Ottoman Concepts of Empire

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ABSTRACT

Empire was never an important concept in Ottoman politics. This did not stop Ottoman rulers from laying claim to three titles that may be called imperial: halife, hakan, and kayser. Each of these pertains to different translationes imperii, or claims of descent from different empires: the Caliphate, the steppe empires of the Huns, Turks, and Mongols, and the Roman Empire. Each of the three titles was geared toward a specific audience: Muslims, Turkic nomads, and Greek-Orthodox Christians, respectively. In the nineteenth century a new audience emerged as an important source of political legitimacy: European-emergent international society. With it a new political vocabulary was introduced into the Ottoman language. Among those concepts was that of empire, which found its place in Ottoman discourse by connecting it with the existing imperial claims.

KEYWORDS

audience, empire, entangled concepts, Ottoman Empire

Introduction

There never was an Ottoman Empire – at least not if we are to take Ottoman discourse in the Ottoman language as our guide to what the polity should be

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1. In this article, I treat the Turkish and Ottoman written languages as a single historical continuity. Ottoman was originally the written high language of the Ottoman state, while Turkish was the vernacular of a portion of the subjects. During the period between the 1880s and 1930s the Ottoman written language was systematically and wilfully changed by introducing vernacular Turkish elements, and from the 1930s by removing “non-Turkish” elements. The distinction between Ottoman and Turkish is no simple dichotomy with “Ottoman” being written before 1923 and “Turkish” after that time, but rather a complex historical process, which is further complicated by the fact that “Ottoman” and “Turkish” were to some extent and in some periods used interchangeably before this time. See Geoffrey

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called. While there can be little doubt that the polity actually existed, there was no single institutionalized and generalized Ottoman concept that captured the state, the collective subjects, and the territory. Different aspects of the state-people-territory tripod later known under the unified label of “Ottoman Empire” were known as Devlet-i Âliyye-i Osmaniye (the Exalted State/Dynasty) or Âl-i Osman (the Family/Dynasty of Osman), tebaa (subjects/flock), and Memâlik-i Mahrûse (the Well-Protected Domains), respectively. The meaning of these concepts shifted over time and there are a number of overlapping concepts.

In the nineteenth century, the French name of l’Empire Ottoman (the Ottoman Empire) prevailed as an external self-representation, but there was no perfectly corresponding concept in Ottoman. This article deals with how the concepts of empire (imparatorluk) and the Ottoman Empire (Osmanlı


While Ottoman was closely associated with the Ottoman state, there were many different languages, both spoken and written, within the Ottoman Empire. For an elaboration of this language situation, see Johann Strauss, “Diglossie dans le domaine ottoman: Evolusion et pérripètes d’une situation linguistique,” Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée 75–76 (1995): 221–255.

2. For Turkish and Ottoman words I have retained modern Turkish spelling whenever they are not direct quotations from an Ottoman text. For such instances I use the transcription system used by the Ottoman Studies Foundation.

3. Tebaa as a concept had little to do with politics generally, and seldom seems to have been given the status of a collective singular.

4. One possible text in which such a unification of concepts may have been introduced is Babanzâde İsmâ’il Haqqi’s Hâquq-i Esäisiye [Constitutional law] (1909/1910), where he endorses Félix Moreau’s definition of the state as “an entire human society that possesses a population, territory, and government.” See Babanzâde İsmâ’il Haqqi, Hâquq-i Esäisiye, (Istanbul: Müdavimîn-i Mülkiye Kütüphanesi, 1909/1910), 34; Felix Moreau, Précis Élémentaire de Droit Constitutionnel (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1908), 9; Hüseyn Boğac, Erozan, Producing Obedience: Law Professors and the Turkish State (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2005), 102.

5. In fact, these concepts were not necessarily competing concepts as much as they were complementary concepts. Ottoman writing used the poetic convention of varying the use of vocabulary as much as possible. It was a common practice to say more or less the same thing twice in two different ways. It was a sign of great erudition to use as many synonyms as possible.

6. The Ottoman encyclopedist Şemseddin Sami, writing in 1901/1902, included entries in his Ottoman dictionary on imparator and imparatorluq, explaining that an imparator “is a sovereign who is counted as greater and more independent than a king” and lists Germany, Austria, and Russia as empires and as having emperors. There is no mention of an “Ottoman Empire” in these entries, nor of any other non-European polity. See Şemseddin Sami, Qâmüs-i Türki [Dictionary of Turkish]. (Dersa’âdet [The threshold/door of felicity [Istanbul]]): Aqdâm Maṭba‘ası, [1317] 1901/1902), 251. In an Ottoman-French bi-
İmparatorluğu) emerged in the Ottoman and Turkish languages as entangled concepts,⁷ as concepts that speak to both a domestic and an international audience.⁸ As such, it is about the Ottoman terminology used in the last century of the polity’s existence and the history of that terminology, and leaves aside the question of whether historians may analytically call the Ottoman polity an empire (a question dealt with by Marc Aymes in this issue).⁹

Entangled Histories

Conceptual history has lately taken a turn away from its origins as a discipline oriented toward European languages and away from treating languages as self-contained entities with stable boundaries.¹⁰ Following the University of Tartu–based semiotician Yuri Lotman, this article begins with the assumption that it is in the meeting and translation between languages (as well as between lingual dictionary he published, he included an entry on ğimpârâtîrîl væq, in which he wrote (in French) that it was the ‘realm/reign of an emperor” (règne d’un empereur): Şemseddin Sami, Qâmûs-i Frânevi: Türkçeden Frânszcaya Lügât: Dictionnaire Turc- Francais [Dictionary of French: Dictionary from Turkish to French: Turkish-French Dictionary] (Constantinople: Mihrân Matba’ası, [1224] 1883), 212. The entries in the dictionary are littered with usages of Empire Ottoman and Empire Turc in French, but the Ottoman concept ğimpârâtîrîl (if it was a concept at all at this point, and not a mere word) is not used regarding the Ottoman state. All translations from Ottoman, Turkish, and French are my own.


⁸. I retain the inside/outside and domestic/international distinctions as analytical tools in order to differentiate the audiences vis-à-vis whom the Ottoman state legitimized its rule, not because I take them to be ontologically prior to relations. See Patrick Jackson and Daniel Nexon, “Relations before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics,” European Journal of International Relations 5 (1999): 291–332.


center and periphery) that new usages emerge and new concepts are coined. Semantic change, then, is dependent upon new concepts or interpretations being developed at the margins and making their way to the center of discourse. The insight at the basis of ahistoire croisée, which is oriented toward the study of entanglements, is that the history of a country, region, or language is constituted by its relationships with other countries, regions, or languages.

