The Study

If history is a science, it should be possible to treat and analyze Ottoman history according to criteria commensurate with those that have been developed in studying the history of other areas. Such an approach should facilitate the entry of Ottoman history into the discourse of comparative history, thereby allowing communication across ethnic, national, civilizational, and continental divides. Global communication of this kind in turn should allow one to bridge the gap that today separates historians and social scientists, most particularly historically oriented sociologists and anthropologists. Many historians see themselves, and consequently are seen by others, as being concerned mainly with the study of the particular, the unique, and the nonrepetitive. This type of orientation, even though much reduced in the last fifty years or so, still can be observed even among historians of Europe.[1] In Middle Eastern history, and particularly in Ottoman history, where research moves at a much slower pace, these attitudes are very prevalent. As a result, present day historiography of the Ottoman Empire continues to emphasize the peculiarities, oddities, and particularism of Ottoman history and civilization. The present study is intended as a plea for a reversal of this trend.

I.

A general look at the present state of historiography concerning the Ottoman Empire soon makes it apparent that the scholarly cost of particularism has been high, because the emphasis on the incomparability and incommensurability of Ottoman history with other histories has narrowed our perspective and has given rise to many distortions. Ottoman historians are often inclined to treat phenomena that occur throughout the world in vastly different states and cultures, such as, for instance, tax farming, as if they were the outcome of purely conjunctural factors affecting the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Empire alone. Ottoman specialists have emphasized the "differentness" of their chosen subject to such an extent that a dialogue with neighboring historical disciplines has become difficult if not impossible. We have made our field into such an esoteric one that most of the time other researchers cannot fathom what we are trying to do. This difficulty brings another in its wake, and to my mind, this second problem is even more serious, from a scientific point of view. Our tendency to isolate ourselves in a small esoteric group has made it impossible to develop any sustained scholarly interchange even within the broader field of Near Eastern studies. As a result, most scholars in Ottoman history proceed in a most uncritical fashion when they read one another's work. In addition, the dearth of scholarly communication and exchange puts us all too often in the position of duplicating one another's work, with all the waste of time and energy that this involves.

It must be admitted also that most studies in the wider Near Eastern field are written from a noncomparative point of view. This state of affairs makes it impossible for the researcher to carry on any discourse with other specialists. At a future occasion I hope to address the question of why there is hardly any scholarly dialogue (across specialists' lines) between Near Eastern historians and specialists in other areas.

Scholarly particularism not only misleads Ottomanists

but also compounds the dilemma of those nonspecialists who are anxious to write comparative history that includes the Ottomans in their studies. A noteworthy example is Perry Anderson, who in a book focused on European absolutist states, has included a chapter on the Ottoman Empire.[2] Basing himself upon the standard secondary literature, Anderson underlines what he regards as the unique character of the European historic trajectory by stressing the features in which the Ottoman Empire differed from Europe. Since moreover he places a high value upon the political and social results of the historical processes he discerns in early modern Europe, he regards Ottoman history as not only different, but also as inferior. But at the same time Anderson genuinely wishes to tackle Ottoman history from a progressive perspective. Thereby his treatment adds some further complications for those Ottoman historians who attempt to develop counterpositions against the dominant conservative paradigm. More than a few established Ottoman historians, with their emphasis on the Empire's decline and modernization, have imposed a perspective in which Ottoman state and society appear both different from and inferior to their European counterparts. Those Ottoman historians who are working toward a revision of these unscientific views now need to grapple not only with the more old-fashioned, modernization-oriented, and European-centered paradigm, but also with the progressive variant proposed by Anderson.

For what is ostensibly a historical treatment, Anderson starts with some curious assumptions, for example, the notion that the Ottomans represented a less developed civilizational formation than that found in Europe.[3] This claim sets the tone for his study of Ottoman history in the early modern period. Anderson considers the Ottoman state to be an intrusion on the European continent, albeit an intrusion that lasted for five hundred years. He evaluates this intrusion as one that created problems "to unitary histories of the continent," since the Ottomans were never "naturalized into (Europe's) social or political system"(p. 397).

