

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF TURKEY

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The organizers of this workshop have done me the honour of inviting me to speak about "Research and Documentation on Turkish Social History Conducted outside Turkey and Channels of Cooperation". If I do speak about this topic, I do so with a certain reluctance. The reason for this is that I am primarily a political historian of the period of the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish republic. This fact has some dire consequences for my treatment of my subject of today.

In the first place, it means that I shall take a very broad view at social history, interpreting it as the history of empirically indentifiable social groupings, not as the history of classes in the Marxist sense, let alone that of the working class, or even that of the labour movement. In the second place, it means that I shall talk about international cooperation in the total complex of social, economic and political history of Turkey, because, although the emphases may differ, I really do not think that these aspects of history can be usefully separated in any but the most limited monographies. I am not at all sure a non-political social history can be written. Besides: I am convinced that an integrated approach to modern Turkish history is long overdue. Thirdly, it means that I shall not busy myself with the conceptual framework of the field. Social history has come a long way since Trevelyan's days, when it could rightfully be criticised as being "polite things said about the past", but the uncertainty of many social historians about the legitimacy of their approach still shows in the great concern they display for the conceptual and methodological framework of their historiography. A lot of soul searching about the exact nature of concepts such as "class" and their interrelations has been and is going on. The fact that so many of the social historians, certainly in Turkey, are at the same time ideologically aware, politically active persons, strengthens this tendency. The political historian, traditionally less burdened with the need to vindicate his field, generally is less inclined to this kind approach, although it cannot be denied that the emergence of political science has provided the political historian with more clearly defined conceptual tools. I myself stand before you as a confirmed eclecticist, who prefers to use sociological and historical concepts such as the "patrimonial state", "class" and "incorporation" as stimulating and thought provoking constructions, rather than as reliable representations of a historical reality.



Having thus confirmed your worst expectations, I shall now proceed to make a few remarks about the current state of international cooperation with regard to the history of modern Turkey and to give you my view on (to quote Lenin) What Is To Be Done. In order not to make this too abstract an exposé, I shall try to illustrate trends and developments with examples from the situation I know best, that in the Netherlands. (Even so, a short introduction to so broad a topic makes sweeping generalisations inevitable).

When we look at the places where, and the organisational context in which, the history of Turkey is studied, we see great differences between the situation in the Anglo-Saxon world & continental Europe. In the United States, and to a certain extent in Britain too, the field is studied in either history or political science departments, both of which usually form part of the faculty of social sciences. Although it cannot be denied that in the United States, too, there exists a cleavage between the political scientists and sociologists on the one hand, and the historians on the other, the situation is much better than that in continental Europe. The reason for this is that in Europe the antagonism between the social sciences and history is more deeply rooted, but also that history departments are generally part of the Arts faculties, together with the linguistic and literature departments - to my mind an irrational and unfortunate location, since history cannot but be considered a social science.

For the study of the history of Turkey we face another difficulty. Turkey is generally considered to be a non-Western country. On the whole, history departments in continental Europe do not study non-Western countries on any scale, with the exception of the history of Western colonialism, which is generally studied from the point of view of the Western nations, not the conquered ones. The indigenous history of the non-Western countries, among them Turkey, is left to Orientalist departments, which operate under different names, but generally, and in the Netherlands always, within the context of Arts faculties. In these departments study of the history of, for instance, a country like Turkey is lumped together with the study of its language, literature and culture. This has led to unfortunate results in several ways:

The fact that the Orientalist departments have been grouped with departments whose only concern is languages and literatures, together with the unavoidably time consuming business of learning a non-European language, has led to an excessive emphasis on philology, with too little attention being devoted to questions of historical methodology. It has also led to a certain insularity in the way the history of Turkey is approached, with too little eye for the possibilities of comparative studies, as if Turkish history were in some mystical way fundamentally different from, say, Spanish or Polish history. Integrated courses in which Orientalist and other departments take part are rare, as are research projects or programmes which transcend the boundaries of the departmental organisation.