Both Lotman’s semiotic approach and histoire croisée may serve as ample motivation for an inquiry into entanglements between cultures and languages and it is of little consequence for this article whether one prefers one or the other. The main point here is that discursive power relevant to the subject of Ottoman conceptions was not uniquely vested in texts written in Ottoman, but also in texts written in other languages; these languages were, to begin with, Arabic and Persian, then French, and later English. This became ever more evident as the nineteenth century wore on, and the Ottoman state sought inclusion in European-emergent international society for the sake of maintaining its rule over its territories and subjects.

The Ottoman elite attempted to maintain its position within the state and the state’s very existence by seeking recognition and legitimacy among the European society of states.

Since many such Ottoman claims to legitimacy were formulated in languages other than Ottoman, they cannot be understood except as entanglements, as playing to both a domestic and an international audience. Ottoman legitimacy in French was not detached from legitimacy in Ottoman and vice versa, although claims were made to different audiences and drew upon different conceptual histories. The history of the concept Ottoman Empire in the Ottoman and Turkish language is very much an entangled history, and one of increased compatibility both between Ottoman internal and external discourse, and between Ottoman discourse and European (mainly French) discourse.


The nineteenth-century French concept of *empire* was not implanted into a semantic *terra nullius*. To illustrate this point I will trace the variety of concepts used by the Ottomans in places where a scholar today might expect to find the word "empire." While the immediate impulse for conceptual historians is to reach for etymologies, there is a distinction between *semasiological* and *onomasiological* investigations that may be of use if one is to look at a history of a concept such as *empire*. A semasiological investigation of a concept is one that adheres to the meaning of individual words, and how the meaning of these words changes. Onomasiological investigation is, by contrast, an investigation of concepts that have occupied similar positions in the semantic field.\(^\text{14}\) Staying with a relational theory of language, I would stress that the concepts used in the Ottoman language drew their meaning from their own history, rather than from some innate quality of the Ottoman polity.

For smooth translation and for words and concepts to retain a certain similarity of meaning when translated, “mutually equivalent relationship[s] [must] have already been established between units of the two systems [languages].”\(^\text{15}\) These mutually equivalent relationships should not be assumed, as they rarely exist. They are created and stabilized by frequent translation between two languages. However, when dealing with conceptual entanglements one should be attentive to the fact that while certain concepts are often translated, thus becoming important both internally and externally and taking on similar connotations and meanings, others are seldom translated and therefore retain their separate cultural- and linguistic-based meanings. It is only those concepts that are frequently translated or used in relations that take place across linguistic boundaries that become more or less compatible in meaning. Entanglement does not occur homogenously, nor does it reach every part of a language or language community in equal measure.

*Empire* and its derivative *imperialism* are examples of concepts that became important in both domestic and international arenas, thus becoming “entangled concepts”, concepts that belong neither here nor there, and where one can frequently bring in an interpretation from another context. This is at least so in the meeting between the Turkish/Ottoman and European languages. However, Turkish interpretations of European concepts are less easily accepted by Europeans than European interpretations of European concepts are by Turks and, previously, Ottomans. This is an aspect of the power relationship between Turks and Europeans. The European interpretation is frequently accepted as “correct”, or at least taken to be more acceptable, by both parties. Although concepts are always used within a specific linguistic and historical


\(^{15}\) Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 37.
context, and this context is what gives them meaning, such concepts are part of the international arena, where they are used to attain legitimacy for the state and to further state goals externally, thus drawing upon a number of different caches of meanings at the same time. There cannot ever be a clearly bounded distinction between the internal and external conceptual usage, but an analytical distinction can be made in order to highlight the process of entanglement.

**Translationes imperii**

The Ottoman dynasty asserted three *translationes imperii*, claims to imperial succession, deployed according to context and audience. The first of these claims was to the imperial title of the steppe (*Khagan/Qağan/Hakan/Khan/Han*), of which Attila (the Hun), Ghengis Khan, and Tamerlane are the most famous claimants. This claim was first taken up by the Ottoman dynasty around the time when the Turko-Mongol emperor Tamerlane invaded Anatolia in 1402, and the Ottoman dynasty needed to secure its legitimacy vis-à-vis the nomadic tribes who formed the bulk of the Ottoman armies during the early part of its existence. This *translatio* (along with the titles *Han* and *Hakan*) was used until the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1918–1923).

The second claim was to the *translatio imperii* from the Roman Empire. It was first made after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and sought to create continuity between the Roman and the Ottoman Empires via the Byzantines (whose empire, in their own eyes, *was* the Roman Empire). The third claim to *translatio imperii*, and that which is best known to Europeans, was that from the Caliphate. This was taken up after Sultan Selim I (“the Grim”) conquered the Mamluk state in Egypt in 1517 and thus the Abbasid Caliphate, who stood

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17. See Jackson and Nexon, “Relations before States.”
18. Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 31, 78–79. Lowry argues that the linkage to the Qayi branch of the Oğuz Turks was made by Ahmed, writing in the interregnum years (1402–1413). While Lowry does not emphasize this fact, it is the claim to Qayi descent that linked the Ottoman dynasty to the steppe imperial title.
19. The exact timing of the fall of the Ottoman Empire is difficult to pinpoint. It conceded defeat in World War I in 1918 and was soon occupied by the British, French, Greeks, and Italians, although a national resistance movement fought against the occupiers in Anatolia. The sultanate was abolished in 1923, but had lost de facto power after the Constitutional Revolution in 1908, two coups in 1909 and 1913, and the occupation in 1918.
20. For a study of continuities between the Byzantines and the Ottomans, see Lowry, *Early Ottoman State*. 
under Mamluk “protection.” This source of legitimacy became increasingly important after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774.