Anderson sets up a typically Eurocentric answer to the question why the Ottoman Empire is important in world history, an answer he must have had in the back of his mind even as he started to consider Ottoman history. To state the matter in his own words: "In fact, the long and intimate presence on European soil of a social formation and state structure in such contrast with the prevalent pattern of the continent, provides an apposite measure against which to assess the historical specificity of European society before the advent of industrial capitalism."[4] Anderson goes further, picking up the traditional Orientalist theme of Ottoman decline and attributing it to the usual external causes: "The long-term decline of the Ottoman Empire was determined by the military and economic superiority of Absolutist Europe."[5] He reduces Ottoman state and society to a kind of backdrop to the unfolding drama of world history, which in his view is equated with the history of the principal European states.

It should be pointed out in Anderson's defense that he is not a specialist on early modern Ottoman history, and that he has arrived at his simplistic and narrow explanations of Ottoman affairs by faithfully following the available secondary literature. As a consequence, he winds up doing something that was not necessarily part of his original intention, namely, reinforcing regressive paradigms through the reintroduction, in what seems to be totally new garb, of the same old cliched interpretations of Ottoman history. He develops his own explanations for the internal dynamics of such historically evolved practices as the shift from charismatic leadership to leadership based on a collective ruling class, but in so doing, he simply repeats the standard explanations. To name but one example, he views the introduction of the royal cage, or *kafes*, in the following manner:

"In the seventeenth century, the calibre of the imperial rulers—whose despotic authority had hitherto generally been exercised with considerable ability—collapsed because of a new succession system." (From now on, the throne passed to the eldest surviving male of the Osmanli line.)" Princes were placed in "... damascened dungeons virtu-

ally designed to produce pathological imbalance or imbecility. Such Sultans were in no position to control or check the steady deterioration of the State system beneath them. It was in this epoch that clericalist manoeuvres by the Sheikh-ul-Islam started to encroach on the system of political decision, which became steadily more venal and unstable."[6]

This passage contains several misunderstandings, and to discuss them *in extenso* would lead the reader far away from the present topic. Suffice it to say that seventeenth century Ottoman rulers ruled in only a limited sense; their presence was necessary so that bureaucratic commands could be appropriately legitimized. Mehmed IV (1648–1687) for example, was a child during a considerable part of his reign, yet the state apparatus functioned adequately without him. The sultans of the seventeenth century did participate in politics, and a major political mistake could, and occasionally did, cost them their throne. But basically, the Empire was governed by bureaucrats who were based in the palace or the grand vezir's office, and the major officeholders used their households as a means for the recruitment and training of new personnel. In this context, the madness of Deli Ibrahim (1640–1648) was a minor matter, and to take the personality defects of some rulers as a starting point for dealing with the question of Ottoman decline represents a grave misunderstanding. It must be admitted, however, that similar misconceptions still dominate twentieth century Ottoman historiography, and a specialist on early modern Europe, even one who might wish to challenge the current paradigm, would have great difficulty in locating the appropriate secondary literature.

Given this background of reproduced and perpetuated misconceptions, it is not surprising that specialists on Ottoman affairs on both sides of the Atlantic should frequently complain that other historians are indifferent to engaging Ottoman historians in any kind of dialogue on any aspect of their subject. Those few who do, like Anderson, focus on the odd, the unique, and the peculiar characteristics of Ottoman state and society. It is these particular

features that seem to attract attention, rather than those which the Ottoman Empire shared with other societies, and which, therefore, are accessible to broader comparison.[7]

As a way out of this impasse, I would suggest replacing the old notion that Ottoman state and society were essentially unique with the proposition that Ottoman history is comparable and commensurable with other histories. I would go even further and say that as far as seventeenth century history is concerned, there are profound correspondences between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, and these parallels suggest some of the issues that Ottoman historians might pursue in reassessing Ottoman history. Two themes in particular stand out in the recent European historiography of the seventeenth century: one focuses on the possibility of an economic and social revolution, and the other is concerned with the changing character of the state. Historians have long debated whether or not a given country experienced a major revolution or a series of social and economic crises which amounted to a revolution. The issues raised have led to sustained debates on the meaning of the term revolution in a preindustrial context: can one assume, for example, that during the seventeenth century English revolution wealthier or rising gentry generally sided with the powers that be against the rebels, or was enrichment or impoverishment irrelevant in this context?[8] Or in another example, from seventeenth century France: were the rural rebellions that shook the country motivated by peasant resentment against the dominant classes, or should they be considered as provincial movements, headed by the gentry and directed against the centralizing tendencies of the emerging early modern state?[9]

