation of the legal and judicial mechanism
4. The performance of religious services and direction of education for the Muslim subjects of the empire

The first and third of these duties were its most important functions for the diffusion of scriptural Islamic interpretations.

Members of the first Ottoman *ulama* came mainly from other emirates in and outside of Anatolia. During the foundation of the Ottoman State, these figures were the architects of the administrative and political institutionalization, in both the existing lands and the regions taken by conquest, that gradually reinforced the state's Sunni character. Most notable were members of the *ulama* who apparently lived during the periods of Osman and Orhan, as their biographies are given in the *Şakâyık-ı Nu'mâniyye*. Among these scholars, who served either in education or in the bureaucracy, some of Arab and Persian origin had completed their education and specialization at old, established and internationally renowned Sunni *madrasa*s in Islamic lands such as Mâverâünnehir (Transoxiana), Iraq, Syria or Egypt. There is no doubt that these *ulama* of various origins and characters added a significant amount of color to the intellectual life of the capital of the empire. In addition, beginning with the period of the empire's foundation, but especially in the classical period, many students from among the Anatolian folk graduated from the old *madrasa*s at Izmir, Bursa and Edirne or went from the empire's highest-level *madrasa*s such as those of Fatih (*Sahn-ı Seman*) and Süleymaniye to the above-mentioned lands in order to specialize before taking up posts in the Ottoman *madrasa*s.

With the consolidation of the centralist understanding of the state in the fifteenth century, the Ottoman *ulama* developed the most well-organized bureaucratic hierarchy in the Islamic world. This system brought the *shari'a* and Ottoman administrative practices into a degree of harmony that lasted until the Tanzimat.[15] Extending from the level of professorship (*müderrislik*) of a small provincial *madrasa* to that of the *Sahn* professorship in the imperial capital on up to the highest *ulama* position of *Shaykhu'l-Islam*, this religious bureaucracy can be considered the most concrete example of the interconnectedness between religion and state peculiar to the Ottoman Empire.

One of the most important functions of the *ulama* constructed by the Ottoman state was to provide legitimacy for the sultanic law used to administer a vast empire spread across millions of square kilometers. It succeeded in this task with extraordinary skill, producing the mass of law codes from the classical period still preserved in the archives. The huge class of *kadı*s was directed by the *kazasker*s, the enormous army of *imam*s and *müezzin*s by the *müftü*s and the large group of

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[15] B. Lewis, *Istanbul et la Civilisation Ottomane* (Paris, 1990), p. 160. For detailed information on this hierarchy in the Ottoman *ilmiye*, see the following monographs which have become classics in the field, H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. 1, pp. 81-113; İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin İlmiye Teşkilatı*, 1st edn. (Ankara, 1965).

*müderris*es by a single *shaykhu'l-Islam*, while institutionalized Islam was supervised by means of the *waqfs*.[16] It was through this organization that the *ulama* played its crucial role in the Ottoman Empire.

The political functions of the Ottoman *ulama* secured its social status. These scholars were exempt from taxation, controlled the vast income of the *waqfs*, and were allowed to pass on to their children their wealth, property and professional status. Consequently the *ulama* became a quite privileged "class" among the sultan's other "servants" (*kul*).[17]

The Ottoman *ulama* excelled in two traditional scholarly fields – *fiqh* (law) and *kalâm* (theology) – which were directly concerned with practical life. Because in both fields, it was heir to the theory and practice amassed by the Islamic world over several centuries, the Ottoman *ulama* produced Turkish and Arabic *fatwas* that made important practical contributions to Islamic law.[18] The classical *madrasas* of cities such as Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo provided its education in the field of law and the *madrasas* of Transoxiana predominated in the field of theology. While the first of these sciences was an important means used in the administration and institutional organization of the empire, the second was instrumental in producing its ideology. These two traditional religious scholarly disciplines were the most favored areas of interest of the *mollas* in the Ottoman *madrasas*. The ability of individual scholars to reach high bureaucratic positions required their showing competence in one or both of these fields. The basic educational program of the Ottoman *madrasas*, therefore, set aside disciplines closely related to human health and daily life such as medicine (*tıp*), mathematics (*hesap*) and geometry (*hendese*), along with astronomy (*nücum*) in order to emphasize law and theology and the two fundamental sciences of *tafsir* and *hadis*, which undoubtedly nurtured them.

