WRITING HISTORY
AT THE OTTOMAN COURT

Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future

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Otoman historical consciousness and historiographical practices simultaneously underwent significant changes in the nineteenth century. This essay, conceived as the first in a series on new developments in Ottoman historiography during that century, concentrates on changes to Ottoman models of periodization for world history and aims to demonstrate that Ottoman historical consciousness entered a novel phase during the late nineteenth century. According to this new tripartite periodization model, world history was divided into “Ancient,” “Medieval,” and “New” periods, a departure from pre-nineteenth-century world histories, in which accounts of various dynasties had been given in roughly chronological fashion, with loose geographical groupings.

The choice of a new model for periodizing world history was a manifestation of a changing worldview, an indication of where the Ottomans located themselves in the emerging world civilization of the nineteenth century. Although that project was spearheaded by contemporary western European ideals, members of the Ottoman elite no doubt considered themselves a part of it. Moreover, the idea of a world civilization that was shared by, and common to, all leading nations of the world facilitated the appropriation of non-Ottoman models in many spheres, including historical periodization.

This essay investigates eight historians who published world histories or grappled with the topic of periodization in works written in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although their models seem largely similar, the small innovations introduced by each historian provide extraordinary insights into the nature of their concerns. Because the tripartite periodization model found resonance, was adopted with few alterations by later historians, and became the standard version taught in schools of the Turkish Republic, the variations that these historians proposed now seem all the more valuable historically. The model’s later modifications, moreover, dominated and shaped Turkish historical consciousness in the twentieth century.

A number of reasons for such a development of a revised periodization model present themselves. One is the new source material that Ottoman historians began to appreciate and utilize in the nineteenth century. Sources doubtless have an effect on
one’s conception of historical periodization, but accepting a particular periodization of world history is a larger intellectual commitment than a mere replication of a European model. I consider the Ottomans’ new periodization models to be a result of, and a vehicle for, a new notion of “universalism” in Ottoman historical consciousness. This new universalism was connected to the aforementioned idea of an emerging world civilization, and many Ottoman intellectuals regarded nineteenth-century modernization attempts as a step toward a common universal civilization project. The concept of westernization had not yet taken on negative connotations for non-Europeans, and hopes were high. Influenced by, and in negotiation with, the findings of the emerging professional discipline of history in Europe, the Ottomans felt the need for a “scientific” periodization that covered the entire known history of the world.¹

Before the nineteenth century, Ottoman world histories had utilized a structure relating the rise and fall of individual dynasties in chronological order, with some geographical grouping. The loss of prestige of the monarchy as a form of government, and of individual dynasties as legitimate sovereigns, during the nineteenth century must have made the move away from historiographical practices closely associated with them natural and easy, rendering the models traditionally preferred in Ottoman court historiography obsolete. The Ottoman intellectual mind also gradually dispensed with its faith in the linearity and singularity of Ottoman history, and the centrality of Ottoman achievement to world history became an assumption fewer historians accepted as easily as their predecessors.

The tripartite division of world history and its later variations were adopted from European historiography. Several concepts of periodization based on Christian understandings of history and of the universe had been in use in Europe since the Middle Ages (e.g., the Four Kingdoms model or the Six Ages model). Christoph Cellarius’s (d. 1707) tripartite model, dating from the late seventeenth century, is generally considered to be the first “secular” periodization of world history.² The Ottomans seem to have found it attractive only when it made its way into “scientific” nineteenth-century historiography. Oddly, the Ottoman mind had not been unfamiliar with tripartite taxonomies but classified many notions, including the histories of states, into three. Following the Ibn Khaldûnian scheme, for example, the historian Na’īmâ (d. 1716) viewed the rise, maturity, and decline of states as a reflection of the stages of a person’s life.³

My goal is not to examine the validity or suitability of the tripartite periodization of world history, or to evaluate the dates and events taken as turning points in this division, but to consider the ways in which Ottoman historians and intellectuals presented and discussed this proposition. I would like to gauge, in light of these developments in history-writing in the Ottoman Empire, in which ways the Ottoman intellectual mind was ripe for, and receptive to, a new conceptualization of history.

Apart from Ahmed Cevdet’s (d. 1895) intelligent remarks quoted below, contemporary voices critical of the tripartite model are absent from this essay. This absence
The Challenge of Periodization does not mean that resistance to the concept did not exist. The fact that I have not found any such criticism may be due to my inability to locate it, or to critics’ reluctance to commit their opinions to paper. It is possible that there were intellectuals who found the new model unattractive, but there seems to have been no grave cultural conflict that would have caused its rejection. The view that many found the tripartite model practical is bolstered by the fact that most of the world histories composed during this time were for instructional purposes.

I will briefly discuss the structure and contents of a few pre-nineteenth-century universal histories as a point of departure for comparison with the new paradigms of the nineteenth century. The few histories cited here constitute a mere fraction of the total production of such works.4 This discussion is not an extensive analysis of pre-nineteenth-century periodization models but an opportunity to establish that the later structures had indeed a novel character.

Periodization Models before the Nineteenth Century

Ottoman historiography traditionally considered itself and its major topic, the Ottoman dynasty, as a chapter of Islamic history. The narratives of pre-nineteenth-century universal histories began with the Creation, usually jumped to the rise of Islam, explored individual Islamic dynasties, and concluded with a considerably more detailed narration of the history of the Ottoman dynasty. Non-Islamic history generally featured only modestly in any Ottoman universal history, within particular contexts defined by time and space. Ottoman authors commonly consulted earlier sources—such as al-Yaʿqūbī (d. after 905), al-Ṭabarî (d. 923), al-Maṣʿūdī (d. 956), Ibn Athîr (d. 1233), and Rashîduddîn (d. 1318)—for pre-Ottoman world history.5 Their periodization scheme was thus based partially on the organizational schemes of these earlier models.

These prestigious pre-Ottoman world histories had some similarities in terms of their divisions of world history. However, based on whether the authors belonged to the Arabic or Persian cultural traditions, or simply as a result of their political orientations, they recounted recent and contemporary events in different ways. Rashîduddîn’s Jāmiʿ al-Tawārikh, for instance, is a good example of an informative treatment of the Ilkhans by an insider who held administrative offices as high as grand vizier at the Ilkhanid court. Religious loyalties also made a difference when the author wrote in the Sunni or Shiʿi tradition, evidenced, for example, by extra emphasis on the history of twelve imams by authors with Shiʿi tendencies. These histories’ cosmology derived from Islamic as well as biblical (or Islamicized biblical) traditions. The Old Testament was a common source for pre-Ottoman and Ottoman historians, and al-Yaʿqūbī, for example, is known to have used apocryphal Psalms as well.6

A world history generally commenced with the creation of the light (nūr) of the Prophet Muhammad, angels, and souls, before continuing with the creation of the material world (although this arrangement differed slightly from work to work). Geographical data based on a few traditions (such as Ptolemaic or Iranian) was occasionally
included in descriptions of the creation of the earth, the seas, the climes, and creatures. Tales of prophets would be told according to Islamic lore. A history of ancient nations was generally included in a section on the pre-Islamic era, incorporating basic information on the kings of ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, Israel, Greece, Rome, China, Byzantium, or Egypt.