Although the debate on seventeenth century revolutions is intimately connected with a discussion of the early modern state, some historians approach the nature of the state in a more direct manner. They wonder whether the state, in its precapitalist formation, should be studied as an autonomous entity separate from its class base, or whether it is no more and no less than an extension of the ruling class. Anyone studying the early modern European

state should consider at the very least the following alternative approaches. (1) The state is class-based and functions to all intents and purposes as an extension of the ruling class; (2) The state is class-based but autonomous; that is, while it represents the interests of the ruling class as a whole, the interests of subsections within the ruling class may be sacrificed "for the good of society," and left with no alternative but to comply; (3) The state is part of the ruling class, but for its own advantage forges alliances with local or regional elites; (4) The state is autonomous and not based upon any particular class; to the contrary, the officials serving the state perceive themselves as transcending class divisions in the area they govern. The development in Europe of absolutist monarchies striving toward an early modern type of centralization can be understood as one stage in the process whereby the state gained increasing autonomy. Here we may have an example of the tendency toward a progressive separation between the state and the ruling class.[10]

The advance in historiographical thinking found in recent work on seventeenth-century European history is based upon a body of advanced scholarship produced over the last quarter of a century. Without this rich scholarship and historiography, the debate over state or society and the "revolution" of the seventeenth century would have remained at the abstract and theoretical level. While similar debates concerning state, society, and political transformations ought to be taking place for the Ottoman realm as well, research on these topics is very limited indeed. Worldwide, there are fewer than fifty historians engaged in the study of Ottoman society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since there is so little scholarly literature available, those Ottoman historians who do work on this period are obliged to be far more speculative than their European counterparts when introducing and discussing revisionist interpretations.[11]

Within Ottoman historiography, the treatment of the state (and of society) has played an especially critical role in setting the parameters of nearly all the research that

has been carried out to date for all periods of Ottoman history. In particular, assumptions guiding scholarly research on the early modern and modern Ottoman periods accord a prominent place to the state as an institution, especially with regard to its bureaucracy and administrative practices.

In twentieth century scholarly writing on Ottoman affairs, the concept, the institution, and the nature of the state have been treated as if, regardless of the passage of time, the state had remained essentially the same. The term state possesses the same connotations and denotations throughout the entire course of Ottoman history, and no differentiation is drawn between the early modern period (which for the purposes of this study is the fourteenth through the seventeenth century) and the modern period (which encompasses the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries). Such simplification is bad enough in itself; but to compound the problem, nearly all the scholarly literature I have reviewed is premised on the unspoken, perhaps even unconscious, assumption that the modern standards of the nation-state constitute the unchallenged norm by which to assess early modern political life. Determinations are made without regard for any historical transformations from early modern times to the fully developed and virtually autonomous modern institution. The scholarly literature measures the early modern Ottoman state by such modern sociologically evolved standards as merit, public service, equity, and rationalized practices—the very same standards that modern, and specifically twentieth century social science has reserved for evaluating the efficacy of the modern nation-state.

This anachronistic treatment first of all leads to a displacement of emphasis and to misconceptions in the study of Ottoman society and state. Second, because of the misappropriation of categories used in historical analysis, Ottoman society is treated by a more subjective standard than its early modern counterparts in Europe. For example, corruption with respect to appointments to public office was a regular occurrence in England during the eighteenth century, and specialists dealing with this area

treat the phenomenon of corruption as a topic for legitimate scholarly analysis.[12] Yet when treating the equivalent feature in Ottoman state and society historians do not analyze corruption—they simply condemn it. Admittedly, a rationale for approaching "early modern" corruption against modern sociological standards comes readily to mind, since some of the Ottoman authors of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also take an abstract and moralistic approach when inveighing against corruption. But historians pride themselves on the critical use they make of the available sources. Had Ottoman authors not been concerned with corruption, it would still be necessary to try to find out whether the "standard" member of the Ottoman ruling class saw his relationship to the available fiscal resources in the same manner, say, as did a virulent critic of the Ottoman establishment such as the sixteenth century writer Mustafa 'Ali. In other words, only after an investigation of the facts has been made can one compare the understanding of corruption such as may have existed in the second half of the sixteenth century with the conception that prevails today, after the nation-state has had time to take root.[13]