Sultan Süleyman I (“the Magnificent”), who is often seen as the embodiment of the so-called Golden Era of the Ottoman Empire (c. 1451–1566), used all three of these translationes imperii in legitimizing his rule (as well as the Persianate title Shah). To illustrate this, I will quote a speech and a letter detailing his self-representation. The first is from his declamation at the Castle of Bender in 1538:

I am the slave of Allah and the sultan of the estates of the world, with the blessing of Allah I am at the head of Muhammed’s ummah. Allah’s superiority and Muhammed’s miracle are my companions. I am Süleyman, in whose name the Friday Prayer of Mecca and Medina is read. I run the navies of the seas of Europe [Avrupa], Maghreb and India, I am the Shah of Baghdad, the emperor [kayser] of the lands of Byzantium and the Sultan of Egypt. I am a Ruler [Sultan] who has taken the throne of the King of Hungary [Macar kralı] and given it to a lowly subject of his.

The second is his letter to the French king a few years later:

I, who am Sultan of the Sultans of East and West, fortunate lord of the domains of the Romans, Persians and Arabs, Hero of Creation, Champion of the Earth and Time, Padishah and Sultan of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, of the extolled Kaaba and Medina the illustrious and of Jerusalem the noble, of the throne of Egypt and the province of Yemen, Aden and Sana’a, of Baghdad and Basra and Lahsa and Ctesiphon, of the lands of Algiers and Azerbaijan, of the regions of the Kipchaks and the lands of the Tartars, of Kurdistan and Luristan and all Rumelia, Anatolia and Karaman, of Wallachia and Moldavia

21. While the title Shah was used by the Ottoman dynasty, there was no elaborate myth making accompanying it that sought to draw a lineage back to a Persian origin. Therefore, it does not quite qualify as a translatio imperii, as there was no claim to imperial succession to the empires of Iran.

22. Evliya Çelebi, quoted in İbrahim Şirin, Osmanlı İmgeleminde Avrupa [Europe in the Ottoman imagination] (İstanbul: Lotus Yayınları, 2009), 59. My translation is from Şirin’s transcription. Evliya Çelebi’s Seyahatname [Travelogue], from which this is taken, is one of the most famous works of seventeenth-century Ottoman literature. It was written in ten volumes, over a period of forty years, approximately 1640–1683 CE. Given the time span between the speech and Evliya Çelebi’s work, it is difficult to ascertain the veracity of this source. Much of the book is often written off as fictional, but as the sultan’s way of using titles corresponds to the other sources I have consulted, I use it as an example of conceptual usage at Süleyman’s time. It has appeared in many versions since, of which the best is Evliya Çelebi, Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi [Travelogue], 10 vols. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996–2007).

This being the sixteenth century, the Caliphate was the least used of the translationes imperii, but the specific way in which he referred to Allah and the ummah of Muhammed probably implied that he was Caliph\(^{25}\) (literally, “successor” or “representative”, that is, the successor of Muhammed), although he does not say so explicitly. According to the encyclopedist Şemseddin Sami, writing in 1901/1902,\(^{26}\) ummah meant, among other things, “a community that has been ordered by God to follow a prophet of the true religion.”\(^{27}\) The ummah of Muhammed, therefore, must mean all Muslims collectively.

Furthermore, he refers to himself as kayser, sultan, and shah (a Persian title meaning king). As the reader will notice, the sultan used almost every imperial title he could credibly use, but did not refer at all to the Ottoman state as being an “empire.” Indeed, there is no reference to the state at all, only to the ruler and his possessions. It would be tempting to argue that a claim to being a kayser implies ruling an empire, as both concepts can be semasiologically traced to the Roman Empire, whose ruler was titled caesar, from which kayser is derived.

### Concepts of the State

While institutions are impossible to uphold without concepts, the absence of a consistent name for the Ottoman state, or at least a stable concept of state, should not lead a scholar to conclude that there was no state (just like one should not conclude that the Ottoman polity was not an empire based on the absence of the concept). Instead, we should direct our attention to the concepts that were used, and which indeed occupied similar positions in the discursive structures of Ottoman politics.

The Ottomans themselves referred to the state and the realm with a variety of concepts that had partially overlapping meanings. “The Exalted State” (Devlet-i Âliyye) and “the Well-Protected Domains” (Memâlik-i Mahrûse)

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25. Halife in Ottoman/Turkish.

26. 1317 according to the Rumi calendar, which includes both 1901 and 1902.

27. Şemseddin Sami, Qâmûs-i Türkî, 163.
were the most frequently used. In the earlier centuries, the dynasty was for the most part called the Āl-i Osman (the Family of Osman), which according to Carter Findley was replaced by the Devlet-i Osmanlıye (the Ottoman State/Dynasty; devlet can be translated as both state and dynasty) in 1876. Furthermore, the state was also called the Devlet-i Ebed-müddet (the State/Dynasty of Eternal Duration or simply the Eternal State/Dynasty).

Reciprocity in titles between the Ottomans and the various Christian polities to their north and west was an important diplomatic development of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the letter quoted above, which enumerates the Sultan's many elaborate titles, the French king was addressed: “you, who are François, king of the land [vilayet] of France [França].” It should be noted that this letter was sent under special circumstances, as the French king was being held hostage by the Habsburgs and was begging the Sultan to pay the ransom. Only a few decades later, the French king (this time Charles IX, the grandson of François I) was addressed as l'empereur de France. Note that there is also the issue of bilingualism here, whereby what is possible to articulate in one language may not be as easily said or written in another. The Ottomans addressed the Habsburg emperor as Bec kralı (king of Vienna) until the Treaty of Zsitvatorok in 1606. In this treaty, the Habsburg ruler was first titled çasar (a variant of caesar), and then padişah. Other European rulers were soon titled in the same manner. Diplomacy between the Ottoman Empire and other polities did not rest upon reciprocity until 1774, but a struggle over parity seems to have become an issue much earlier. When European states started to establish embassies and trade missions in Istanbul, the sending state guaranteed that they would adhere to certain Ottoman rules, and were granted an ahdname (official pledge) by the Ottoman ruler, which meant that they could