Many of the prestigious histories written in Arabic or Persian were used extensively by Ottoman historians, especially by the more ambitious. Muṣṭafā Ḍālī (d. 1600), for example, praises al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Ṭabīr, the latter for his extensive treatment of pre-Islamic and early Islamic history. He cites Ibn Ṭabīr as a “historian without equal” (mīverriḥ-i bī-naẓīr), praising the historian’s detailed exposition of various peoples, events of ancient times, geographical knowledge, and “even” his case-by-case investigation of wonders and oddities.7

One implication of surveying world history before the rise of Islam in a cursory manner and exploring events thereafter in much more detail was that history could be presented as a divine plan. This approach originated in the medieval period but lived on in the Christian as well as the Islamic world into the early modern period. According to this view, it was mankind’s task, and that of historians as their competent representatives, to try to discern God’s plan for the universe and derive lessons from the past based on interpretation. This theme often surfaces in the introductory sections of Ottoman historical works, in which the author philosophizes about the uses and benefits of history. A related concept was the advance (although not necessarily “progress”) of history toward its inevitable destination: the end of the world, or Judgment Day. The Eternal Ottoman State (devlet-i ebed-müddet) was implicitly considered the final phase of Islamic history.

A handful of histories penned from the fifteenth century on mark the emergence of Ottoman historiography. Şükrullāh (d. 1488), a member of the ulema class during Murad II’s (r. 1421–1444 and 1446–1451) and Mehmed II’s (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481) reigns, composed Bahjat al-Tavārikh (Splendor of Histories, ca. 1458) in Persian. Bahjat, a rather concise world history that was to become a prestigious source for later historians,8 consisted of thirteen chapters and covered a period from the Creation to Mehmed II’s enthronement in 1451. Şükrullāh claims in the introduction that his book would be a valuable source not only for history but for other sciences, such as astronomy, mathematics, or medicine, as well. The work begins with the creation of the universe, offers an Islamic cosmology, and explores the origins of some ancient peoples. After the second chapter, which depicts the history of the prophets according to Islamic lore, chapters 3 through 9 detail subjects in Islamic history centered around the Prophet, such as his genealogy, family, and companions. Chapters 8 and 9 also offer an excursus on the imams and notable sheikhs in Islamic history. An additional short chapter is on the “Most Significant Greek Philosophers,” and chapter 11—“Kings of the Infidels and the Believers”—details the pre-Islamic Persian kings to the Sassanids. Şükrullāh again turns to Islamic history proper in chapter 12, which covers the
Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and Seljuk dynasties. Finally, the last chapter, which is also rather short, tells of the Ottomans up to the reign of Mehmed II.9

Although Künhül-Aḥbār (Essence of History), by Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī of Gallipoli (d. 1600), was published in five volumes in 1872, the author divided the book into four rūḵns, or pillars. ʿĀlī describes the first pillar as covering the period from the creation of the Light of Muhammad to the time of Adam. This section focuses on cosmology and the Creation; provides geographical information on the seas, islands, and climates; mentions some ancient nations; tells of the Flood; and records some tales of the prophets. The second pillar continues with stories of prophets and of Muhammad’s life, gives an account of the rise of Islam and early Islamic history, and ends with a section about the Persian kings and Ptolemies. The third pillar is on Islamic dynasties that ruled in such locations as Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia. The Umayyads and Abbasids are treated in detail. After exploring certain smaller dynasties of the Islamic world and the characteristics of some European peoples, ʿĀlī ends this pillar with the Timurids and the Anatolian Seljuks, reserving the last and longest pillar for the history of the Ottoman dynasty.10

Karaçelebizade ʿAbdūlʾazīz (d. 1658), born into a long-established ulema family, climbed the ladder of the ulema hierarchy, reaching the top and becoming sheikhulislam in 1651. His world history, Ravzatül-Ebrār (The Garden of the Pious), includes an informative and original section on recent Ottoman history and rather lengthy sections on the Mamluks and Safavids, which together compose more than half of the book. His treatment of pre-Ottoman times, however, is an uninspired and abridged replication of earlier world histories. The book is divided into four chapters (plus two appendices), the first of which covers the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾan; the second, the life and achievements of the Prophet Muhammad; the third, pre-Ottoman Islamic dynasties; and the final and the longest chapter, the history of the Ottoman dynasty.11

Müneccimbaşi Ahmed (d. 1702), a polymath of the late seventeenth century, was appointed chief astronomer in 1667 and held that office for twenty years. In addition to works in various other disciplines, he composed a massive world history in Arabic, entitled Jāmiʿ al-Duwal (A Compendium of States). Müneccimbaşi’s history is divided into two main sections, the first of which concerns the Creation, the stories of prophets, and, in a much longer part, the vita of Prophet Muhammad. The second section is again divided into two parts: the first treats the dynasties and people that existed before Islam; the second, those that came after Islam. This section begins with a detailed account of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Müneccimbaşi then conducts something of a regional survey, within which he pursues a chronological treatment of the dynasties by centuries (qarn). As the title suggests, his exploration of individual dynasties is extensive: he not only includes numerous smaller Islamic dynasties but also incorporates the histories of European dynasties—Austrian, Spanish, English, Russian—up to his own time (despite the fact that he discusses them under the title “Dynasties before Islam”). Ancient dynasties and peoples, such as the Persians, Greeks, and Copts, had traditionally been mentioned in some detail in
world histories since al-Yaʿqūbī. Reporting on contemporary non-Islamic dynasties, particularly European examples, however, was a novelty. Müneccimbaşı was curious and studious enough to expand his list of dynasties and nations by consulting European sources and is known to have used a chronicle published in 1532 (in German) by Johannes Carion, who was an astronomer at the court of Brandenburg. To recount the more recent history of certain European dynasties, however, Müneccimbaşı must have utilized other sources.

The last example I would like to mention is Gülşen-i Maʿārif (The Rose Garden of Knowledge) by Ferāʾizīzâde Meḥmed Saʾīd (d. 1835). Saʾīd was from Bursa and apparently lived there throughout his life, as the preacher at the Emir Sultan Mosque. He submitted his manuscript to Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) and received encouragement and authorization to publish his work at the imperial press. Gülşen-i Maʿārif is rather less innovative as a world history than other contemporaneous examples. Quite religious in its tone, the two-volume work starts with sections on the qualities of God, the angels, and holy books, and then continues with biographies of the prophets. After recounting the prophets’ lives through Muhammad and his age, Meḥmed Saʾīd turns back in time for a chronological digression about the ancient kings of Persia. The narrative then continues with the history of Islamic lands, by dynasty, and a detailed account of Ottoman history, which comprises three-fourths of the book. Although Gülşen-i Maʿārif seems to be designed as a world history, the author’s main objective was clearly arriving at Ottoman history as quickly as possible.

Ottoman historians’ concept of the periodization of world history was partially inherited from pre-Ottoman Muslim historians and partially shaped by what they regarded as decisive events of more recent history. The initial period began with the Creation and lasted until the next significant event in history: the Deluge. The prophets, for example, were usually classified as coming before or after the Deluge. Ancient nations of the antediluvian era also found some mention. Āli, for one, surmises that before the Deluge people understood the descent of Adam to earth as the beginning of history. However, the historian reasons, because all of the documentation pertaining to the pre-Deluge era vanished in that catastrophe, the people living thereafter had to take the Deluge as the start of history. Noah was occasionally mentioned by his epithet, the “second Adam” (Ādem-i șānī), which indicates the understanding that a completely new era had begun with him.

The post-Deluge era stretched to the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad, or, more precisely, to his departure from Mecca to Medina (i.e., the Hegira). More pedantic historians broke down the period from Adam to Muhammad, which was believed to have lasted approximately six thousand years, into several eras: from Adam to the Deluge (2,256 years), from the Deluge to Abraham (1,079 years), from Abraham to Moses (565 years), from Moses to Suleiman (536 years), from Suleiman to Alexander the Great (770 years), from Alexander to Jesus (369 years), and from Jesus to Muhammad (550 years).
While a proper chronology of events was considered one of the requirements of a good history, one did not need to seek hard evidence or documents to rectify the chronology of prehistoric events and people; this standard narrative relied heavily on Islamized biblical lore. Pre-Islamic Persian and Arabic history was also recounted, the degree of detail dependent on the historian's affiliation and prospects. The post-Hegira period was treated exclusively according to rulers or dynasties. A further topical classification might also be used to arrange the massive amount of material covered, such as “the dynasties of North Africa” or “the dynasties of India.” When more recent events were recounted, some historians shifted to a detailed annalistic narrative. These latter annals were predominantly focused on wars, conquests, and political developments in the periods in question, again grouped by the reigns of individual sultans.