An uncritical reading of the Ottoman sources, with their emphasis upon bureaucratic merit, predisposes the researcher to regard the modern nation-state with its meritocratic bureaucracy as a paradigm applicable to the study of the early modern period as well. As a consequence, social and economic transformations in the Ottoman sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are either totally ignored, or are forced into the nation-state framework of analysis. This approach should not be regarded simply as an intellectual error, for value judgments are equally at play. Evaluating the early modern Ottoman state according to criteria designed for the modern nation-state tends to reinforce a comfortable feeling of superiority in scholars from Europe and America, a state of mind which, as already seen, may sometimes be found even among those scholars who try to view history in a progressive perspective. The unhistorical character of such attempts becomes even more obvious

when one examines some of the underlying assumptions. Chief among these is the misapprehension that prior to the seventeenth century the Ottoman state was a centralized, efficient, and rational public entity, unique in the period during which it flourished. The presumption follows that by the seventeenth century the Ottoman state had lost whatever unique features it had once possessed and had begun to disintegrate. The process of disintegration is presumed to have started late in the sixteenth century. Another misconception is that such features as the rationalism and public service that characterize the modern state are totally unprecedented in Ottoman history. Therefore, with the dawning of modern times, the nation-state was presumably imposed on the underlying Ottoman society by the ruling elite. This model makes it unnecessary to examine the history of the previous three hundred years, which is apparently irrelevant to the experiences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Further, socioeconomic transformations are seen primarily in terms of how they affect the functioning of the state. Little attention is paid to the possibility that the state may in turn reflect transformations in economy and society. Behind these distortions in interpretation and understanding lies a literalist and unreflective reading of Ottoman sources, as shall be discussed below.

To date, enough evidence has been accumulated to allow historians to begin considering whether the "classical" themes of seventeenth century European history are appropriate to Ottoman history as well. In European history, an economic and social revolution was postulated and questions were raised on whether the revolution was of a nature to transform the state. What do these themes teach about the relationship between Ottoman social and economic structures on the one hand, and the political superstructure on the other? When comparative approaches to Ottoman history have become more developed and more sophisticated, it will be possible to determine whether the links between the political and socioeconomic structures in the Ottoman Empire were similar to

those in Europe, or whether the relationship between a social and economic revolution and the transformation of the state differed in certain respects from one polity to the other. In the long run, comparisons of this kind may carry historians beyond the confines of Europe and the Middle East; it would be particularly instructive to study the seventeenth century peasant rebellions of China from such a comparative context. Whether or not a seventeenth century transformation of the Ottoman state took place is a question of interest not only by and of itself, but also one that allows the historian to tie in Ottoman history with world history.

II.

Given the present dearth in knowledge, the Ottoman problems of the seventeenth century constitute too large a task to be tackled by a single researcher. At this stage of inquiry, the question that must be raised is simply why there were major social and economic upheavals at this particular time. Any attempt to explain these upheavals shows that they form part of a pattern, and that Ottomans and Europeans of the seventeenth century experienced comparable economic and political dislocations, which can be regarded as symptoms of a far-reaching transformation. What is most striking, however, is the state of perpetual rebellion in a good number of Ottoman domains during this period.[14]

The underlying economic issues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continue to be argued according to competing theories. Contributions to the debate are articles by Halil Inalcik, Huricihan Islamoglu and Çaglar Keyder, and Huricihan Islamoglu and Suraiya Faroqhi.[15] Inalcik takes a monetarist view, to the effect that the flood of New World silver entering the Ottoman domains and the resulting liquidity crisis of the Ottoman state constitute the primary contributing factor to the disruptions of the seventeenth century. Inalcik focuses on external

(*timars*)—in addition to easy and frequent appointment to or removal from high office. The ruling class implemented these political moves with confidence. Members of the Ottoman ruling establishment were not excessively concerned whether the reaya would deliver their taxes or not to the next assignee (fief-holder), or object to the appointment of a specific individual to high office, or to the removal of another. For a while the ruling class was united enough and mustered sufficient coercive power to assert its will and discourage local resistance. Late in the sixteenth century, the historian and litterateur Mustafa 'Ali dwells on the ability of the ruling class to enforce its power as special attributes of the strength and gifts once possessed by the Ottoman dynasty.[17]

Another significant manifestation of early modern centralization is illustrated by the effort to "Ottomanize," that is, to codify the provincial regulations known as the *liva kanunnameleri* or *sancak kanunnameleri.* Conformity to these centrally conceived tax regulations was insisted upon "without exceptions."[18] Sixteenth century liva kanunnameleri, especially though not exclusively from the Arab provinces, point to an initial effort at reaffirming most of the provincial regulations and laws which had existed prior to the acquisition of these provinces, whether by conquest or by peaceful annexation. The provincial tax codes were amended or reproduced at intervals throughout the sixteenth century and early part of the seventeenth. After that period the production of codes nearly halted, because the centrally imposed tax regulations were abandoned in most of the Ottoman domains during the seventeenth century. This was a change of some moment, for it indicates a transition from an established, and on the whole, stable system of revenue collection to a situation in which fixed rules no longer obtained, and in which maximization of revenues became the one and only concern. In the scramble for higher revenues, formally enacted tax regulations had become all but irrelevant.