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32. Notice that the Austrian Empire (Kaisertum Österreich) itself did not have an official name until 1804, although its ruler was styled as emperor (kaiser) from 1440, depending on his election to the Holy Roman Empire.
34. Ahdname is usually translated as “capitulation.” This is correct for the later period of the Ottoman Empire’s existence. But since “capitulation” implies something that is imposed by force, it is an imprecise translation of ahdname in the earlier period, when they were not imposed upon the Ottoman Empire by powerful foreign powers, but magnanimously granted by the sultan. They were letters of protection guaranteeing foreign merchants and diplomats the right of residence and protection in times of peace. These rights were revoked
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take up residence in the capital (albeit, for Christians, only across the Golden Horn, outside the city walls). This protection was abrogated in times of war, when these emissaries were considered hostages of the sultan, representing a completely different approach from that held by the European-emergent international society. But with the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty of 1774 that ended the Russo-Turkish War with defeat for the Ottomans, much of this approach changed. Instead of European powers competing for recognition as equals by the Ottoman state (partly in the Ottoman language), it increasingly became the Ottoman statesmen who sought parity with European states on a Europe-centered international arena, where the language was mainly French.\textsuperscript{35} The Ottoman Empire was not recognized by these other states as a “great power”, and in order to become recognized as such, it started jealously guarding the titles of \textit{imparator} and \textit{padişah}.\textsuperscript{36}

As the German Turkologist Christoph Neumann points out, the polity’s statesmen for a long time preferred the name \textit{Devlet-i Âliyye-i Osmaniye} (the Exalted Ottoman State/Dynasty), which implicitly recognized the possibility that other states could also be exalted (since the specifying clause “Ottoman” would not have been necessary had there been only \textit{one} legitimate state in the world).\textsuperscript{37} Rather, claims to legitimacy in state discourse were all about the ruler, the dynasty, and his or their possessions.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Devlet}, a concept that today means “state” in modern Turkish, comes from the medieval historian Ibn Khaldûn’s work \textit{Muqaddima} (prolegomena), which was translated into Ottoman in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{39} Though it is unclear to what extent the \textit{Muqaddima} (or, in Turkish, \textit{Mukaddime}) was part of educated Ottomans’ literary diet before it was translated into Ottoman from the Arabic, it had a significant influence on Ottoman political and historical writing following its translation.\textsuperscript{40}

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  \item if war broke out with the sending state, and thus did not correspond to the European diplomatic convention of immunity.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} For examples, see Neumann, “Devletin Adı Yok,” 274.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} According to the German Turkologist Christoph Neumann, these two titles were taken as synonyms; I would rather claim that they have different, and entangled, conceptual histories. See Neumann, “Devletin Adı Yok,” 274.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 276.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} This is not at all unique. Great Britain, for example, still has “God Save the Queen” as its national anthem, a remnant of a similar way of privileging the ruler.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} The first two-thirds were translated by Pirizade Mehmet Sahip, (1674–1749) and first published in 1858 (though circulated in manuscript prior to this). The final third was translated by Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (1822–1895), and the whole work was published together in 1858/59–1860/61 as Ibn Hâldûn, \textit{Tercâme-i Muqaddime-i Ibn Hâldûn}. (Dersa ‘adet: Taqvîm-i ‘Arî, 1275–1277 [1858/59–1860/61]). See also Fleischer, “‘Ibn Khal-
If one looks back to the fifteenth century, the early Ottoman historians title their works in such manner as Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman (the Histories of the Family/Dynasty of Osman). As Neumann noted, there is no mention in their work of a Devlet-i Âliyye at all. The Ottoman concepts used for the Ottoman polity appear in Mustafa Ali’s 1581 Nushat üs-Selâatin (Counsel for Sultans): memalik-i Osmaniye (Ottoman realms/possessions), âl-i Osman (family/dynasty of Osman), diyar-i Rum (lands of Rome/Anatolia/Balkans, depending on the context), memalik-i Rum (the realms/possessions of Rome/Anatolia/Balkans), milket-i Osman (the gifts/attributes of Osman), or simply Rum (Rome/Anatolia/Balkans), whose very conceptual history is a rather long and complex affair when it comes to the Ottoman and Turkish languages. Indeed, there was no reference to devlet (state/dynasty) at all. Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent called his country Memalik-i Mahrusem (My Well-Protected Domains). What Neumann points out is that there was little in terms of an institutionalized Ottoman concept for state at all.

Empire

There is a much stronger case for arguing that the concept of Ottoman Empire (Osmanlı İmparatorluğu) did not exist or was entirely unimportant in the Ottoman language than the case for arguing that the concept of empire was absent. It is also much easier to check the relevant sources. For the former, one could find a number of examples in which the Ottoman state was called by another name. For the latter, however, it is more difficult to comment upon the absence, as it is not clear where one should look. It would be impossible to review every Ottoman text ever written to be certain that empire was never used. A cursory search of the Prime Ministry Archives in Istanbul indicates...
that *imparatorluk* was indeed used in the nineteenth century, but that this was primarily in reference to European polities, with Napoleon's France and Tsarist Russia being important cases, and Japan another.\(^46\)

On the basis of the scarcity of sources in which the Ottoman polity was referred to as an *imparatorluk*, I conclude that it is unlikely to have played an important political role as a concept used by the Ottoman state to describe itself. If it had been, one would expect it to show up in parliamentary transcripts or important political treatises.\(^47\) A quote from “And seek their counsel in the matter,” an essay written in 1869 by Namık Kemal, an influential nineteenth-century political writer, may serve to hint at a reason for this absence:

The esteemed person [*zat-i hazret*] the sultan is heir to the noble dynasty, which the Ottoman family established by protecting religion.\(^48\) It was thanks to this fact that they became the cynosure of the people and the caliph of Islam. The religion of Muhammed rejects the absolutist claim to outright ownership [of the state] in the incontrovertible verse: “Whose is the kingdom today? God's, the One, the Omnipotent”.\(^49\)

\(^{46}\) See, for example, BBA HAT 31 1448F, 18/1/1220 and HAT 31 1483 29/1/1218. I have also come across a newspaper article with the title “Devlet-i Âliyye-yi Osmâniye ve Jâpônya İmparâtörlûğu” from 1897, in which the concept of *imparatorluk* clearly was used, but not in reference to the Ottoman polity: “Devlet-i Âliyye-yi Osmâniye ve Jâpônya İmparâtörlûğu,” *Mâlûmat*, 12 Ağustos 1313 (24 August 1897), 1; Renée Worringer, “Comparing Perceptions: Japan as Archetype for Ottoman Modernity, 1876–1918” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 28–29. The Ottoman statesman Sadık Rıfat Paşa used the more Arabic-sounding *imparatoriye* in a 1834 letter from Paris, see Mehmet Cavit Baysun, ed., “Mustafa Reşit Paşanın Siyasi Yazıları I: Atabei bülent mertebei veliyûnniamilerine maruzi çakeri keminleridir ki,” *Türk Tarih Vesikalari* 1, no. 1 (1941): 33

\(^{47}\) The transcripts of the Turkish parliament, the *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (TBMM), are searchable through Google, and although the optical character recognition system does not return perfect results, they are fairly reliable. These transcripts have been searched in their entirety for the early 1920s. The transcripts of the Ottoman parliament, with the chambers *Meclis-i Mebûsan* and *Meclis-i Âyân*, are not searchable in the same way, as optical character recognition of Arabic script is not yet sufficiently functional. However, their registers are in Latin script and therefore searchable. These have been searched and suspected occurrences have been checked in the actual transcripts. Moreover, a sizeable, though by no means comprehensive, body of late Ottoman political texts has been read.