The post-Hegira period had one additional significant landmark for early Ottoman historians, whose first works date from the fifteenth century: the Mongol takeover of Baghdad and the fall of the Caliphate in 1258. The political and social transformations of the post-Mongol period must have given rise to an awareness of living in a different era than before.

Muştafa 'Ali's survey of historical events from different traditions, which he presents as epochal frontiers in history, gives us insight into his understanding of historical periodization. He mentions such events as the Pharaoh throwing Abraham into the fire, the Exodus, the first construction of the Ka'aba, Alexander the Great’s era (Romans and Greeks), the “Year of the Elephant” (ca. 570, Quraish tribe), and the reign of Kawadh I (d. 531), father of Anushirwan the Just (Persians). Finally, the Prophet Muhammad’s departure from Mecca to Medina is mentioned as the first important political act of the budding Islamic state. This date was then taken as the “beginning of history,” says 'Ali, and was used until his time.

Only a few decades after the publication of Gâlsen-i Ma’ârif (1836), probably the last world history in the “old” tradition, a number of historians introduced an alternative periodization model for world history to the Ottoman intellectual public (initially through educational material): the tripartite division of world history. Although a dialogue continued for some time as to which events to accept as turning points in this tripartite division, the new model quickly found resonance.

New Periodization Models in the Later Nineteenth Century

Ahmed Vefik: Hikmet-i Tarih (The Philosophy of History), 1863

One of the first to “officially” introduce a periodization model unfamiliar to the Ottoman tradition was the curiously erudite figure of Ahmed Vefik (d. 1891). Born to a family of interpreters for the imperial court, Vefik was profoundly educated, especially in languages. In addition to perfecting his Arabic and Persian, he trained in Italian, Latin, and ancient Greek. Furthermore, he is said to have had substantial knowledge in Russian, German, Chagatai, and Hebrew. He was likely most skilled in French:
having attended high school for six years in Paris, he was apparently able to converse in French like a native.

Ahmed Vefik was appointed an official in the Department of Translation (Terçüme Odası) and served as a mediator in several foreign missions for the Ottoman state for more than three decades. He was one of the forty elected members of the Academy of Sciences (Encümen-i Dânîş), founded in 1851, the majority of whose activities concerned commissioning histories or translations from French, mostly on historical subjects. For instance, Ahmed Cevdet’s twelve-volume Ottoman history, covering the years 1774–1826, was commissioned by the Academy of Sciences. Works on specialized topics in history, such as Histoire naturelle by Georges Louis Leclerc (Comte de Buffon, d. 1788), or on recent history (e.g., a book on the Napoleonic Wars) were among the books that the Academy supported. The Academy’s activities over its short (about ten-year) life lead us to believe that “modern” historical approaches were strongly endorsed by the institution.

Ahmed Vefik did not become prolific until the 1860s. In 1863 he offered a series of lectures, entitled Hikmet-i Tarih (The Philosophy of History), at the newly founded University (Dârül-fünûn). The lectures were one hour long, delivered twice a week, and continued only for a few weeks. Still, their introductory section, which was printed in the daily newspaper Taşvîr-i Efkâr the same month and appeared later as a separate booklet of forty-four pages, has much to offer, particularly in terms of Vefik's ideas about the periodization of world history. Lectures on such a subject were a novelty, as Ottoman education traditionally did not include any courses on the instruction of “history” per se. The booklet gives one the impression that the lectures were designed as a class on “world civilization,” rather than the philosophy of history, as scholars would characterize it today.

The sources and methodology of Ottoman historiography may well have been under discussion for some time. A reworking of periodization of world history, however, was apparently suggested only with Hikmet-i Tarih. Vefik not only proposes an adjusted periodization of the totality of world history but also discusses new types of sources and methodology for history-writing.

Ahmed Vefik sees the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad as the most important landmark in the history of mankind. He justifies his choice of Prophet Muhammad’s advent as a dividing line as follows: while the Arabs were a weak Bedouin tribe, prior to the Prophet’s time, they managed to conquer the most fertile grounds of the world, and this conquest proved revolutionary for all nations. Except for China, he says, all parts of the world were affected by the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. Because all of the nations extant during Vefik’s time had come into existence after that momentous event, world history should be divided into two major parts. He classifies the fifty-six centuries from the Creation to the Hegira as the longer first period (cüz-i aşim) and the thirteen centuries after the Prophet as the second. He labels the former the “Ancient Ages” (ezmine-i mukkekkime), and the latter the “Modern Ages” (ezmine-i müte’ahhare).
From time to time, Ahmed Vefik explains, the conditions of the world and of nations were transformed by “great events”; thus, it is necessary to subcategorize each of these two periods into four subsections, to which Vefik attributes the following anthropomorphic designations:  

First era: The Period of Childhood (faṣl-ı evvel-i şebābī)
Second era: The Period of Growth (faṣl-ı sānî-i nemevī)
Third era: The Period of Maturation (faṣl-ı şalîş-i istivā)
Fourth era: The Period of Descent (faṣl-ı rābî-ı ihītaṭī)

However—and perhaps the note taker or editor is at fault—there seems to be a grave confusion in Ahmed Vefik’s booklet. While at the outset he clearly discusses a division of world history into two periods, with the Hegira as the threshold, a few pages later his detailed list of events lays out a tripartite classification. Oddly, Vefik does not address this discrepancy: he merely mentions that “some history books label this period the ‘Middle Ages’ and the subsequent one as ‘Modern Ages’” and continues to list the events of these two periods.

Ahmed Vefik does not claim that he is designing a new periodization model “from scratch.” It is clear that he is quoting from “some histories” (ba‘zi tevārīḥ) and relying on “scholars” (erbāb-i fenn), whom he does not specify by title or name. He imports and domesticates models that were in circulation in nineteenth-century European historiography by inserting events pertinent to Islamic and Ottoman history in the Middle and Modern Ages sections. Vefik seems to be adamant about the importance of the Prophet’s advent for world history and the Hegira as the dividing line in his (earlier) bipartite periodization. (This insistence readily reminds one of the birth of Christ as the point of departure for Christian calendars. He integrates the Hegira into a “scientific” periodization of world history, although Christ’s birth was not included in European historiography.)

Ahmed Hılim (trans.): Tarih-i ‘Umūmî (A World History), 1866–1878

Although Ahmed Vefik’s lectures and booklet may have had little effect, the following decade saw a lively discussion, as several additional translated works containing similar periodizations of world history were published. One of them was an adaptation of a “world history” by William Chambers (d. 1883)—a popular Scottish author and publisher of periodicals and encyclopedias—translated by Ahmed Hılim (d. 1878), an assistant clerk at the Translation Office. Apparently published with the encouragement of Minister of Education Kemal Efendi, between 1866 and 1878, this six-volume incomplete edition was the first translated universal history in Ottoman Turkish. While Ahmed Hılim mentions Chambers’s name in the introduction, from which of his works Hılim rendered the first two volumes of the book remains unclear.