The abandonment of the liva kanunnameleri and the growing pace of tax experimentation should be taken as

symptoms of the breakdown of whatever form early modern centralization had taken in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It should therefore also suggest a diminution in the coercive powers of the ruling class in Istanbul. As I have noted elsewhere, important changes were taking place in the composition of the ruling elite, accompanied by the loss of a consensus which up to that time had preserved a balance of power.[19] Eventually, the consequent loss of balance of power led to a more open intra-elite political struggle at the center, manifested by a growing decentralization of authority and an end to the early modern class-bound merit for-service-system. There is no doubt that the struggles within the ruling elite also affected its capacity to collect taxes.

The tax paying Ottoman subjects, especially the peasants among them, did not remain passive spectators of the struggle for revenue collection. Social conflicts surfaced, usually in the form of resistance to the experiments in revenue extraction so frequent at this time. Peasants in early seventeenth century Anatolia built improvised earthworks in the vicinity of their villages, and from the shelter of these strongholds refused to pay their dues. Others invoked the protection of influential figures in Istanbul against rapacious provincial governors and their tax collectors.[20] The peasants' resistance can be explained easily if one considers that the new forms of revenue extraction consisted of variations on a single practice, namely, the privatization of what was once considered public property, and the consequent change in the relationship of the reaya to the land. (Regional exceptions apart, peasants held their land individually, and not in common.) A further observation needs to be made at this point. Whether the Ottoman state extracted taxes mostly in cash or mostly in kind constitutes one of the major issues in the debate on the nature of the Ottoman state within Ottoman historiography. Evidence in the liva kanunnameleri, suggests that even in the beginning of the sixteenth century, this early period, there was a trend in favor of cash extraction. The records also document a de facto shift from product to

cash payment, which the central government was powerless to prevent, though some liva kanunnameleri, for example the one for Mosul, expressly prohibits demands for payment in money.[21] A similar prohibition is recorded in a sixteenth century district court record or *sicillat-i şeriye* for Jerusalem.[22] We may conclude that from the sixteenth century onward, the use of money was progressing on the upper levels of the Ottoman economy, and that timar holders and other claimants to peasant surpluses reflected a growing trend. It is probable that peasants were still finding it difficult and burdensome to convert their tax gains into money, and the prohibitions in some of the liva kanunnameleri probably reflect their protests.

From the seemingly confused and arbitrary practices of seventeenth century revenue extraction, an overall trend does in fact emerge. The central government often lost control over surplus extraction, which resulted in the progressive disappearance of the timar holders, who were government appointees without any power to dictate the terms of their appointment. Revenue extraction gradually fell under the control of tax farmers, who were much more difficult to depose, a state of affairs that had repercussions on the local level as well. The new style tax collectors operated close to the source of revenue, initially as agents for the major tax farmers, who bought at auction the right to collect revenue. The more important tax farmers were often found among high- and middle-level Istanbul-based officials. Their agents supervised revenue sources and ensured that taxes were delivered promptly, in some instances both to the main tax farmer and directly to the imperial treasury. The shift from taxation in kind to taxation in cash took place with a commensurate change on the sociopolitical level, manifested in a transformation in the composition of the ruling elite at the center and in the provinces. The process began in the sixteenth century, but became statistically significant only in the seventeenth.[23]

The interests of the newly emerging tax farmers large and small demanded that they retain control of taxable resources for reasonably long periods of time. Toward the

end of the seventeenth century, as tax farms were converted from short- and fixed-term forms into a lifelong right for the successful bidder at auction, an organizational mode was found to accommodate the demands of some of the major tax farmers.[24] The lifelong tax farms allowed the more important tax farmers to calculate future income to a much greater extent than had been possible in the past, since yearly installments were low and fixed for the life of the grantee. For example, a tax farmer who had paid the substantial downpayment demanded by the treasury could now look forward to a hitherto unprecedented security of tenure.