However, I am happy to say that during these last few years a change seems to be occurring in which the walls separating the disciplines are gradually coming down, at least on an organisational level. On the whole this is not happening through the history departments suddenly starting to devote attention to Turkey, or to the students of Turkish history being moved from orientalist departments to historical ones, but there is an unmistakeable trend towards multi-disciplinary area studies. As an example, one can cite the activities of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales in Paris, but in the Netherlands, too, things are moving. The Dutch universities with major interests in non-Western studies have all taken steps to bring those who study non-Western civilisations in the Arts faculties and those who do so in the Social Science faculties together in one single organisational framework. In this way the Centre for Asian and African Studies in Amsterdam, the Centre for Non-Western Studies in Leiden and the Institute for Comparative Culture- and Development Studies in Nijmegen have come into being. In Nijmegen we have opted to move in the same direction where undergraduate programmes are concerned and we have started a multidisciplinary Middle East Studies program, in which language training is combined with elements from the social sciences and history. We expect to start talks about close cooperation on both research and teaching with our colleagues in Leiden in the near future. At the same time the interest among general historians for Turkey seems to be growing, among the students, if not among the staff.

All these developments, I think, can have a very positive effect on the study of Turkish history. They will give the field a firmer organisational basis and enable sociologists, political scientists and historians to collaborate more closely. Bringing specialists on different non-Western areas under one roof (though not physically) it will certainly encourage comparative approaches and thus help lessen the insularity of which much of the history writing on Turkey still suffers. Social history, as the branch of history which is closest to the social sciences, should profit from this development, even more than other fields.

Intensified contacts with social scientists on a local and national level will make it easier for contact to be established internationally between the representatives of the different disciplines who work on Turkish history. Right now, the international organisation of our profession is such that a political historian from the "turkological" side like myself, who studies the political movements of late nineteenth and early twentieth century will not, normally meet a political scientist like Walter Weiker, a sociologist like Caglar Keyder or an economic historian like Sevket Pamuk, even though we are all concerned with roughly the same period in the history of the same country.

I do not think that the answer to this problem should be to try to get all historians of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire to unite under one banner. Still less is there a need for even more numerous professional organisations and congresses than we have now. The fragmentation of the field is already considerable: The International Committee on Pre-Ottoman and



Ottoman Studies (CIEPO), the congresses on the Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish Historical Congress, the International Meetings on Modern Ottoman Studies and the Turkish Republic, the IRCICA conferences on science and technology in the Ottoman Empire, Turkish sections at the MESA, BRISMES and DMG congresses and incidental congresses like the one on the Young Turks in Manchester earlier this year, the one on Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the one we are attending now. The larger congresses clearly have a role to play as meeting places, but, as is well known, the disparate nature of the programmes of these congresses does not make them a very fertile ground for in-depth discussion. I think that for this, a series of smaller workshops attached to the larger organisations, with meetings taking place in the margin of a larger congress (like the excellent workshop on the Ottoman provinces chaired by Paul Dumont at the CIEPO in Pecs, 1986) or separately, like the Manchester conference, is far more suitable. The scope of these workshops should be clearly, and fairly narrowly, defined. The idea behind the first and second International Meetings on Modern Ottoman Studies and the Turkish Republic in Paris and Leiden, i.e. defining a number of themes (in this case: towns and villages and political reforms) and restricting the meetings to these themes for a number of consecutive meetings has to my mind shown itself to be an eminently practicable one. This type of symposium should have a fairly limited, but above all constant, attendance, though, of course, it should not be closed to new people in the field. I think that the regular convening of this type of workshop is the best way to promote productive cooperation. If attendance at these workshops is determined by the theme and not by the provenance of those taking part, multidisciplinary cooperation will be the automatic result.