The first volume, which contains numerous illustrations of the remains of ancient cultures, begins with the ancient Egyptians and continues with the Phoenicians,
Assyrians, and Lydians. The second volume includes the ancient civilizations of the Iranians, Romans, Greeks, European and African nations, Scythians, Hindus, and Chinese. 侯尔米 concludes the second volume by reflecting that ancient history is largely based on tales and legendary accounts.30 His tone makes clear that he views the “Ancient Ages” as times when common people suffered under absolute sovereigns, who ruled with injustice and coercion. 侯尔米 delivers the good news, though, that in the upcoming volumes the history of mankind will progress significantly. The sixth volume31 recounts the Islamic history of the Middle Ages and ends with the fall of the Caliphate in Baghdad in 1258. The method of the book is noticeably different in this latter volume, which recounts the history of Islamic dynasties chronologically and with separate sections devoted to individual rulers. This volume does not seem to be a translation of Chambers’s work but an adaptation from earlier chronicles available in the Ottoman realm. The translation project must have come to an end with 侯尔米’s death in 1878.

At the time, it was quite common for translators to intervene with, occasionally question, and even alter original works. Not surprisingly, then, 侯尔米 engages in a dialogue with Chambers’s model of periodization: he employs Chambers’s tripartite division without criticism, but considers the events Chambers chose to mark the beginnings and ends of those eras problematic. 侯尔米 mentions that one variant of periodization, conceivably the Ottoman example, divides history into the Ancient Ages (ezmine-i mütêkaddîme, “from the creation of Adam to the departure of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, i.e., the Hegira), the Middle Ages (ezmine-i mütëvassîta, from the Hegira to the conquest of Constantinople), and the Modern Ages (ezmine-i müte‘alhîre, from the conquest of Constantinople to the translator’s time). However, as 侯尔米 mentions in passing, Chambers’s original work suggests different events for these divisions: the “creation of Adam,” the fall of the Roman Empire, and the discovery of the New World.32

*Mehmed ʿAtif: Hulâsatü‘-Tevârîh*  
(*A Summary of Histories*, 1872–1873)

Another world history, penned by Meḥmed ʿAtif of Candia (d. 1908 or 1909), appeared in 1872–1873. A civil servant by profession, the author apparently designed *Hulâsatü‘-Tevârîh* (*A Summary of Histories*) to comprise at least four volumes, only two of which appeared. ʿAtif is not shy about invoking the ambition of his undertaking, namely his plans to write “a perfect universal history with no equal to date” (*mişli ná-mevccd bir târîh-i mükemmel-i ʿumûmi*). ʿAtif’s confidence in his ability to produce a heretofore-unrivaled history is intriguing. His introduction suggests that what distinguishes his project might be the “new method” (*uşül-i cedid*) in which he claims to be writing the book: ʿAtif asserts that he compiled and translated his book from well-known Arabic, French, and Greek histories, due to a lack of histories written in the “new method” in Turkish. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate; however, it is conceivable that he is
referring to the book’s content: a new periodization model, the variety of civilizations covered, and presenting events’ causal relationships.

Mehmed Âtif also speculates about the model of tripartite periodization of world history used by European historians. The conventional division in Europe, he explains, offers the following historical eras, defined by specific events: Initial Ages (kurûn-ı ğülâ), from the Creation to the fall of the Western Roman Empire; Middle Ages (kurûn-ı vüstâ), from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople by the Muslims; and Modern Ages (kurûn-ı âhire), the period after the conquest of Constantinople. However, because “it would be more suitable for the glorious nation of Islam” (millet-i celîle-i İslâmîyece daha münâsib olduğuandan), he chose to replace the fall of the Western Roman Empire with the Hegira as the event marking the beginning of the Middle Ages. Âtif does not otherwise alter the original periodization model; he also uses the Hegira calendar throughout the book. Hence, for example, the creation of Adam is dated 5585 years before the Hegira.

Âtif also explores the subdivisions that European historians utilize, as well as shorter periods. The book then continues with a long section on approximately twenty Greek, Roman, and Jewish historians, such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, and Josephus (Yosef ben Matityahu), introducing each with a paragraph. Mehmêd Âtif’s work resembles a somewhat detached compilation of sections from various sources. A chapter on “Tales of the Prophets” in the Islamic tradition is inserted into an otherwise largely Eurocentric narrative of pre-historic and ancient ages. Biblical stories on the Kingdom of Israel, Kingdom of Judah, and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem are followed by accounts of the Assyrians, Phoenicians, Lydians, Egyptians, and Sassanians. No further volumes to this world history appeared, and the work remains incomplete.

Süleymân Hüsnî: Târîh-i Âlem, I: Kurûn-ı Ülâ
(A History of the World: The Initial Ages), 1876

A few years after Mehmêd Âtif’s universal history, Süleymân Hüsni Pasha (d. 1892) published Târîh-i Âlem (A History of the World), designed as a textbook for military high schools. The author, himself the director of the Military Academy (mekâtîb-i ’askerîyye nâzîri), would also become an able commander during the Ottomans’ war with Russia, which began a few months after the book’s publication. Hüsnî mentions that the textbook used in military schools (Hîlmi’s translation of Chambers) was a direct translation of European books, a fact that motivated him to compose Târîh-i Âlem. The author leaves no doubt that he does not approve of the previous textbook’s approach, which he describes as “contrary to Islamic principles and national values and the moral code.” He further notes that the textbook remained incomplete, in that only a few parts of the Ancient Ages section were translated. Süleymân Hüsnî used a number of recent universal histories in French in addition to Arabic and Ottoman sources, all of which he lists at the beginning of his volume. He then compiles
information from a variety of primary and secondary sources and develops a narrative that he characterizes as compatible with Islamic and Ottoman values.

The beginning of the first volume lists the second volume, which would have been on the Middle Ages, as under preparation, but it seems to have never appeared. Hüsnı discusses the reasons he titled his work Tarih-ı Âlem instead of Tarih-ı Umûmi (General History): he viewed Tarih-ı Âlem, Tarih-ı Umûmi, and Tarih-ı Huşusi (Particular History) as subdivisions of political history (Tarih-i Siyâsi). In explaining his choice of the title, Hüsnı provides a definition of the former two: Tarih-ı Âlem narrates the events that happened from the time of the Creation, through the emergence of nations and states, to his own time. Although some historians would consider his account Tarih-ı Umûmi, the latter would be, for Hüsnı, a full account of all of the events that took place during a specific period of time or in the course of a political rule.

Süleymân Hüsnı can be credited with some originality. In addition to his idiosyncratic definition of the generic term Tarih-ı Umûmi as an account of world history, he lists somewhat unusual events as governing the tripartite division that he appropriates without comment. As far as I can detect, he is the only historian to take the rise of the Ottomans (ca. 1300) as the beginning of the Modern Age and the destruction of the Janissary corps as its end.38

Some topics, although identical in subject to the age-old tradition, were handled completely differently by Hüsnı. For example, although he begins his book with the Creation, nothing he tells in this section resembles traditional cosmologies of pre-nineteenth-century Ottoman historiography; instead, Hüsnı’s Creation story builds on the latest scientific explanations in Europe. He describes a gas-liquid mass that cooled and turned into the earth over time and the elements that emerged. He covers the appearance of plants, mountain chains, animals, and, finally, humankind. Oddly, he also lists, clearly translating from European sources, the prehistoric period (Stone Age, Bronze Age) in a section just before his tripartite division of world history, the first part of which he wishes to call ancient history (tarih-i kadim). Biblical traditions predictably dominate the narrative’s earlier portion; however, Hüsnı conspicuously cuts short the stories of the prophets. The book is further divided into thirteen chapters, each of which treats a separate people, starting with the ancient Egyptians and continuing to the Arabs of the pre-Islamic era.39

Rıfat Efendi: Nakdût-Tevârîh (A Review of Histories), 1879

In the 1870s, Ahmed Rıfat (Yağlıkçizade, d. 1895), who served as a mid-level government official in Izmir, Crete, and Salonica, was working on his massive encyclopedic work, Luğat-i Tarihîyye ve Coğrafîyye (A Historical and Geographical Dictionary), which would appear a few years after Nakdût-Tevârîh. He informs the reader that the volume emerged as a byproduct of his studies on Luğat.