Although the Ottoman *ulama* had to be involved with advancements in scholarship, it was primarily concerned with protecting the social order from decay, satisfying the religious needs of the people, and administering the affairs of the state. As a result, its members preferred to expound on the works of law and theology set down five hundred years before them by the Hanafi and Maturidi *ulama* after Ghazzali, known as *müteahhirûn* (the Latter Ones), and they tended to write *tâliks* (explanations) and *hâşiyes* (commentaries), and even explanations of explanations and commentaries on commentaries.[19] Favored resources in the field of *fiqh* included the work of Ali b. Ebîbekr el-Merğinânî (d. 1196/1197) titled *al-Hidâye* and in *kalâm*, the commentary on the *Akaid* of the renowned scholar Nesefî (d. 1114), the *Şharh al-Akâid* by Sa'deddîn-i Taftâzânî (d. 1395), better known by his

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[16] See Gibb and Bowen *Islamic Society and the West*; Lewis, *Istanbul et la Civilisation Ottomane*, pp. 160-161.

[17] Compare Lewis, *Istanbul et la Civilisation Ottomane*, pp. 161-162; Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, p. 115.

[18] İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 174.

[19] See Hulusi Lekesiz, "Osmanlı İlmî Zihniyetinde Değişme (Teşekkül-Gelişme-Çözülme: XV-XVII. Yüzyıllar)," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Hacettepe University, Ankara, 1989), pp. 164-171.

pen name "Allâme."[20] In short, as the Ottoman *ulama* was concerned with the two practical matters of carrying out the bureaucratic requirements of the state and preventing the beliefs of the people from falling into decay, the two favored scholarly disciplines maintained their importance for centuries – the one scientifically repudiated non-Sunni movements and strengthened the Sunni perspective, the other condemned those movements from a legal point of view. The emergence of these two *naklî* (conventional, dogmatic) sciences, Kâtib Çelebi complained in the seventeenth century, encouraged intense bigotry against the previously respected *aklî* (rational) sciences of logic, philosophy, and mathematics.[21]

With the influx into Anatolia of Hurûfîs who had been subjected to intense persecution in fifteenth century and the impact of Safavid propaganda, which continued with full force in the sixteenth century, the state thrust the *ulama* into an intense psychology of defensiveness. Headed by the famous *shaykhu'l-Islam*s Ibn Kemal (d. 1535) and Ebusuûd Efendi (d. 1574), the Ottoman *ulama* began a merciless struggle against every type of Shiite and non-Sunni sect and Sufi tendency.

Tekke or Mystical Islam

The mystical character and substantial influence on folk Islam of *tekke* Islam make it an important subject for analysis from many angles. Like folk Islam, mystical Islam also developed in both Sunni and heterodox directions. Either in its understanding of *wahdat al-wujud* or in the way of life it exhibited, *tekke* Islam affected almost all social sectors of the Ottoman Empire, from the common tradesmen to the highest bureaucrat and even sometimes the sultan.

Since the first appearance of Sufism, the mystical interpretation of Islam has been characterized in almost all parts of the Islamic world by a particular worldview and related lifestyle exhibited in the *tekke*s. According to this mystical interpretation, divine truths are not attained through scientific knowledge, but through divine discovery and inspiration, which are affected by special methods.

With respect to its worldview, Ottoman *tekke* Islam constituted a parallel style of Islam. This was true within the Kadirî, Rifâî, Mevlevî, Halvetî, Bayramî and Celvetî *tariqa*s, which followed the Sunnî line, and even among the Nakşîs, who followed the Sunna entirely, and especially so of the Kalenderî, Bektashî and Melamî Sufi circles, which had a heterodox character. Moreover, Ottoman *tekke* Islam maintained its parallelism vis-à-vis both *madrasa* Islam and political Islam, except in the case of the Bektashî order, which the state took great pains to keep by its side. This parallel position was sustained by the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* for

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[20] Ibid., pp. 42-43; Fahri Unan, "Kuruluşundan Günümüze Fatih Külliyesi" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Hacettepe Unv, Ankara, 1993), p. 305. For a sound analysis of *Sharh al-Akâid*, see Taftazanî, *Kelâm İlmi ve İslâm Akâidi. Şerhü'l-Akâid*, ed. Süleyman Uludağ, 2nd edn. (İstanbul, 1982), pp. 62-87.

[21] See *Mîzân al-Hakk fî İhtiyâr al-Ahakk* (İstanbul, 1311), pp. 10-11.

the Sunni mystical circles and that of *wahdat al-mawjud* – that is, pantheism – for the heterodox circles.

