Intellectual encounters with the west: The cases of Turkey and Japan

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This project started as an update of the volume by Ward and Rustow on political modernization in Japan and Turkey.[1] I think we all agree that we have moved on to something entirely different, and original. Comparisons of Japan and Turkey in terms of industrialization, westernization and so forth are obviously quite absurd, but what still has validity is the question of how these two non-Western societies encountered the West and modernity. The paper will focus on questions of perceptions and mentalities which have not been discussed at length previously. In this paper, I will look at some general themes in the beginning, and then focus more specifically on the encounters of several Ottomans with the West in comparison with the experience of their Japanese counterparts.

Introduction and historical background

The obvious difference between Turkey and Japan in terms of encounters with the West is that—compared to Japan—Turkey/ the Ottoman Empire historically *was* the West. The Ottomans had been part of the European state system since early modern times. Nor did the Ottoman Empire at any time in its history experience anything similar to Japan's policy of isolationism. Ottoman formal diplomatic relations with Europe began in the eighteenth century and by 1856, the Ottoman Empire was formally recognized as one of the Great Powers.[2] Yet, beyond the immediate differences, we find intriguing similarities. Both the Ottoman and the Japanese modernization processes were provoked by a perceived threat to their survival from the outside. For both, the threat emanated from the West. Ever since the second half of the eighteenth century, the Ottomans

1 Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow, eds., *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

2 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

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had been trying to learn from their enemy. The Ottoman reform process had begun in the eighteenth century, but it made a quantum leap in the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839). Previous reform efforts had been attempts to return to an imaginary Golden Age, the height of power that the Ottoman Empire achieved in the sixteenth century. With the reign of Mahmud II it became clear that there was no going back. Ottomans had to become like the West or be destroyed. In both the Japanese and the Turkish cases the immediate trigger for reform was war and/or intervention. The initial spur to the Mahmudian reforms was the threat posed, not by the West, but by a nominal vassal, Mehmed Ali of Egypt, whose modernized army actually invaded Anatolia. Then there came the intervention of the Great Powers, and the price to pay was the 1838 Trade Treaty with Britain, which is somewhat comparable to the unequal treaties imposed on Japan in 1858 after the "opening up" of Japan after Admiral Perry's "visit" of 1853.

For Japan, the triggering event was the Opium War in China in 1840-42 and the sheer rapacity of Western imperialism let loose, as seen in the sacking of the Summer Palace in Beijing. An event, by the way, that was to shock Turkish public opinion too. The great Ottoman encyclopedist Münif Paşa wrote: "How could such a thing happen? How could a thousand year empire succumb to a few hundred foreigners? Obviously the Chinese Emperor, who commands hundreds of thousands of soldiers, has fallen behind the times.[3] If one delves beneath the superficial differences, one can find two striking similarities between Japan's and Turkey's experiences. First, in both contexts, the primary focus of the person encountering the outside world is centered on the following question: "What is our Place in the World?" Second, both societies have long questioned the degree to which reform is a Western imposition and in how far it is a result of domestic impetus. As Esenbel rightly points out, Western Civilization was learned behavior for the West itself, and this project ultimately is the investigation of "the non-western history of Western culture."[4] As a result of their efforts, both societies became the only two non-western powers who not only avoided being colonized, but were recognized as Great Powers in their own right. Of course, Japan was much more successful, as she actually went on to become aggressively imperialist in her own right.

3 Münif Paşa, "Mukayese-i İlm ve Cehl (A Comparison of Learning and Ignorance)," *Mecmua-ı Fünun*, no. 1 (1279/1862-1863).

4 Selçuk Esenbel, "The Anguish of Civilized Behavior: The Use of Western Cultural Forms in the Everyday Lives of the Meiji Japanese and the Ottoman Turks During the Nineteenth Century," *Japan Review*, no. 5 (1994).

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Early encounters: Students sent abroad

This paper focuses on the early encounters of the nineteenth century, but it must be pointed out that the truly first encounters for the Ottomans happened in the eighteenth century, with the first Ottoman diplomatic missions to the West.[5] Nonetheless, the nineteenth-century encounters are significant, because they are contemporary to the Japanese experience. First, it must be noted that neither in Japan nor in Turkey was there initially any great enthusiasm to study abroad. This comes as no surprise—in that age foreign travel was undertaken only rarely. The first Turkish boys to be sent to Paris in 1830 were the slaves of Grand Admiral Koca Hüsrev Paşa, and the first Japanese students to be sent to Europe were the younger sons of low-to-middle-ranking samurai who were told that it was their patriotic duty to volunteer.[6] The first obvious difference between the Turkish and the Japanese cases is the sheer discrepancy in the volume of available information. For Japan, we have much detailed information as to how many students there were, where they went, what they studied, about their daily lives, and so forth.[7] In the Turkish case we only have very dispersed and scanty information. We can therefore speculate that the sending of students was taken far more seriously in Japan than in the Ottoman Empire. This also holds true in terms of numbers. Although, according to Beasley, the numbers of Japanese students only amounted to 128 out of a population of some 35 million in the years 1862-1868, this is still significantly more than in the Turkish case. The first group of Hüsrev Paşa's slaves numbered four. Their upkeep and education were paid out of their master's pocket, and only after several years did he approach the sultan, suggesting that it might be a good idea if the state took some interest in their education. Another known case is that of Tunuslu Hayreddin Paşa, also of slave origin, who was sent to Paris to study in the 1830s by his protector Ahmed Paşa, the *de facto* ruler of Tunisia.[8] Although the number of Turkish students increased in later years, foreign study was never really encouraged by the Ottoman state, and many of the reform efforts in education in later periods were informed by the desire to provide a safe local version of modern education. The ambivalent nature of the desire to seek Western knowledge, but to somehow avoid contamination by the West seems to be common to both Turkey and Japan. Yet, in both cases, early Western education marked these men for life. Some of them—for instance, Ito Hirobumi whose early days in

5 Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

6 W. G. Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 119-39, İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1982), 602-03.

