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Ariel Salzmann

Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire. Rival Paths to the Modern State

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Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire fulfils a long-standing need in Ottoman studies. It is an application of the pertinent concepts that Tocqueville had developed for France and the United States to the context of the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the book represents a sweeping argument on the concept of *Ancien Régime* and its implications for the early modern Ottoman state. Now that Ottoman Studies has begun to overcome its isolated methodological frame of reference, there emerges a wider horizon for comparative history. The first step, and Ariel Salzmann is promoting this, is to try and circulate analytical concepts. The author has already developed such research trends in previous publications, and her book focuses on a major aspect of Tocqueville's work: state-building processes and the evolution of *ancien régime* organisation. The process of modernization of the Ottoman state structure is analysed from a double point of view: Ottoman history, and comparativism in the use of concepts. It is a very innovative way of dealing with Ottoman history, and in that sense Ariel Salzmann's work fits perfectly into the new frame of Ottoman studies, in which a good knowledge of the archival landscape is articulated by a good knowledge of present theoretical debates, beyond a strictly Ottoman horizon.

The book begins with an imaginary journey of Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire, or more precisely into its archives. In her introduction, the author depicts Tocqueville as a ghost, and at the same time as an alias of the historian, looking for archives on the governance of the empire. This imaginary journey presents to the author the occasion to paint a historiographical panorama and to articulate the directions she intends to take. Her book is based on her Ph.D. thesis (Columbia 1995) in which the main focus was tax policies and their role in the building of the Ottoman state and in the perpetuation of its dominance through a group of economic and social actors. Her focus here, in addition to these previous results which still constitute the core of the book, is a wider examination of other aspects of old-regime rule and governance. As the main archival terrain of Ariel Salzmann's Ph.D. was Diyarbekir, the intent is here to present a much broader work.

Salzmann's discussion of the concepts of the *ancien régime*, state, and empire between Tocqueville and the Ottoman case contains an enlightening paragraph on the "Vocabularies of Early Modernity" (p. 24), in which she tries, with both prudence and rigor, to establish correspondences between the French words of the Old Regime and the Ottoman language. Ariel Salzmann begins the core of her book with a chapter called "On a Map of Eurasia". The intent is to insert the regions her research deals with into the geopolitical atlas of the 18th century. After having conducted an examination of the ways in which the Ottoman Empire was treated in the European geographical production of the time, and of the circulation of cartographical knowledge between the empire and Europe, Ariel Salzmann proposes a detailed analysis of the vocabulary of governance in the Empire (institutions, territorial entities) as it can be read on historical maps. Logically, she focuses on the Ottoman frontiers: regions which were particular objects of constant redefinitions. What emerges from this dynamic picture is also the old-regime style of governance, made up of adaptations, integrations, redefinitions. The map Ariel Salzmann draws reading historical maps is, then, a complex one, in which the different layers of old-regime governance begin to emerge. The Ottoman Empire – and this is an important aspect of the book – is described both in a dynamic relationship with its frontiers (Europe, Iran, the Indian Ocean, the Arab world), and with a

detailed attention to its internal evolution: those little details of naming a region or an institution teach us a lot about the global conception of imperial rule at the time.

Chapter II - "The Sublime Porte and the Credit Nexus" - deals first with protocols, feasts, parades, court rituals, and more generally the symbolic apparatus established by the Ottoman government in newly conquered regions. But Ariel Salzmänn also examines the impact of the extension of imperial rule to remote provinces on the central structure of government itself, and on the growth of the central imperial bureaucratic apparatus. This dynamic account of state-building processes, particularly the organisation of administrative *bureaux*, the evolution of the administrative hierarchy and gradual changes in the status of state agents, leads to a discussion of Ottoman fiscal organisation as a whole. The main question concerns the passage in the Ottoman Empire from a medieval financial structure to modern fiscality. This process is examined with particular attention to the characteristics of the *malikâne* contracts. The author demonstrates that the very definition of what is 'imperial' changed together with the evolution of fiscal issues and with the introduction of new financial solutions. But this was not a linear journey towards rationality: Ariel Salzmänn illustrates how these evolutions took place in the frame of constant negotiations and redefinitions of the relationship between the empire and its fiscal *élites*. The examination of the fate of Feyzullah Efendi, who was executed in 1703, is used as a way to analyse the complex relationship between the court and the financial *milieu*, as is the narration of the development of tax-farming over the course of the 18th century. What is important here is not the moral and religious implication of financial innovations, and Ariel Salzmänn's paragraph on the matter is perhaps not entirely convincing, but the influence of the evolution of fiscal governance on state-building processes. "Fiscal patronage anticipated formal bureaucratization of the state," she writes (p. 119). Here is one of the most important aspects of the book: a reading of the growth of the Ottoman imperial state structure in a broad framework, considering both centre and periphery simultaneously, both the fiscal and the bureaucratic elements, and managing to conduct conceptual comparisons.