Indeed, pantheism created a protest class within the Ottoman Sufi ranks that came out against the central administration. Protest Sufism developed its pantheist approach by synthesizing it, on one hand, with a messianic mentality and, on the other, with the *qutb* (pole) theory. At the center of the latter theory was the figure of the *qutb* – the reigning spiritual authority of the world at the time – who was sultan of both the material and the spiritual worlds. The pantheist interpretation of the popular Sufi circles, unlike the *wahdat al-wujud* views of the higher Sufi circles, struck a chord with the rural population and was able to transform social protests into revolutionary, militant movements by combining the *qutb* theory with the messianic spirit.

When Nizârî Ismailîs, having been scattered by the Mongol invasions, infiltrated various heterodox Sufi sectors, they merged the Ismailî Shiite *imam* theory with the Sufi *qutb* theory and assumed a militant attitude.[22] The entire sixteenth century was colored by the rebellious movements of these circles against the Ottoman central administration.[23] Their leaders were able to attract large groups of followers with the new ideology, which separated the heterodox sector of popular Islam from the Sunni sector.

Popular Islam

Popular Islam is relatively unaffected by political or scriptural Islam but is influenced by aspects of mystical Islam, which easily incorporated the patterns of traditional life and culture. It is a simple form of Islam that animates the scriptural foundations of Islam by mixing them with traditional motifs of folk belief. To do so, it relies more on ritualistic practices more than by intellectual inquiry.

Reflecting non-Turkish as well as Turkish elements, popular Islam in the Ottoman Empire did not possess an entirely mystical character although it placed the cult of saints from Sufism at the center of its beliefs. It consequently differed from the organized mystical Islamic lifestyle experienced in the *tekkes*. Yet to be studied by Ottoman cultural historians, popular Islam displayed its basic characteristics and the influence of beliefs and rituals from the pre-Islamic period during such festivities as those related to the holidays of *Hıdrellez* and *Nevruz* and the practices performed during visits to saints' shrines.

Birgivî Mehmed Efendi (d. 1573) and certain members of the *ulama* who followed him violently opposed aspects of folk Islam in the Ottoman Empire. His books aimed to make the Islam of the folk conform strictly to scriptural foundations and to cleanse it of superstition and primitive beliefs, referred to collectively as

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[22] See Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990, repr. 1999), pp. 463, 465,467, 469.

[23] For an analytical assessment of this subject, see A. Y. Ocak, "XVI. yüzyıl Osmanlı Anadolusunda mesiyanik hareketlerin bir tahlil denemesi," in *V. Milletlerarası Türkiye Sosyal ve İktisat Tarihi Kongresi (Tebliğler)* (Ankara, 1999), pp. 817-825.

bid' at (religious innovation). The term *bid' at*, as used by Birgivî and his followers, amounted to almost the same concept as heresy from Christianity. In any case, his efforts, renewed continuously by various *ulama* circles, proved largely ineffective in practice.

Islam in the Modernization Period

The issue of *bid'at* became linked with that of Islam as an obstacle to "modernism" or "modernization," a problem that continues to be the subject of heated debate today. During the process of modernization in the Ottoman Empire beginning with the Tanzimat (from 1839 onwards), influential Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals began to blame Islam for the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire. This tendency actually arose in opposition to the politicized, strictly conservative interpretation and understanding of Islam that had been identified with the Ottoman central government. After gradually gaining strength among a sector of the elite, however, it became the basis of both Republican reforms aimed at keeping Islam completely outside the public arena and the Republican understanding of secularism.

Abdulhamid II, using the institution of the caliphate, made Islam the tool of a new political function, often referred to as Panislamism. This new policy did not seek, as is generally supposed, to gather Islamic countries under the single political authority of Ottoman dominion; rather it sought to organize an Islamic opposition to the imperialist policies of the Great Powers of the West.[24] It attempted to show the Western states, by emphasizing as a political means the Ottoman sultan's function as caliph, that he possessed the right of overlordship over the Muslim people of the world. In fact, this policy would be more suitably called Caliphism. This ultimately ineffective movement's temporary success was to be the final revival of Islam in Ottoman history.

After presenting a colorful appearance during the classical period of Ottoman history, Islam was to become, in the period of modernization, a problem. For the westernizing intellectual elite of the empire, it was the cause of backwardness and the obstacle to progress (*mâni-i terakkî*). Thus began an important transformation whose consequences have continued with full vigor ever since the early years of the Republic. Islam served as the Ottoman state's official ideology until roughly the Second Constitutional Period. Then it gave birth to a new political and intellectual movement by serving as the ideology of the opposition rising against the westernization that began with the Tanzimat. As Islamism (*İslamcılık*), this movement still constitutes an opposition ideology in Turkey today.