\(^{48}\) Although Şükrü Hanioğlu opts for “His imperial majesty the sultan” as a translation of “zat-i hazret-i padişah,” the word “imperial” in Ottoman is not actually used (it does not exist as an adjective in Ottoman, but can be formed by compounds with other nouns). Briefly, *zat* can be translated as “person, individual”, *hazret* as “excellency” or in the compound form as the title of an exalted personage (also for Qur’anic figures, such as Noah—*Hazret-i Nuh*), and *padişah* was the concept used in Ottoman in the same way as the English would use “the sultan” in reference to the Ottoman sovereign, used interchangeably with the name of the sultan.

\(^{49}\) Näüm Kemâl, “Ve Şâvirhüm Fi-l Emr” [And seek their counsel in the matter], in
In sum, neither *empire* (*imparatorluk* or *imparatoriye*) nor *imperial*\(^{50}\) are anywhere to be found, nor do they appear by putting these concepts together. Where one might expect to find *empire*, there is *dynasty* instead.

**Endogenous and Exogenous Concepts**

The concept of *imparatorluk*, as I claim in this article, sprang forth in the twentieth century in a complex process of entanglement. In order to show this, we need to step outside the internal Ottoman history of concepts. I will trace the late appearance of the *Ottoman Empire* as an exogenous concept—an external, French designation for the Ottoman polity—and then describe, first, the status of the French as a source of high reference and legitimacy, and, second, the presence of French in Ottoman discourse, through which conceptual meetings could have taken place. I then move on to show the final adoption of the concept of *empire* as an internalization of an Orientalist point of view on Turkey’s own past.

A choice of names and concepts may as readily identify the speaker as it describes the subject. The Italian city known in English by the name of Naples is known as *Napoli* in Italian. The former is an exonym, a name not used by native speakers, and the latter is an endonym, that by which native speakers call the city. They may be different names for the same city, but they are also two concepts embedded in different discursive structures. The semantic connotations of *Napoli* in Italian are bound to be different from the connotations of Naples in English. Between closely entangled languages, the differences need not be great, but they are there. In the same manner, exogenous and endogenous concepts, even though they are sometimes used by the same people, have diverging conceptual histories, and thus different meanings. This may be illustrated by the case of Ottoman money notes, which in the nineteenth century carried the title of the issuing bank in both French and Ottoman. In French, the issuing authority was called *Banque Impériale Ottoman*—the Ottoman Imperial Bank (1863–1924). The Ottoman name for the bank was *Bank-ı Osmani-i Şâhâne*, which is most appropriately translated as the Royal Otto-

\(^{50}\) The existence of *imperial* as an adjective in Ottoman and Turkish is marginal at any rate. Rather, it would normally appear as a compound noun together with *imparatorluk*. 
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man Bank. Thus, the Ottoman state was *imperiale* outward, but *şahane* inward. If meaning is context dependent, then in the immediate context of the money used, they have more or less the same meaning. Detached from this particular context, their separate conceptual histories must be said to come into play to a greater extent, thus making them more apt for divergent interpretations.

To turn to the history of French designations of the Ottomans, sixty-sixth-century French writers usually referred to the Ottoman Sultan as *le Turc*, *le Grand Turc*, or *le Sultan*. In 1544, for example, the French explorer Jean Alfonse wrote of Cyprus that it is a “seigniory of Venice, which is a tributary of 'le grand Turc'” The Ottoman polity does not enter into the equation, merely the head of that polity. Note the contrast with the near-contemporary (1538 and 1561) Ottoman texts quoted above, where Sultan Süleyman enumerates his titles (which one, in the absence of a conventionalized single concept of the Ottoman Empire, may call the endogenous concept for the head of the polity). *Le Grand Turc* was an exogenous, French, concept, and the list that is too long to repeat here, but which might be shortened to *pađişah* in less formal circumstances, was the endogenous concept. The lack of reference to an Ottoman *state* in the French texts of the time can be put down to the simple fact that the concept of *state* (*état*) had not emerged in French at the time, just as in Ottoman it had yet to gain a meaning detached from that of *dynasty*.

In 1577, the court of the sultan is mentioned in a book on the demise of *l’Empire grec* (the Greek Empire; that is, the Byzantine) as “the porte (thus they call the Court of the Turk).” This is a reference to the endogenous Bâb-

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51. The references for the French conceptual history were found in the dictionaries *Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française* and *Trésor de la Langue Française*, as well as via searches in the historical text archive *Frantext*, a database containing 4,084 French texts of various genres going back to the Middle Ages. Translations from French are my own, but I am grateful to Ingrid Austveg Evans for comments.

52. See, for example, Jean Marot *Le Voyage de Venise* (1526), 41, where “le Turc” is listed alongside popes and kings, indicating that it is a title more than an ethnicity or political collective; Clément Marot, *L’Adolescence clémentine* (1538), 204; Jean Fonteneau dit Alphonse de Saintonge, *Voyages avantageux du Capitaine de Jan Alfonse, Saintongeois*, (1544), 44 recto–47 recto. For “le Sultan”, see Jean-Louis Balzac (Guez de), *Le Prince*, (1631), 327; Pierre Le Moyne Le Père, *Saint-Louys, ou le Héros chrestien* (1653); Tristan L’Hermite, *Osman* (1655), 775, 794, inter alia.


54. The modern concept of state is commonly thought to have been first shaped and popularized by Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, first published in Italian in 1532, but which first circulated as a Latin manuscript under the title *De Principatibus* (About principalities) in 1513.