Nakdût-Tevârîh is not a history per se but a chronological table of events from Adam to the year 1879. The work is interesting in that the blurb at the beginning of the
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book presents it as having been compiled in the “brand new style” (tarz-i nevîn). While chronological tables are rare in Ottoman historiography, and none had been authored in the nineteenth century, the promotional language may be the publisher’s commercial presentation, for the author himself does not discuss a “new method” and gives credit to another Ottoman historian, who, he says, inspired him to undertake this work. The historian to whom he refers is Kâtib Çelebi (d. 1657), whose chronology, Takvimü’t-Tevârih, had found wide popularity due to its clear layout. Rif’ât’s contribution, in his words, is that he tracked down many events that do not appear in Kâtib Çelebi’s work, notably some Islamic as well as non-Islamic (ecnebi, “foreign”) historical events of the Ancient Ages.

Aḥmed Rif’at elaborates on his dating system in the introduction to the book. He does not take the birth of Christ as the beginning of the calendar, as European (ecnebi) historians do, with the expressed intention of avoiding the trouble of reckoning forward and backward from that event. Otherwise, he argues, it would have been suitable to take it as a turning point on the grounds that the events after Christ were recorded much more precisely than those before his birth. Therefore, although Rif’at does not offer a separate periodization model in Nakdü’t-Tevârih, he has a loose idea of the division of historical eras, based on the argument that historical accuracy is dependent on sources. A work such as Nakdü’t-Tevârih further demonstrates that, in Rif’at’s mind, the focal point of world history was not an event in Islamic and Ottoman history. Rif’at begins with the creation of Adam, marked as year zero; continues until the year 5595, at which point he begins providing the Christian calendar alongside it; then continues until the year 6215, when he switches to the Islamic and Gregorian calendars. The count from the Creation is not included thereafter.

Meḥmed Murâd: Târîh-i ’Umûmî (A World History), 1880–1882

Meḥmed Murâd (d. 1917) taught courses in world history and geography at the School for Civil Servants (Mekteb-i Mülkiyye) from the time the school was restructured in 1877. Based on his lectures at the Mekteb, he composed a six-volume Târîh-i ’Umûmî (A World History), the first edition of which was published between 1880 and 1882. The book enjoyed huge popularity and reached its third edition by 1910. It was also one of the rare world histories that was completed during the period under consideration. Murâd planned to write an even longer, twelve-volume history of the Ottoman Empire, which remained unfinished but became quite popular nevertheless.

Murâd states that his world history project is an ambitious one. He mentions that his lectures had been approaching the matter in a completely new method, which no Ottoman historian had used before (henüz lisânımzda yazılmamış bir tarzda). Despite his claims, the novelty of Murâd’s work, compared to the treatments of world history mentioned above, is not immediately apparent. According to Murâd, there are two kinds of history: Târîh-i Ḥuşûşi (Particular History) is a subdivision of the
former, such as the history of a region or a country. He is to be credited for mentioning, possibly for the first time in Ottoman historiography, a variety of sources and auxiliary sciences that should be used in constructing a historical narrative, such as historical linguistics (fenn-i el sine), geology (fenn-i i tabakatul’-arz), court records (mah keme ilâmat), and oral histories (âşâr-i menküle).  

Murâd begins his book with the narration of sacred history (tarih-i mukaddes), which he describes as events after the Creation for which no source exists other than sacred texts, especially the Old Testament. Although he largely did not relate the stories of the prophets according to Islamic lore, Murâd might have followed contemporaneous European historiography in creating a pre-history that heavily relied on biblical tradition. He also seems ambivalent about what to relate regarding the story of the Creation, as he briefly mentions that “according to the sacred texts” the universe was created in seven days but also mentions an account of earth’s formation based on “the scientists’ claims.”

As for his views on historical periodization, Murâd does not differ much from the aforementioned history-writers. He chooses the Hegira as the beginning of the calendar, informing his readers of the traditions that take different important events to mark the start of their calendars. Among his examples are the Creation, the birth of the Christ, the founding of Rome, and the start of the ancient Olympic games. By the time Murâd wrote his book, the tripartite division of world history had already become a familiar model among Ottoman historians. So, he, too, uses it without further comment. The events he takes for his periodization are no different than those in one of the models circulating in Europe at the time: Ancient Ages (ezmine-i mütekaddime), from Adam to the fall of the Western Roman Empire; Middle Ages (ezmine-i mütevassita), from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople; and Modern Ages (kurûn-i cedide or ezmine-i müte’ahhire), from the conquest of Constantinople to modern times.

Ahmed Midhat: Mufaṣṣal Tarih-i Kurûn-i Cedide
(A Complete History of the Modern Ages), 1885–1888

Ahmed Midhat (d. 1912) was a journalist who also published several popular history books, translated or adapted from French or composed by Midhat himself. With his accessible, didactic style and wide readership, he is generally considered to have had substantial influence on the general reading public. He published a bulky Mufaṣṣal Tarih-i Kurûn-i Cedide (A Complete History of the Modern Ages) first in his own newspaper, Tercümân-i Ahvâl, and later in book format. This unfinished three-volume work has an odd arrangement in that hundreds of long notes, which do not necessarily have direct relevance to the main text, run parallel to it and literally comprise one-half of the book. The main text recounts the rise of the Ottomans and the Byzantine Empire—from its break with the Roman Empire to the Latin invasion of Constantinople (395–1204)—and offers a survey of European nations and their state of affairs at the time of the conquest of Constantinople. Furthermore, Midhat provides a history of
Istanbul as well as a narrative of the siege and the Byzantine intellectuals who fled to Europe after the fall of the city.  

Midhat is critical of earlier Ottoman historians because of their failure to treat non-Islamic civilizations. He had also undertaken the initiative of printing—first in his newspaper and then in more than a dozen volumes—a series of histories titled Kā’ināt (The Universe) from 1871 to 1881. The first part (Europe) of that series includes histories of modern European nations published in several volumes; the second part (Asia) offers only one volume, devoted to the Ottoman Empire. Midhat’s volumes represented the rise of a new concept of universalism that did not see the history of the Ottoman Empire as a chapter within Islamic history.

Contributing to the manifestation of the idea of universalism was the periodization of world history, which Midhat discusses in detail in his introduction to the first volume. “Is the division of history into periods arbitrary?” reads his title to the introduction. Midhat is quite convinced that the tripartite division of world history is an absolute fact. According to him, “this division is not something subjective or an arbitrary choice of historians. All the historians (cumhūr-i müverriḥīn) agree on it.” Several mentions of “the historians” in his introduction, no doubt, refer to European historiographical production. Furthermore, “the unanimous agreement of the historians on the periodization of history,” he declares, “grants almost a scientific nature (fenniyet) to it. It is necessary to regard this structure as immutable (lā-yatağayyer).”

However, Midhat’s presentation of the tripartite division as widely recognized among historians is only the first leg of his argument. He also considers this division natural. He argues that the earlier ages, for which there is little historical evidence, were the “obscure ages” (e.g., zulmet-i mechūliyyet), and that, accordingly, one should label the later periods, for which historical documentation does exist, as the “illuminated ages” (e.g., kīsm-i münevver). Because humankind did not leap from “Bedouinism” (a concept frequently used in opposition to “civilization” in the second half of the nineteenth century) to “civilization” at once, there should also be a period of transition. Therefore, according to Midhat, a tripartite division can only be natural (inkisām-i tabē). The fact that the three periods are not divided evenly in terms of their span also supports his argument. The events he takes for his tripartite periodization are no different than those in one of the contemporaneous European models: Ancient Ages (ezmine-i mütekaddime), from Adam to the fall of the Western Roman Empire; Middle Ages (ezmine-i mütevassıta), from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople; and Modern Ages (ezmine-i mütealḥire), from the conquest of Constantinople to modern times.