Experimentation with revenue extraction reached its peak in the eighteenth century with the extensive practice of *mülk* grants, which converted public lands outright into registered private property. The history of these grants can be traced to grants of freehold property made to "lords of the marches" on the Balkan frontier during the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Similar grants are known from the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning years of the seventeenth as well, and contemporary writers such as Mustafa 'Ali and Koçu Bey have commented on them. For the later seventeenth century, I might mention the case of Rami Mehmed Paşa, later to become grand vezir, who early in his career was granted former miri lands as private property. The practice became a great deal more frequent in the eighteenth century than it had been previously; this was also the period during which elite families such as that of the Jalilis of Mosul, for example, were offered *temliknames* which conferred large tracts of public land as private property.

We may assume that the transformations in Ottoman society which started in the sixteenth century continued into the seventeenth.[25] The transformations resulted in numerous and sometimes violent rebellions in the Rumelian and Anatolian countryside. Some rebellions resulted in the granting by the Ottoman administration of provincial dynastic control to successful rebels. As examples

from the seventeenth century, I might mention the Mount Lebanon rebellion headed by Ma'anoglu and the rising power of the sherifs in the Hijaz.[26] Interestingly enough, by the eighteenth century the central state had become so dependent on the provincial magnates not only for internal security but for protection from external aggression, that it had to solicit the help of their armed forces in its quarrels with foreign powers.

Beginning in 1648, the provincial rebellions coincided at the center with the forcible removal from power of four sultans, a sequence of events which indicates that elite configurations at the center were changing also. Some of the royal depositions were accompanied by violent and bloody confrontations that parallel the fiscal transformations characteristic of the times, such as for instance, the several experiments which in 1695 led to the adoption of *malikane* tax-farming.

Already in the late 1500s there is evidence that the peasants were reacting to all the turmoil by abandoning their homes and their plots. Mustafa 'Ali comments on this phenomenon when he indicates that thousands of formerly peasant reaya were known to have settled in cities as artisans. He laments further the consequent double loss to the treasury, first, of the neglect-of-land tax or *çift-bozan* dues, which often remained unpaid, and second, because as the fleeing reaya became new artisans they did not pay the taxes which in more normal times had been paid by craftsmen and shopkeepers.[27] From Mustafa 'Ali's treatment it appears as though the reaya voluntarily and deliberately abandoned the countryside in favor of urban centers. Koçu Bey discusses the phenomenon from another perspective. Writing in the first half of the seventeenth century, he deplores the erosion of barriers that had once separated the orders or classes of society. He comments on the fact that in his time it had become difficult to differentiate a tax-paying subject from a member of the governing class, what with the reaya donning the outer garments of other social orders, riding horses, and carrying firearms

like military men. To this erosion of corporate distinction, Koçu Bey attributes the social rebellions of the time.[28] Other seventeenth century Ottoman chroniclers equally record various instances of social protest. Some protests were directed against changes in the form of landholding, others were the result of transformations in both political and social structures.[29]

In spite of evidence, however, twentieth century researchers have for the most part been reluctant to admit that the social and economic transformations that were taking place throughout the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century amounted to a change in social formation. Islamoglu and Keyder insist that in spite of the changes I have outlined, the same social formation continued, albeit in altered forms.[30] One may speculate that Ottoman historians have become so accustomed to thinking of Ottoman state and society as an all but immobile structure that they have great conceptual difficulties in reorienting themselves even when new evidence demonstrates the contrary of mobility. But in the long run, Ottoman historians cannot avoid facing the obvious question: How much change does there have to be before they will admit an overall transformation of state and society?[31]

III.

The nature of Ottoman state and society can be examined by contrasting evidence from the latter part of the sixteenth century with evidence from the late seventeenth. Here it is useful to reintroduce briefly the ongoing debate among historians of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Recent scholarship has explored the issue of the emerging autonomy of the state vis-a-vis the ruling class of the period. One side of the debate suggests that precapitalist (or early modern) state formations are indistinguishable from the ruling classes that dominate them. In the subsequent stages of the debate another focus pre-

dominates and researchers discuss whether the separation between state and ruling class and the development of state autonomy were conditioned by the emergence of capitalism. This problem continues to be the subject of heated argument. It may be recalled that there are secondary debates within the larger one, which examine the relative degree of autonomy that the state, in its latter-day evolution, obtains under specific historical conditions. One instance is the rise of Bonapartism as a result of a class struggle in which the power of the ruling class is nearly equal to that which its opponent can muster. Other debates concern the different natures and degrees of early modern and modern processes of centralization.[32]