Chapter III ("Government in the Vernacular") is largely based on research on Diyarbekir, and focused analytically on the evolution of state institutions in the empire. The state is considered as a work in progress and the quotidian facets of rule as a compound that I call vernacular government. Such forms of governance took shape in the shifting jurisdictions within and between provinces and as a by-product of a land or, better, labor regime that was continuously remapping itself against the demands and resistance of tax-lords, peasants and herders. It also opens a window on the city as a locus of contractual relationships linking Istanbul with the urban *élites*." (p. 127)

Here lies the very core of Salzmänn's work based upon research in the Ottoman state archives in Istanbul. The interest of her inquiry is to follow the fate of old institutions into new frames, to pay attention to the social *milieux* involved in governance and, through a detailed description of the progressive shifts in institutional vocabulary, to trace the evolution of the conception of the state and of its relations with the provinces. The most important concept might be "interstices" (p. 139). Ariel Salzmänn shows how imperial governance is more complex than the mere description of institutions could illustrate, and that the characteristic of old-regime governance is precisely to allow the existence of such interstices. Her demonstration of rural taxation in the Diyarbekir province is particularly convincing, with her attention to negotiation, mediation and to the relationship between local communities, tax farmer and state employees.

The conclusion ("Paths not taken") is conceived as a return to the initial discussion of Tocqueville's concepts and begins with excerpts from the *Second Letter on Algeria* (1837). The object of the chapter is to examine the fate of Ottoman old-regime "vernacular government" in the confrontation with modernity. The method refers to World History, and Ariel Salzmänn draws a picture of the empire at the turn of the nineteenth century in which geopolitical issues are inserted into questions regarding the evolution of the imperial administration. But Salzmänn's method also proposes a kind of counterfactual history: the "paths not taken" are the directions in which the empire could have evolved. Arguably the

most interesting aspect in this regard is her federalist hypothesis (p. 187). The evolution of the empire between a constantly negotiated old regime situation and a modernized, centralised system could indeed have left space for this option. And examining it is a way to underline the issues at stake: fiscal privileges, provincial autonomy, the financing of the state structure and the evolution of the state personnel. But here Salzmänn's work also meets what might be one of its limits: the centrality in her research of Diyarbakir does not always allow her, in spite of an excellent knowledge of the current historiography, to develop as far as one would have hoped her important ideas in the field of world history. And even at a simply Ottoman scale, conclusions about eastern Anatolia, though very important for introducing new perspectives on the Ottoman centre itself, would benefit from comparison and cross-examination with other regions. It is particularly true for the Arab provinces, where the rhetoric of imperial belonging was the object of intensive speculations between the 18th and the 19th century. One can, of course, only be thankful to Ariel Salzmänn for proposing such interpretations. But engagement with a broader Ottoman sample is important. What would also have been important is an engagement with the new sets of issues the 19th century brought about.

Salzmänn's work is clearly centred on the 18th century. But her conclusions and the perspectives on Ottoman modernity would perhaps have required a broader elaboration of 19th-century developments. Tocqueville's work on the 18th century was largely determined by his political passions of the mid-19th century. The first issue is about the Ottoman reforms. Ariel Salzmänn proposes a convincing interpretation of the Ottoman old regime. But this very interpretation would have merited to be contrasted with the question of state reforms and modernity. Because it is now certain that the very Ottoman modernity of the *tanzimat* period was in no way the result of a mere importation and inherited in many ways impulses that came from the old-regime situation itself. At the same time, the limits of the implementation of Ottoman reforms are sometimes to be found in the particularities of the Ottoman old-regime. Many aspects, then, have to be dealt with: from the role of the old-regime *élite* to the nature of their previously negotiated privileges. Paths taken are sometimes as telling as paths not taken. The second issue Salzmänn might have brought out more clearly is the circulation of administrative solutions in the Empire.

Some other aspects of the old regime could also have been the objects of a particular focus, as Tocqueville's work itself suggests. Ariel Salzmänn builds her theory on imperial governance mainly from the point of view of fiscal governance. But she could also have detailed more precisely some other aspects of old regime politics and their confrontation with modernity: urban governance, guilds, the governance of confessional communities for example. These are all matters in which the questioning she proposes brings original arguments to the table. They allow a more nuanced vision not only of the characteristics of the Ottoman old regime, but also of its passage – sometime problematic passages – towards modernity. Evoking Tocqueville could also have suggested some other questions regarding the Ottoman condition. Tocqueville's intent was not only to understand the functioning of the old regime, but also to explain the eruption of modernity. In that sense, his *Ancien régime et la révolution* of 1856 is an exploration of the roots of modernity. But Tocqueville, two decades before, also wrote *De la démocratie en Amérique*. This essay is also appealing for conceptual comparativism of the Ottoman Empire, with questions such as the birth of a civil society or the building of a state-apparatus. Ariel Salzmänn, having chosen such an ambitious title as "Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire", might have tackled these questions, as well as the possible impact of Tocqueville on Ottoman intellectuals or statesmen of the second half of the 19th century.

Ariel Salzmänn's book is set to become an important contribution to the present revival in Ottoman studies. In openly advocating the use of a concept – the old regime – elaborated in a different cultural sphere, Salzmänn contributes to breaking the traditional parameters of Ottoman studies and to broadening the horizons of post-cultural studies. In addition, her interpretations of the peculiarities of the Ottoman regime are particularly convincing. And if questions do remain, for example about the passage towards modernity or about different local conditions, they are mostly invitations to persevere in the promotion of conceptual comparativism between various cultural spheres, which moves beyond a mere transfer, and of an Ottoman comparativism, based upon a critical intimacy with archives.

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