Midhat also offers his opinions as to which calendar to use for dating historical events. In a lengthy discussion, he objects to using the Hegira and the lunar calendar and defends the birth of Christ as the landmark for year zero in the solar calendar. This section must be a response to Meḥmed Murād’s popular Tāriḥ-i ‘Umūmī, which
had appeared only a few years before and utilized the Islamic calendar for all of world history. Ahmed Midhat’s justification seems to be based on practicality. Because of the ten days of difference between the two calendars, he argues, using the lunar calendar as opposed to the solar calendar is problematic.\textsuperscript{53} If “we” accepted the birth of Christ as the start of the calendar, “we would neither be isolated from all the historians, nor would we have to alter the historical periodization which has been recognized by all.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Ahmed Cevdet: A Response to Ahmed Midhat, 1886}

Ahmed Midhat sent a copy of the first few fascicles of his \textit{Mufassal Tarih-i Kuran-i Cedide} (Complete History of the Modern Ages), along with a very humble letter, to Ahmed Cevdet (d. 1895), the “grand historian” of the late nineteenth century. In the letter, Midhat expresses great admiration for Cevdet’s historianship, especially for rescuing “(Ottoman) historiography” (\textit{fen\textsuperscript{n}-i tarih}) from mere tale-telling in favor of critical historianship through his opus magnum. The book to which he alludes is of course the \textit{Tarih-i Devlet-i ʿAliyye} (History of the Ottoman Empire), a twelve-volume work that covers the empire from 1774 to 1826. Cevdet may have been regarded as somewhat out of fashion by the new generation of history-writers in the 1880s, but apparently some still considered his blessings important and prestigious.

In his response, dated May 1886, Cevdet thanks Midhat for his kind words and notes that he does not deem himself worthy of the exaggerated praises. He states that he read and studied Midhat’s book and offers some critical remarks on a few points, all of which pertain to the introductory section. As becomes clear from the tone of his polite, yet skeptical, response, Cevdet found the author’s arguments naive, if not outright ignorant.

After a rather detailed and learned account of the emergence and use of the Julian and Gregorian calendars, Cevdet alludes to Midhat’s confusing the tripartite periodization with the Christian calendar, starting at Christ’s birth. The latter was considered appropriate in Europe because of Christ’s centrality to that culture. Accordingly, taking the Hegira for the start of the calendar would only be natural for Muslims. According to Cevdet, the difference between lunar and solar years is a non-issue. The period before the fifth century is also “quite obscure” in terms of historical knowledge; thus, Christ’s birth was not considered the beginning of the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{55} He also does not consider the fall of the Western Roman Empire an event that had an important impact on world history: it may well have been a dramatic event for Europe but was not significant to world history in general (\textit{alel-ʾumum tarih-i ʿalem ičin}).

Cevdet does not object to Midhat’s logical division of history into periods on the basis of the abundance of sound documentation. He has a modified model to offer, however: he divides history into two periods, Ancient and Modern, and proposes to regard the rise of Islam as the dividing line. He argues that the period from Adam to the rise of Islam is not sufficiently documented, and that the histories written before
then were merely unreliable stories (*kuru hikâye*). According to Cevdet, it was only after the rise of Islam that historians examined the veracity of historical narration.

Before he finishes his letter—with the wise statement that all periodization is after all speculative (*bu mişilli taksimler umûr-i tibârîyyedendir*), thus once again rejecting Midhat’s Eurocentric division of world history as an absolute truth—Cevdet makes one further, curious point. He proposes dividing the Modern Age into two sections, with the invention of the printing press as the dividing line. This logic is again in accordance with his division of world history into two periods, based on the availability of information about the period in question.\(^56\)

Conclusion

Ottoman historiography traditionally took the Creation as the beginning of history and considered the lands and peoples that were under the influence of, or in direct contact with, Islamic states. The two historical turning points thereafter were the Flood and Prophet Muhammad’s appearance. The first event was regarded as a logical second dawn of world history. As for the latter, it certainly was Islam centered, but because the message of the Prophet was regarded as universal, it was also seen as a landmark for world history. This model was gradually abandoned in the second half of the nineteenth century and a new scheme was adopted.

Another, albeit less common, scheme was to treat history after the rise of Islam by centuries. Münecimbaşı, as we have seen above, chose to list the Islamic dynasties chronologically, grouped by centuries, after narrating the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties in detail. Although dividing Islamic history into centuries was an approach that developed within the Islamic tradition, it became only somewhat popular. This division is usually understood to have risen from the concept that Islamic tradition expected a religious regeneration under the leadership of a spiritual (and/or political) ruler every hundred years after Hegira. Some nineteenth-century history-writers also experimented with this scheme with regards to Ottoman history. Ahmed Vefik, for example, grouped Ottoman sultans under centuries in his textbook *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanlı* (A Résumé of Ottoman History, 1869). Ahmed Cevdet, too, made use of the scheme in his *Tarih*’s second edition (1884–1886).\(^57\)

The shift from a long-established periodization scheme to a new model occurred as a result of several factors, among which new approaches to sources feature prominently. Changes in mentality and worldview do not occur over short periods of time, a statement especially valid for historical consciousness. In fact, emerging approaches to historical sources are evident before the period this essay focuses on, notably with Şanızade Mehmed, a court annalist who composed his history in the early 1820s. Şanızade introduces and praises unusual sources for Ottoman historians as solid evidence that cannot be dismissed in historical writing: archeological finds (such as the Egyptian pyramids), statues, drawings, and inscriptions.\(^58\)
By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most Ottoman historians came to approach historical sources with a positivist perspective. A narrative of pre-historic times based on sacred texts gradually became impossible to substantiate. Consequently, the new qualification of sources led to a detachment of “sacred history” from the “history of civilizations,” which would be the first step in completely removing such accounts as the stories of prophets from world histories, as they came to be seen as stories without proper historical documentation.

A general disapproval of the traditional methodology of imperial annalists had already been on the rise in the 1840s. Although such criticism was not about periodization models per se, the general attitude can certainly be taken as evidence that the Ottoman intellectual mind was ripe for questioning long-established historical methods and patterns and apparently receptive to new ones. Criticism centered around the fact that the annalists recorded events in chronological order without seeking to elucidate any causal relationship between them, and that they were writing to justify the actions of powerful statesmen. Even an appointed imperial annalist, Recâî Mehmed (d. 1874), found the tradition problematic by the late 1840s, as becomes clear from a petition he submitted to the grand vizier; he considered the unilateral nature of the sources to be the primary shortcoming of the annals written by his predecessors.

Although Ottoman historians did not make use of the new types of sources directly, appreciation for them led to an admiration of historiography that utilized them extensively. Eventually, a periodization that partitioned all known history of the world in three main periods was adopted by Ottoman intellectuals who aspired to replicate a “scientific” historiography that became professionalized first in German academia and then in other places in Europe during the nineteenth century. The new historiography, an important component of which was the tripartite division, was accordingly labeled the “new method” (üsûl-i cedid) by several history-writers of the later nineteenth century. It seems that the tripartite division as a format was imported rather mechanically and presented as absolute fact. No doubt it would have been impossible for Ottoman intellectuals to invent a much altered periodization scheme when European historiography made use of an overwhelming body of sources and auxiliary sciences. Ottoman scholarship had made no original contribution to non-Ottoman historiography by this time. Hence, major events that mark turning points in the European scheme were simply replaced with those from Islamic and Ottoman history. There seems to be a consensus that the scarcity or abundance of sources for each of these periods was the justification for the tripartite division.