In Ottoman usage the term for state is *devlet*. Modern historians have almost invariably misunderstood this term to have both the connotation and the denotation of the modern nation-state. Most often their misunderstanding is automatic, for it is difficult to find in the secondary literature a substantial discussion of the concrete changes of the historical phenomenon that the term devlet purports to represent. Andreas Tietze has provided one of the most suggestive definitions of what was meant by devlet in the seventeenth century. In an early discussion of the phenomenon he qualified it as "the decision-making power of the legitimate head of state as well as of those to whom he has delegated this power. The phrase *din u devlet* (religion and state) refers perhaps to the general climate produced by this power in the community under the aspect of perpetuating itself."[33]

That the term devlet as used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries carried strong religious connotations is apparent. Apart from the commonly used phrase din u devlet, as one example among many one might refer to the practice of granting pensions to various elderly people, who in recognition of the sultan's bounty were expected to pray for the continuing existence of the state. At the same time, in the day-to-day operation of the Ottoman state, religious legitimation was seldom invoked; quite the contrary, one comes away from Ottoman archival materials

with the impression that sixteenth and seventeenth century officials were concerned with the intricacies of implementing policy, less so with the general principles that informed the policies to be implemented. Obviously the tendency by sixteenth and seventeenth century authors to take the devlet for granted does not facilitate the task of the modern historian, who is thereby deprived of the source materials which a more open discussion would have generated. This difficulty may explain the lack, to the present day, of systematic studies on the nature of the early modern Ottoman state and society.

In the absence of secondary materials, it is possible to resort to the analyses of selected sixteenth through eighteenth century authors which give a central place to the operation of the Ottoman state.[34] One useful type of primary sources is the literature of advice to princes, or *nasihatname*. There are also useful historiographical treatises, a good example is Naima's *History*. Both types of sources are naturally distorted by the political partisanship of their authors, but even through this refraction the texts provide glimpses of seventeenth century society and state. Significantly enough, the ostensible impetus for the *nasihat* genre was the guidance of princes in the management of their personal and public affairs (in some periods the two were considered inseparable). There is no such immediately practical aim in Naima's chronicle, but he treats state and society in a polemical preface to a historical account of seventeenth and eighteenth century political events.

Among the *nasihatnames*, Koçu Bey's *Risale*, written in the first half of the seventeenth century, is particularly valuable for the purposes of the present study, for it provides three distinct advantages. First of all, it was composed before 1650 and therefore allows the tracing of some of the social, political, and economic trends that had been set in motion in the sixteenth century. This retrospective aspect of Koçu Bey's work is particularly important because changes occurring in the sixteenth century paved

the ground for the major transformations discernible by the end of the seventeenth. Among the most obvious examples of changes that took place about 1600 is the gradual phasing out of the timar system, which authors of Koçu Bey's time still tended to regard as the symbol of Ottoman greatness. Historians in the late twentieth century, however, view the timar system as indication that the early Ottoman Empire flourished in an environment in which coins were rare, and in which firearms were mostly a matter of artillery. Population growth, the spread of handguns, the influx of foreign silver, and the aggressive trading practices of European merchants all combined, in varying degrees (the exact role of these factors is still hotly debated), to increase monetary circulation, drive up prices of essential supplies, and induce the Ottoman administration to gradually substitute tax farming for the timar. Koçu Bey was highly sensitive to the social consequences of the prevailing economic and political instability. Since he and his fellow scholar officials understood the strict separation between taxpayers and ruling group to be a basic principle of Ottoman political organization, they perceived any blurring of the distinction as an indication of a severe political crisis.

Another advantage provided by Koçu Bey's treatise is one of structure. Within the genre, Koçu Bey's work is the only text that details both what Ottoman society and the state were like in earlier eras, and what they had become at the time of his writing. For the earlier years Koçu Bey sketches a picture of the Ottoman state and society as he imagined them to have existed at the time of the Empire's greatest achievements, drawing for his sources on the rules, regulations, and the etiquette that once had dictated acceptable behavior for the different classes.

Koçu Bey facilitates the work of the modern researcher in yet another way, for he provides a fairly comprehensive view of state and society in his own time, including con temporary details, specific dates, individuals, and events. Past and present are linked by his interpretation. From