At the time of the Tanzimat, high-level bureaucrats and intellectuals tried to diagnose the reasons for the decline of the Ottoman Empire. As they realized the

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[24] See Jacob Landau, *The Politics of Panislamism: Ideology and Organization* (London, 1990); Cezmi Eraslan, *II. Abdülhamid ve İslam Birliği (Osmanlı Devleti'nin İslâm Siyaseti, 1856-1908)* (İstanbul, 1992); Azmi Özcan, *Panislamizm: Osmanlı Devleti, Hindistan Müslümanları ve İngiltere (1877-1914)* (İstanbul, 1992) or in English, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924)* (Leiden, 1997).

insufficiency of the modernization movements begun in the military arena by the central administration from the Tulip Age on, they began to consider Islam a problem. Especially in the minds of some intellectual bureaucrats who had become acquainted with the West, Islam gradually was deemed responsible for the underdevelopment and decline of the Ottoman Empire. This, of course, was the traditional Islam identified with the Ottoman central administration – the political Islam that had settled into conservatism or Ottoman Islam. The views toward Islam of the founders of the Republic led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, should be evaluated in this context.

The new Islamic ideology that emerged in reaction to Western-style modernization movements, however, was not based on the Ottoman Islam of the classical age. On the contrary, grounded in a Selefî understanding of Islam, such as that held by Afghanî and Abduh, it opposed Ottoman Islam as well as westernization. Its adherents rejected the sultanate, the traditional political institution of Ottoman Islam, in favor of a constitutional regime relying on the council (*machwarah*), which they perceived as an Islamic institution. Because they were Selefi, or puritanist, they wanted to discard most of the cultural content and institutions of traditional Ottoman Islam and return to the Islam of the early period. Likewise, they wanted to abandon the "imitation" (*taklid*) characteristic of traditional and Ottoman Islam and to reopen the "Gate of Interpretation" (*ictihad kapısı*), which they believed had been closed since approximately the tenth century.

Thus, the Islamism of the periods of Abdulhamid II and of the Second Constitution was perhaps basically a reactionary movement against classical Ottoman Islam. So it was in essence a modernist trend. Despite its apparent opposition to the West, it was in favor of modernization, and thus should be studied within the framework of the modernist intellectual movements of Turkish history.

Islamist writers and intellectuals of the era of Abdulhamid II, along with figures from the Ottoman Islamist elite, took pains to demonstrate that Islam was not "*mâni-i terakkî*." Among the former were Namık Kemal and Ziya Paşa; the latter included Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Şeyhülislam Musa Kâzım and Said Halim Paşa, Babanzade Ahmed Naim, Mehmet Akif (Ersoy), İsmail Hakkı (İzmirli), İsmail Fenni (Ertuğrul) and Şemseddin (Günaltay). According to them, Muslims had retrogressed from advocating science and reason to scholastic thought. Holding the autocratic regimes and traditional Islam responsible for the backwardness of the Islamic world in general, and of the Ottoman Empire in particular, they attempted to explain that Islam actually did not tolerate any regime that suppressed human freedom.

Conclusion

To summarize briefly, Islam maintained its position as the Ottoman state's official ideology until the Second Constitution, then withdrew into defending itself against the severe criticism of bureaucratic intellectuals representing Western-style modernization movements, and eventually was transformed into an opposition ideology. Known as Islamism, this opposition ideology was nourished by the

reaction that ensued after an intellectual class, raised with the modern bureaucracy and education of the Tanzimat period, blamed Islam for the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was carried over into the Republican period as a problem. The Ottoman westernizing elite who founded the Republic chose a radical way to eliminate the obstacle this problem posed to their project of modernization (*muasırlaşma*). Putting the Republican reforms into practice one-by-one, they removed Islam from all the public spheres it had occupied during the Ottoman period.

Today in the secular Turkish Republic, Islam has come to be the opposition ideology of a significant portion of the population. At the same time, a segment of the administrative intellectual elite is trying desperately to free itself from this "problematic legacy," even resorting to the disguised effort of the "war against *irtica*" (retrogressive political reactionism). So many people still see Islam as the basic factor defining their identity, however, resolution will be achieved only if both sides use reason, rather than enmity, to reach a compromise. In any event, Islam's place and profound influence in the history of Turkey, from the foundation of the Ottoman state until today, require serious discussions, not only from the perspective of Ottoman history but also from the perspective of Turkey's past, present and future; and they are issues that will be beneficial both practically and academically.

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