When considering the organisation of international meetings, special attention will have to be devoted to creating possibilities for Turkish scholars to attend. As the list of people attending this workshop shows, the contribution of the Turkish scholars is indispensable in the field of social history. Unfortunately, in recent years both the Turkish government and the Turkish universities seem to be guided more and more by political considerations alone in awarding grants for stay or travel abroad, as I have discovered myself in the case of a Turkish post-graduate who was awarded a YOK grant to write a thesis in the Netherlands, but was prevented from going by the University of Ankara. This policy has resulted in totally inappropriate representations of Turkey at recent conferences, such as the CIEPO in Minneapolis and the UEAI in Budapest, which reflect badly on the image of Turkish academic life.

Besides interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and international cooperation, the collection of source materials is, of course, of prime importance. It is clear that Orhan Siler and the Turkish section of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam could and should play a central role in this respect, certainly in view of the way



invaluable archival materials are being sold or destroyed in Turkey today. Besides building up its own collection the institute could function as the pivot of a network of data collection. For this, a complete inventory of existing collections and collecting policies would be essential: again a subject for international cooperation. Our department in Nijmegen has started a documentation unit, which monitors economic and political developments in Turkey on the basis of the Turkish press, commercially accessible databases and government publications. Because of the cost of the data collection, the unit will have to supply information commercially to the Dutch business world to support itself. Nevertheless, if the IISH sees fit, it can play a role in a documentation-network for academic purposes, too.

Once more betraying my background as a political historian, my plea would be to make the scope of the documentation as broad as possible, taking in not only documents relating to the Turkish labour movement and left wing political organisations, but accepting, for instance, private archives of important political figures outside those movements as well. There are still a number of extremely important collections in private hands in Turkey (I am thinking of those of people like Cemal Kutay and Taha Toros) which face an uncertain future. In salvaging these collections through microfilming them, the IISH would be doing the profession a great service.

Finally, I come to the possibilities of international cooperation in the field of publications. In his paper, Korkut Boratav points to the need for detailed analysis of social and biographical data, before any generalisations on the Turkish ruling class can be made. He specifically points to the need for biographical research on the Young Turk and political cadres. I could not agree more. All too often statements have been made about the social, national and professional background of these cadres, without any detailed research being made to substantiate them. I am therefore happy to be able to say that, together with a colleague in Ankara, Mrs. Bilge Criss, I am executing a project for the compilation of a biographical dictionary of the Turkish national movement, to be published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1990, under the auspices of the CIEPO. We think there is a great need for such a biographical tool, because the biographical data such as they are, are very widely scattered and hard to come by. When the project nears completion, the results will be circulated among a number of specialists for their comments. After its completion, it will be available as a book and as a Data Base on diskette, in order to make adding and changing as easy as possible. For those of you, who are interested a short written presentation of the project will be available in Amsterdam.

I think this biographical dictionary is only one of a number of tools, which could be developed through international cooperation. Bibliographical and statistical data are also very much needed, as are biographical collections on other categories of people. Besides these reference works, I think there is one other type of publication on which political, social and economic historians of Turkey could fruitfully cooperate.

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According to the programme, our workshop will end with a discussion on the possibilities for collectively writing a social history of Turkey in the last 150 years. I cannot see how such a history can be written without due attention being paid to political and economic developments at the same time. Therefore, my suggestion would be to consider writing a general history of modern Turkey. There is, I think, a great need for an English language one or two volume history of Turkey in the nineteenth and twentieth century, in which the results of detailed modern scholarship have been integrated. We can, I think, all agree that at the moment such a work does not exist. The major textbooks lag far behind the "state of the art" as reflected in monographies and articles. Bernard Lewis' Emergence of Modern Turkey will always remain a magnificent achievement, but in its original form it is now very nearly thirty years old and, although a collective effort will always lack the character of a text written by one individual, I think that in this day and age it is the most practicable as well as the most balanced way of producing a standard textbook.

Interdisciplinary research, an open eye for the uses of comparative methods, international cooperation in well-defined fora for specific themes over a longer period, inventory and collection of documents, cooperation on the production of basic research tools and on a textbook history of modern Turkey - these are the items which might make up the shopping list of the international community of historians of Turkey, social as well as otherwise.