Still, the ready acceptance of the tripartite division of history in the Ottoman intellectual milieu must be considered within the framework of Ottoman intellectual history and the emergence of a new notion of universalism. The new universalists did not consider Ottoman history the final phase of Islamic and world history, nor did they consider the world to be deteriorating toward its inevitable destruction, that is,
Judgment Day. The idea that by every lived day the world was approaching its cataclysmic end is deeply rooted in Christian and Islamic belief systems and can also be traced to Ancient Greek thought. History was now viewed as an optimistic story of progress—much in line with contemporary European views of history. Ahmed Midhat, for example, describes history as “the account of the progress of humankind and civilization.” A progressive story of world history logically required a division that developed from old (ancient) to new (modern). The scheme that had partitioned Islamic history into centuries, as we have seen above, viewed Islamic history as a linear story, but not a progressive one.

There was also a political aspect to the idea of a progressive history. As mentioned, Ahmed Hılmı explains at length—in an afterword to his discussion of the Ancient Ages—that the common people were oppressed and treated with injustice by absolute monarchs. Whatever the rulers proclaimed was taken as law, he laments. Ancient history can be characterized, in his words, by plundering, execution, injustice, and transgression—acts that conflicted with ideals such as “justice and humanity” (hakkanıyyet ve insaniyyet). Yet, the history of the Ancient Ages also proved that people in a state of savagery constantly strived to transform themselves into a state of civilization.

Surely, the monarchy’s decline in popularity during the nineteenth century, and the growing admiration for popular participation in government, was the backdrop of such statements. History-writing was, as always, a medium that was used to reflect political views.

Another development that facilitated the rise of the “new method” in historiography was the democratization of historical writing in the Ottoman lands. Due to the educational policies of the nineteenth century and increasing printing opportunities, there was a rapid growth in the number of histories, the variety of subjects they covered, and the methodologies utilized. With new histories emerging in parallel, the city of Istanbul, the imperial court, and the central bureaucracy ceased to be the only centers of historical production. The professional background of history-writers changed, as well. In addition to historians from scribal careers, or those with close connections to the court, now freelance history-writers, modernizing military officers, and journalists (a new profession) composed or translated popular works or textbooks. The ulama, traditionally a prolific group in all kinds of writing activities, did not compose or translate any works in subjects under consideration here.

The tripartite division remained the only scheme used in modern Turkish historiography and had a great impact on Turkish historical consciousness throughout the twentieth century. Its adoption in the late nineteenth century was the result of an effort to integrate Ottoman-Turkish historiography with a tradition that claimed to have divided world history into periods “scientifically.” Whether prompted by current historiographical outlooks on world history or by nationalistic incentives, many modern historians highlight the Eurocentric nature of the scheme and question the validity of such a model for world history.
Appendix: Books Examined in This Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historian</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Composed or Published</th>
<th>Period Covered</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Şükrullah (d. 1488)</td>
<td>Bahjat al-Tawārikh</td>
<td>late 1450s</td>
<td>from the Creation to the 1450s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustafā 'Ali (d. 1600)</td>
<td>Kūnhūl-Aḥbār</td>
<td>1590s</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaçelebizade 'Abdūl‘azīz (d. 1658)</td>
<td>Ravżatü'l-Ebrār</td>
<td>1648</td>
<td>from the Creation to 1646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müneccimbaşi Ahmed (d. 1702)</td>
<td>Jāmī’ al-Duwal</td>
<td>1672</td>
<td>from the Creation to 1672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferā'izizade Mehmed Sa‘id (d. 1835)</td>
<td>Gūlsen-i Ma‘ārif</td>
<td>completed 1834 published 1836</td>
<td>from Adam to 1774</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ahmed Vefiğ (d. 1891)  
**Hikmet-i Tāriḥ**  
lectures delivered at the University in March 1863  
from the Creation to the Modern Ages

Ahmed Hilmī (d. 1878)  
**Tāriḥ-i Umbūmī, 6 vols.**  
(at least the first two volumes translated from William Chambers)  
1866–1878  
from the Ancient Ages to the Middle Ages (incomplete)

Mehmed Āṭif (d. 1908 or 1909)  
**Huḥsatu’ll-Tevāriḥ**  
1872–1873  
from the Creation to Ancient Greece (incomplete)

Süleyman Hüsnī (d. 1892)  
**Tāriḥ-i ʿĀlem, 1: Kurūn-i Ülā**  
1876  
from the Creation to the Hegira (incomplete)

Rıfā’at Efendi (d. 1895)  
**Naḵdīvī-Tevāriḥ**  
1879  
from the Creation to 1879

Mehmed Murād (d. 1917)  
**Tāriḥ-i Umbūmī**  
1880–1882  
from the Creation to modern times

Ahmed Midḥat (d. 1912)  
**Muḥaussal Tāriḥ-i Kurūn-i Cedīde, 3 vols.**  
1885–1888  
begins with the rise of the Ottomans

Ahmed Cevedet (d. 1895)  
Included in the **TeVākīr** letter written in 1886  
a critique of Ahmed Midhat’s Muḥaussal Kurūn-i Cedīde Tāriḥī

Notes

1. I have placed the adjective “scientific” in quotation marks because, while modern historians appreciate the limited validity (or invalidity) of all-encompassing historical models, the periodization scheme under consideration was accepted and promoted by members of the newly professional discipline of history in Europe, who conferred to it the illusion of scientific authority. A survey of developments in European historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be found in


11. Çaraçelebizade Abdülaziz, Ravzatü’l-’Ebrar (The Garden of the Pious), composed 1648. Chapters: the Prophets (Adam, Seth, Idris, Noah, etc.) (pp. 4–99); Prophet Muhammad, his family, wars, and so forth (pp. 99–126); the four rightly guided Caliphs (pp. 127–141); the rise and fall of the Islamic dynasties: Umayyads, Qarmatians, Ghaznavids, Buyids, Khwarezmian dynasty, Crusades, Ghurids, Abbasids, Seljuks, Karaman, Halagu (pp. 141–275); the rise of the Ottomans (pp. 275–288); the fall of the Mamluks (pp. 288–319); Safavids (Kizilbaş) (pp. 319–338); a detailed account of Ottoman history (later sections recount contemporary history) (pp. 338–628).


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15. Ferâ’izizâde Mehmed Sa’îd, Gâlûn-i Ma’arîf (The Rose Garden of Knowledge), published 1836. Volume 1: Articles of faith in Sunni Islam (p. 2); angels (pp. 4–6); holy books (pp. 6–7); the rest of the articles of faith (p. 8); prophets: Adam, Seth, Idris, Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Suleiman, Jesus (pp. 9–63); life of the Prophet Muhammad (pp. 63–136); companions of the Prophet (pp. 136–175); the imams, sheikhs (pp. 176–223); Pihşadîyan, Kayanîds, Sassanids, Ashkanids, Umayyads, Abbasids, Samanids, Seljuks, rulers of Khorazm, Khorasan, Kuhistan, and so forth. Turkish, Circassian, Genghisid, Timurid, Turkoman rulers (pp. 223–411); detailed account of Ottoman history (pp. 411–847). Volume 2: Detailed account of Ottoman history (pp. 850–1693).


17. For example, Karaçelebizâde Abdül’azîz, Ravzâtûl-Ebrâr (Cairo: Matba’a-i Bulâk, 1832), 12; and Ahmed Vefik, Hikmet-i Târîh (Istanbul, 1886), 29.


19. Fleischer details the topic in his Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire, 273 ff. Adshead characterizes the Mongol conquests under Genghis Khan and his successors as a massive explosion that “started” history and affected even those parts of the world that were not physically penetrated by the Mongols. See Samuel Adrian M. Adshead, Central Asia in World History (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 53.


22. The booklet ends abruptly in the middle of a sentence, with a catchword for the next page, which might indicate that more was typeset but not printed. The reason why the booklet remained incomplete cannot be determined.