55. “[L]a porte (ainsi appellent ils la Cour du Turc).” Blaise de Vigenère, *L’Historie de la decadence de l’Empire grec, et establissement de celuy des Turcs, comprise en dix livres par Nicolas Chalcondyle [trad.]* (1577), livre 2, chap. 1, 78
1 Âli (sublime/exalted gate/porte, by which the Ottoman privy council was known) being *calqued* by the French into *porte*, and it probably spread to English from there (or from Italian), to the extent that Ottomanist scholars now speak of the “Sublime Porte.”  

56. ottoman and l’Empire Ottoman seem to have appeared in French during the seventeenth century, but it was not until the 1730s that they became institutionalized in French discourse. This development seems coeval with the institutionalization of equivalent imperial titles in diplomatic correspondence between the Sultan and European rulers. In the second part of the eighteenth century, Voltaire helped further institutionalize the concept in French, and seems to have used *Empire Ottoman* and *Empire Turc* interchangeably.  

58. l’Empire Ottoman and l’Empire Turc appear to have been used interchangeably in the 1730s, although their usage seems to start with Jean-Baptiste Dubos Abbé, *Histoire Critique de l’établissement de la monarchie françoise dans les Gaules* (1734), 42, 80, 85, 86, 386 424, 601; and Jean-Baptiste D’Argens, *Lettres juives ou Correspondance philosophique, historique et critique* (1738), tome 1, 46, 251, 349, tome 2, 101, 104, 111.  

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polities, and rarely learned a European language themselves. When the Ottomans established their first resident ambassadors in London, Berlin, Vienna, and Paris in the 1790s, the ambassadors took with them “young secretaries, whose duty it was to study the languages of Europe—and especially French—and to learn something about the ways of Western society.” Thus, when these individuals started returning to Istanbul around 1800, the Ottoman diplomatic corps included a number of statesmen proficient in French and who were acquainted with European high society. After the declaration of an independent Greek state in 1821, the Ottoman state removed the Greek-Orthodox dragomans from state service, and established a Tercüme Odası (Translation Bureau), manned by Ottoman Muslims who learned foreign languages on the job. French was also taught at the Medical School (Tıbbiye) established in 1827. In 1868, the old school that had once served to train devşirme recruits for palace service was re-established as the French-language Galatasaray Lisesi high school. Manned by French teachers, this institution started producing a Muslim Ottoman intelligentsia knowledgeable in French, who received an education independent of the religious establishment.

Although all layers of Ottoman society, if not all people, were to some extent polyglot, knowledge of French was almost uniquely the preserve of the literate and administrative elite. The literacy rate is estimated at two to five percent around 1870; French was primarily learned in schools, but the main means of acquiring literacy was the religious schools, called medrese, which did not teach French; thus, we get a sense of how small this group of French/

60. Many of them were multilingual, knowing a combination of Albanian, Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Kurdish, Persian, or a Slavic language. None of these languages, however, was particularly well-suited to communicating with people beyond the immediate frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, least of all with the elites in Western Europe.


63. Devşirme was the practice by which the Ottoman Empire levied Christian boys from conquered areas (primarily in the Balkans), converted them to Islam and put them in the service of the empire. It ended in the early 1700s.

64. The list of languages that were in contact in big Ottoman population centers is too long to enumerate.

65. These numbers are little more than guesses. Ziya Paşa estimated in 1868 that only about two percent of the Muslim population was literate. Ahmet Mithat thought that illiteracy ran from ninety to ninety-five percent, and lamented that the rest were “without pen and without tongue.” Süleyman Paşa at the same time guessed that there were only twenty thousand Muslims in the capital who could read a newspaper. Özlem Berk, Translation and Westernisation in Turkey (From the 1840s to the 1980s) (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1999), 52.
Ottoman bilinguals was (for Christians, there was probably a higher proportion, but this is equally difficult to estimate). Nevertheless, the social and intellectual importance of the French-proficient Ottoman elite outstripped their small number. Many of this elite were journalists, and newspapers were disseminated not only to those who could read, but also received mass dissemination through such common practices as reading newspapers aloud in coffeehouses. The heavy predominance of French among translated texts is an indication of the importance of that language. Of all translated books published in the Ottoman language between 1729 and 1875, 58.9 percent had French as a source language, while English and German represented seven percent and 4.8 percent, respectively. While percentages are not synonymous with influence, it is tempting to conclude that in the nineteenth century, or at least until 1875, French was more important than any other European language, and possibly as important as all other European languages combined. As Bernard Lewis notes:

The result of all this was to create a new social element [in the Ottoman Empire] … familiar with some aspects of Western civilisation through study, reading, and personal contact, acquainted with at least one Western language—usually French—accustomed to look up to Western experts as their mentors and guides to new and better ways.


67. One may note that the scarcity of translations from Arabic and Persian may stem from the fact that those who cared about such texts were able to read them in the original language. Despite frequent Ottoman/Arabic/Persian trilingualism among the Ottoman elite, especially prior to the nineteenth century and the rising importance of French, there was a rich tradition of translations from Arabic and Persian into Ottoman; see Cemal Demircioğlu, “From Discourse to Practice: Rethinking ‘Translation’ (Terceme) and Related Practices of Text Production in the Late Ottoman Literary Tradition” (PhD diss., Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, 2005), 11; Ağâh Sırrı Levend, *Türk Edebiyatı (Giriş)*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, [1973] 1988); Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Uyanış Devirlerinde Tercümenin Rolü*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Ülken Yayınları, [1935] 1997); Günay Kut, “Anadolu'da Türk Edebiyatı,” *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yılığı Belleten* (1991): 127–136.


69. France was not only the main country from which texts were drawn, but the few texts that were not originally written in French were often translated via French. This made French concepts even more important for the Ottoman language. One such example is Schiller's *Kabale und Lieve*, which was translated from its French version. Berk, *Translation and Westernisation*, 24.

70. Lewis, “The Impact of the French Revolution,” 111. Lewis may be taking it a bit far in that he has no way of knowing how French experts were considered by their students (or at least he quotes nothing to support his claim).
Lewis’s points about a “new social element” and the relationship between Ottoman student and French teacher may be salient ones. France became, for better and for worse, a reference society for the Ottoman elite at the same time as Ottoman/French bilingualism expanded heavily.

**Ottoman/French Bilinguals**

According to the French Turkologist Johann Strauss, “French attained the status of a semi-official language in the Ottoman Empire, and one of communication between educated speakers of different linguistic communities” in the late nineteenth century. While the scholarly literature on how Ottoman intellectuals related to the Ottoman and Turkish languages is quite voluminous, the literature on how they *used* French in combination with Ottoman is not. I will attempt here to provide some sociolinguistic contours.

In most of the major languages in the Ottoman Empire, diglossia was the norm: each language had a vernacular form and a written high language often associated with religion. This excluded a great many from the written language not only because they did not know the alphabet, but because the vocabulary and grammar used in written language was largely unrecognizable without a proper education. As was argued at the time, and commonly repeated today, the result of diglossia was the detachment of the intellectual elite from the rest of society. As Johann Strauss points out with regard to the case of the Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews of Istanbul, French influence further alienated the Jewish elite from the rest of the Judeo-Spanish language community. I would say that the same goes for other language communities in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, a common trope in late Ottoman literature was the Francophile fop being lampooned, such as in the Ottoman novels *Felâtun Bey ile Râkîm Efendi* (*Felâtun Bey and Rakîm Efendi*) by Ahmet Mithat (1876) and *Araba Sevdası* (*Carriage Love*) by Recaizade Ekrem (1886). Now, it is not knowledge of French as such that is lampooned, but rather the superficial adoption of French mores in ways that were not considered compatible with Ottoman social life. In fact, the

positively portrayed protagonist of the former novel is actually praised for his diligent study of French and his (sincere) friendships with Europeans.

Several important Ottoman intellectuals became exiles in London and Paris, publishing the first independent Ottoman-language newspapers there. The most notable of these are Namık Kemal (1840–1888), Ziya Paşa (1825–1880), and Ali Suavi (1839–1878). Their influence on Ottoman political discourse is undisputed, and it is clear from the contributions of such people as Namık Kemal that French was an important reference point, because he began introducing Ottoman *calques* for French concepts or reinterpreting Ottoman words to match French concepts. Among his many contributions to Ottoman conceptual vocabulary are his introduction of *hürriyet* (liberty) and his reinterpretation of *vatan* (*patrie*).76

The elite of the Christian and Jewish minorities are pieces of the puzzle that cannot be treated extensively here, but it is clear that they too constituted possible routes of conceptual exchange and influences. From an earlier date, they had more contact with Europe: from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the majority of works in Armenian, Greek, Judeo-Spanish, and Arabic were printed outside Ottoman territories, in Amsterdam, Rome, Venice, Vienna, or Leipzig.77 At the same time, Jewish and Christian merchants dominated the trade with Europe, and in the nineteenth century, European and American missionary schools were established in Ottoman lands, mainly enrolling Christian pupils.78 Although there was a degree of segmentation of the Ottoman literary public (for the most part, each literary language had its own script79), there were plenty of bilinguals and trilinguals who made up parts of the milieu with whom the Muslim Ottoman elite related. While they may not have had the greatest *direct* influence on Ottoman conceptual usage, interaction in multiple languages made for a dynamic linguistic situation that probably had indirect consequences on Ottoman conceptual developments.

“The Former Ottoman Empire”

The meaning of *Ottoman Empire* (*Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*) as a Turkish concept is today partly constituted by differentiating it from the nation-state concept of

79. This was not a one-to-one relationship; see Strauss, “Who Read What.”
Turkey (Türkiye). In this section I turn my attention to the moment in history when this distinction became established as part of the conceptual vocabulary of the state. Unfortunately, I have not been able to search through the entire transcripts of the Ottoman legislative assemblies, the Meclîs-i Mebûsan and the Meclîs-i Âyân (convened during the Second Constitutional Period, 1908–1920). The transcripts (Tutanak) of the Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Turkish Grand National Assembly, TBMM) are more easily searchable, and have been extensively used in the research for this article.

The concept of “the Exalted State” (Devlet-i Âliyye) was hegemonic in state discourse until the debate about the abolishment of the “sultanate”. The current conceptual relationship between Osmanlı İmparatorluğu and Türkiye was established when what in English is called “the sultanate” was abolished.80 Osmanlı İmparatorluğu came into use as a name for the past incarnation of the same polity that the Ankara-based elite were claiming to rule.81 In the first three years that the assembly met (1919–1922), Osmanlı İmparatorluğu was hardly used in the assembly debates. The few times it was mentioned, the emphasis was not on the concept empire. It was mentioned three times in the transcripts of the TBMM for 1920, but not at all in 1921. In two of these three instances, the specific usage was Türkiye Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.82 It was not “Turkey” or “the Ottoman Empire”, it was “Turkey-the-Ottoman-Empire.” The two were one and the same.83

That this particular combination of concepts was the genesis of the politically significant use of Osmanlı İmparatorluğu may be seen as an indication that there was no clear-cut distinction between the two concepts or indeed the

80. While in English “sultanate” is commonly used to refer to the rule of a sultan and a specific kind of Islamic monarchical tradition, in Ottoman it seems to have had a more generic interpretation (although one interpretation overlapped with the English). While Şemseddin Sami explains it as “rule [hükümdârlık], [rule of a] padişah [pâdişâhlıq] … state/dynasty [devlet], government [hükümet],” Sir James Redhouse has “1. predominant power or authority. 2. Lordship, dominion, jurisdiction, empire. 3. Pomp, magnificence, state,” with “To reign as a sultan” being pretty far down the list. Şemseddin Sami, Qâmûs-i Türkî, 733; Sir James Redhouse, A Turkish and English Lexicon, new impression (Constantinople: H. Matteosian, 1921), 1072.

81. Note that they were technically rebels, setting up a competing political structure centered first in Erzurum and then in Ankara.

82. Turkey, T.B.M.M Zabet Ceridesi. Devre: I., Cilt: 2, İçtima Senesi: 1, Ondokuzuncu İçtima 22.5.1336 (1920) [Turkish Grand National Assembly Protocol. 1st period, 2nd Volume, 1st Legislative Year, 19th Meeting, 22 May 1920], 14.