23. Somel disputes the assertion that history as a course was instructed as early as 1839 at schools, or even later during the 1850s. See Selçuk Aksı̇ın Somel, The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 194.


26. Ibid., 8.

27. Ibid., 13.

28. What follows is Ahmed Vefik’s periodization of world history: Ancient Ages (ezmine-i mütekaddime; or, alternatively, ezmine-i kadime): First era (faşl): 2550 years (Adam sent to earth; the Deluge; histories composed in Greece; end of the Assyrian Empire); Second era: 440 years (rise of the Achaemenid [Persian] Empire; Alexander halts the Persians); Third era: 300 years (fall of Rome; death of Alexander; birth of Christ); Fourth era: 622 years (fall of the Western Roman Empire; barbarian tribes invade Europe; Hegira). Middle Ages (ezmine-i mütevassita): First era: two centuries (Islam spreads in Turkistan, Hindustan, and Europe; barbarian tribes in Europe); Second era: three centuries (the Caliphate splits in two; influence of the popes increases; rise of feudal lords); Third era: two centuries (Crusades; Genghis Khan; Holy Roman Empire); Fourth era: two centuries (Timur; advance of the Ottomans and Genoese; Renaissance and Reformation in Europe; invention of gunpowder and firearms). Modern Ages (ezmine-i cedide or mu‘âlhara): First era (conquest of Constantinople; discovery of the New World); Second era: 170 years (rise of Shi’ites in the East and Protestants in the West; rise of the Ottomans and Spain); Third era: 135 years (Mongol invasion of China; power of Hindustan, France, Netherlands, and Russia increases); Fourth era: 40 years (French Republic; Napoleonic Wars; founding of the United States; British naval power increases; the "Auspicious Event" [Abolition of the Janissary corps]).


30. Ibid., 2:334 ff.

31. I was not able to locate the third, fourth, and fifth volumes of this work.

32. William Chambers vs. Ahmed Hiîî: Ancient Ages (from Adam to the fall of the Roman Empire) vs. Ezmine-i mütekaddime (from Adam to the Hegira); Middle Ages (from the fall of the Roman Empire to the discovery of the New World) vs. Ezmine-i mütevassita (from the Hegira to the conquest of Constantinople); Modern Ages (from the discovery of the New World to author’s time) vs. Ezmine-i müte aḥhîre (from the conquest of Constantinople to translator’s time).

33. Mehmêd Âṭî, Halâsâtât-Tevarîh (Istanbul: Muḥibb Matbâ’as, 1872 or 1873), 3.

34. “European historians” vs. Mehmêd Âṭî: Initial Ages (from the Creation to the fall of the Western Roman Empire) vs. Kurûn-i ūlā (from the Creation to the Hegira); Middle Ages (from fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople) vs. Kurûn-i vustâ (from the Hegira to the conquest of Constantinople); Later Ages (from the conquest of Constantinople to author’s time) vs. Kurûn-i aḥhîre (from the conquest of Constantinople to the translator’s time).

35. For example: Initial Ages (kûrûn-i ūlā): (1) Primary times (ezmine-i evveliyey): twenty-five centuries (events before the Deluge); (2) Mythical times (ezmine-i esâtîrîyyey): seventeen centuries (from the establishment of historical states to the founding of Rome); (3) Historical times (ezmine-i târihîyyey): thirteen centuries (from the founding of Rome to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire).

36. The date 27 May 1876, which is recorded at the end of the book, must be the day on which the book went to press. However, the introduction includes a tribute to Murad V (p. 5), who would be enthroned on May 30 and rule as sultan until August 31, 1876. The introduction must have been adjusted after May 30.

37. Süleyman Hüsni, Târîh-i ‘âlem, 1: Kurûn-i Ūlâ (Istanbul: Mekteb-i Fûnûn-i Ḥarbiyye Matbâ’as, 1876), 2.

38. Initial Ages (kurûn-i ūlā or târîh-i kadîm) (from Adam to the Hegira); Middle Ages (kurûn-i vustâ) (from the Hegira to the appearance of the Ottoman dynasty [ca. 1300]); Modern Ages (kurûn-i
39. Süleyman Hüsnü’s division of pre-historic times, which differs somewhat from Meşmed Âtn’s model, is as follows: Ancient History (tarih-i kadim): (1) Primary times (ezmine-i evveliyye): (a) the era of Adam (ahd-i Âdem) (events before the Flood), (b) the era of Noah (ahd-i Nûh) (until the establishment of the historical states); (2) Mythical times (ezmine-i esâtîriyye) (from the establishment of historical states to the founding of Rome); (3) Historical times (ezmine-i târihiyye) (from the founding of Rome to the Hegira).
40. Rıfat Efendi, Naqdât-Tevârih (İstanbul: Yaḥya Efendi Maṭba‘ası, 1879), 2.
41. Ibid., 3.
42. Christoph Herzog, Geschichte und Ideologie: Meşmed Murâd und Celal Nuri über die historischen Ursachen des osmanischen Niedergangs (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996).
43. Meşmed Murâd, Târihi-ı Umâmi (İstanbul: Maḥmûd Bey Maṭba‘ası, 1880–1882), 1:2–3.
44. Ibid., 1:7.
45. Ibid., 1:14.
46. Ibid., 1:10–11.
47. Ibid., 1:9.
48. Initial Ages (kurun-i âlî or ezmine-i mütekaddime) (from the Creation to the fall of the Western Roman Empire); Middle Ages (kurun-i vustâ or ezmine-i mütevassîta) (from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople); Modern Ages (kurun-i cedide or ezmine-i müte‘âhîre) (from the conquest of Constantinople to modern times).
49. On Meşmed Midhat’s treatment of Byzantine history, see Michael Ursinus, “Byzantine History in Late Ottoman Turkish Historiography,” Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 10 (1986): 211–222.
51. Ibid., 1:9.
52. Ancient Ages (ezmine-i mütekaddime or kurun-i kadime) (from Adam to the fall of the Western Roman Empire); Middle Ages (ezmine-i mütevassîta or kurun-i vustâ) (from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the conquest of Constantinople); Modern Ages (ezmine-i müte‘âhîre or kurun-i cedide) (from the conquest of Constantinople to modern times).
53. Midhat cites a “witty” observation that the difference would create confusion in that both calendars would have the same date after centuries; Meşmed Midhat, Mufaşşal Tarih-i Kurun-t Cedide 1:8. That would be the year 20,875 in the Gregorian calendar.
54. Meşmed Midhat, Mufaşşal Tarih-i Kurun-t Cedide 1:8–9: “Cumhîr-t müverrihîden ayırlımanış ve tarihîn cümle nezdinde makbût takşîmât-ı eşâsiyyesini . . . ”
56. Ancient Ages (tarih-i ʿatîk) (from Adam to the rise of Islam); Modern Ages (ʿaṣr-t cedid) (from the rise of Islam to modern times, divided into two at the invention of the printing press).
59. Several of the authors mentioned here discuss the separation of “sacred history” (mukaddes) and “general history” (āmme) (the latter also appearing as “history of civilization,” tarih-i temêddûn); for example, cf. Ahmed Hilmi, Tarih-i Umûmi, 2:334; Süleyman Hüsnî, Tarih-i Âlem, 1: Kurun-i Ülâ, 2, et. al.
60. Recorded in Meşmed Cemâleddin, Osmâni Tarih ve Müverrihleri: Âyne-i Zurefâ (İstanbul: İkdam, 1896–1897), 105–111. See Cemal Kafadar and Hakan Karatepe, “Late Ottoman and Early

61. The term *üşül-i cedîd* was in circulation with respect to educational policies in the 1870s. The reflection in historiography can rightly be seen as a response to that policy. See Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire*, 169 ff.