83. Turkey, T.B.M.M Zabet Ceridesi. Devre: I, Cilt: 6, İçtima Senesi: 1, Yüz beşinci içtima, 29.11.1336 (1920) [Turkish Grand National Assembly Protocol. 1st period, 6th Volume, 1st Legislative Year, 105th Meeting, 29 November 1920], 118; Ibid., I, Cilt: 2, İçtima Senesi: 1, On Dokuzuncu İçtima, 22.5.1336 (1920) [Ibid. 1st period, 2nd Volume, 1st Legislative Year, 19th Meeting, 22 May 1920], 14.
The concept of Turkey (Türkiye) did not at this point in time take its meaning by differentiation from the Ottoman Empire in the same way as it would only a few years later. Moreover, it attests to a political maneuvering that was necessitated by a duality in political legitimacy—the nationalists were explicitly fighting to save the vatan (patrie) and millet (nation/congregation). In the conceptual apparatus of the time, the devlet—which meant both state and dynasty in the same concept—was the protector of both of these two. As one does not choose the historical context for one’s utterances, I would argue that Ottoman history was still the context for the concepts employed by the Turkish nationalists, and imbued these concepts with meaning. Whatever the statesmen “intended” to mean by devlet, they had to relate to a semantic field in which devlet meant both state and dynasty. Saving the nation meant having to save the state, and one could not express saving the state without arguing at the same time for saving the dynasty, as these were still conceptually one and the same.

The concept Türkiye paradoxically has a longer history than Osmanlı İmparatorluğu. In all likelihood it goes back to Arabic and has existed in French and Italian for centuries, but in Ottoman it seems to have had little prominence until it became popularized in 1913 or possibly a little earlier. As a word it appears to be an Arabic feminine form of Turk, which is a common way of making abstract nouns as well as names for communities and countries. As a concept, it came to be used as a temporal counterconcept to Osmanlı İmparatorluğu in the republican period. While the state was still ruled by a dynasty, the relationship between Türkiye and Devlet-i Âliye seems to have been unclear.

Türkiye, having for the first few years of the TBMM been used in compound with other concepts, became differentiated from Devlet-i Âliye and Devlet-i Osmaniye at approximately the same time as the concept of Osmanlı İmparatorluğu emerged. In terms of official political discourse a 1922 TBMM

84. Türkiye has a precursor in the concept of Türkistan (Land of the Turks), which goes back to at least the 1860s. See, for example, Kemal, “Wa shawirhum fi’l-amr,” 173.

85. Judging from how it was written in the first known instances, a case can be made on the basis of spelling that Türkiye in the modern form was derived from Italian (although it existed in French too). Şiya Gökalp wrote this as Türkiyā (تۆرکیئا), which bears a striking similarity to the long-established Italian name for Turkey, Turchia, but not to the French Turquie or the Arabic original spelling. See O. Öner And I. Parlatır, Tanzimat Sonras Osmanlıca Metinleri [Ottoman texts [written] after the Tanzimat] (İstanbul, 1977), 534. The original was published in as Siyā Gökalp, “Lisānī Türkçülük” [Linguistic Turkism], Türk Yü zat-ı hazret to zat-ı hazret [Turkish Hearth] (1913). It is available in transcription as Siya Gökalp, Türkçülüğün Esasları [The principles of Turkism] (İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları, [1932] 1952), 101–124. This may or may not be a way of “domesticating” a word of recognizably Greek origin: the Arabic “-e” ending taking the place of a Greek “-a” ending.
debate on the Law of Fundamental Principles of 1921 played a key role in distinguishing between the two:

Therefore, from that time on, the old Ottoman Empire [Osmanlı İmparatorluğu] was assigned to history and in its place a new and national State of Turkey [Türkiye Devleti] [was established], actually from that time imperial rule [padişahlık] was abolished and the Turkish Grand National Assembly [Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi] took its place.87

The relationship between Türkiye and Osmanlı İmparatorluğu was further clarified in the relationship to the mandate states that had until recently been ruled by the Devlet-i Âliye.88 The Ottoman past, along with its southern and eastern neighbors, increasingly became represented as foreign, corrupt, and backward. The distinction between Türkiye and Osmanlı İmparatorluğu made it conceptually possible to extend the discourse of European Orientalists not only to the nomads in the Ottoman periphery (as has been shown by Ussama Makdisi in his article “Ottoman Orientalism”)89; It also made it possible to extend this discourse to the Ottoman Empire itself. As European exogenous concepts relating to the Ottoman Empire became translated into Ottoman, Turkish republican discourse started detaching “modern” Turkey from the “backward” Ottoman Empire in terms of temporality.

Conclusion

In a world that was increasingly becoming internationalized, but whose very internationalization and integration was based on European norms, practices, and institutions, and of which the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century must be said to have been part, discursive power in the international arena was vested in texts in European languages to a much greater extent than it had been previously. At stake was the legitimacy to rule that, in the absence of an overwhelming military force, could only be backed up by employing concepts of rule that Europeans recognized and engaging in practices conforming to

86. That is, from the proclamation of the Teşkilât-ı Esasiye Kanunu [The Law of Fundamental Principles] in 1921.
87. Turkey, T.B.M.M Zabıt Ceridesi. Devre: I, Çıtına Sene: 3, Yüzotuzuncu Çıtına 1.11.1338 (1922) [Turkish Grand National Assembly Protocol. 1st period, 24th Volume, 3rd Legislative Year, 130th Meeting, 1 November 1922], 313.
those of “international society.” Discursively, such claims to power were formulated in exogenous concepts, and while endogenous concepts did change, they did not do so as quickly as the Ottomans laid claim to French concepts in French. Internally, there was more of a continuity between old concepts and new. With many people becoming bilingual in Ottoman and French, and more texts being translated from French into Ottoman, concepts were established as conventionalized equivalents. Through such processes, Ottoman language became increasingly entangled with French and thus also more conceptually compatible with it. While this process of entangling is important, one should keep in mind what Jörn Leonhard points out in his contribution to the this issue:

[T]here is rarely a deeper reflection on the diachronic change and synchronic variety of meanings which stand behind different uses of empire and imperial pasts: “imperium” is not “empire” in English, which is not “empire” in French, which is not “Reich.”

I would add that imparatorluk is neither of these. While it makes sense to group and study the concept together with other concepts that translate as empire, one should not lose sight of its specificities. Moreover, one should not jump from an onomasiological investigation to a semasiological conclusion. That is to say, just because one may analytically argue that the Ottoman Empire was an empire, one should not blindly translate the concepts the Ottomans used for their polity as empire. Ottoman Empire as a concept is primarily meaningful in the Turkish language as a counterconcept to a Turkish nation-state. Divorced from the concept of nation-state, it becomes meaningless.