7 For this information I have relied entirely on Beasley. He cites numerous Japanese sources.

8 İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, 895.

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London were to influence him for the rest of his life, and İbrahim Edhem Paşa (one of Hüsrev's slaves) and Tunuslu Hayreddin Paşa, both of whom were to serve as grand viziers—rose to the very top as reformers. But their limited numbers should not blind us to the fact that their influence was great, for, as aptly put by Sydney Giffard, "the history of this period is in large part the history of gifted and determined individuals."[9]

Missions, state visits and the obsession with knowledge and science

The first and only Ottoman Sultan to pay a state visit to the West was Abdülaziz I who visited the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1867. The very fact that the visit took place at all aroused considerable controversy. According to Ottoman tradition, Ottoman sultans could only set foot in the *Darü'l-Harb* (Land of War, meaning land ruled by infidels) if they were leading a campaign. Abdülaziz came, not leading Janissaries and Sipahi cavalry, but at the head of a group of polished courtiers and statesmen, including his two young cousins, Murad and Abdülhamid, both of whom would later succeed him as sultans. Yet there was considerable opposition to the visit in conservative circles, to the extent that the somewhat ridiculous rumor circulated that his shoes contained a layer of Istanbul soil so that theoretically everywhere was home ground! The visit proved to be a great success, so much so that the Empress Eugenie, who had been invited by Abdülaziz, did him the great honor of returning the visit by coming to Istanbul in 1869. The danger, of course, for both the Ottomans and the Japanese in these contexts was that of becoming exotic display items themselves, as witnessed by the Japanese delegation to Paris, who found that, when they walked into the Paris Opera wearing their ceremonial kimonos, they became the spectacle. In London, the Japanese delegation had to stop eating *sashimi* because the comment went around that "they were eating raw fish like the natives of South America," a historic irony if there ever was one given the present world-wide obsession with sushi. In the case of Abdülaziz, "tout Paris" was almost disappointed that he was not exotic enough, as he "very correctly" admired "les plus beaux meubles" and stopped before "les bronzes les plus artistiques."[10]

When the Ottoman elite first decided to send students to Paris, they had no idea that they were in fact preparing the end of the world as they knew it. The Turkish students in the Ottoman School (*Mekteb-i Osmani*) in Paris were confined to a large house on the outskirts of Paris, virtually in a

9 Sydney Giffard, *Japan among the Powers, 1890-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 3.

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state of house arrest. They were taught French and sciences by the best teachers, but were encouraged to converse among themselves in Turkish or Arabic.[11] Nobody could have guessed that this was the beginning of a process that would ultimately produce a whole class of persons who would consider "knowledge and science" (*ilim ve fünun*) as new religion "which would destroy anyone who stood in its way."[12]

In the case of the new Turkish elite we may indeed speak of a naive Enlightenment consciousness, which upheld Western science and knowledge as the ultimate good. A whole plethora of popular science publications reflected this orientation. The famous lexicographer and encyclopedist Şemseddin Sami was to write: "As people were broken up into classes in ancient Egypt and India, in the civilized countries today we see three classes, thinkers, artisans and workers.[13] It was repeatedly stated that the reason for the success of the Europeans was their mastery of "knowledge and science: Although Europe was the poorest and smallest of the world's continents, thanks to the great progress in knowledge and science they have come to rule over most of the world's peoples and have become the centre of the world."[14] Similarly, "England was an obscure county in the far corner of Europe. Now thanks to knowledge and science, it rules half the world." The Enlightenment and its two founders, Voltaire and Rousseau, were elevated to the level of gods, as an anonymous article in a popular science weekly stated:

> Voltaire and Rousseau were not mere human beings. They are two forces of nature who have taken physical shape, two ideas which have become embodied [...] Present day civilization, all modern thought, the present state of Europe or maybe the world are entirely the work of these two men, the fruits of their labour. So, what did they do? Did they invent the steam engine or electricity? No, but they provided the spark for the moral fires that were to be lit by others who followed them. These sparks created a Great Light that was to enlighten the whole world. Our eyes were blind, now we could see, they lifted the curtain of darkness so now the People could see [...][15]

11 Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1986), 12-13.

12 Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Osmanlı Aydınındaki Değişme ve 'Bilim'," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 27 (1984): 183-92. The treatment of the Ottoman students is in stark contrast to that given to the first Japanese students sent to Holland, who were ordered to live in independent lodgings. This should force them to master Dutch.

13 Hanioğlu, *Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*, 19.

14 Ibid., 13.

15 Ibid., 24, footnote 61. Quote from *Hafta* (The Week), 24 Muharrem 1299 (1881).

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Ottoman intellectuals became so obsessed by scientific materialism that a leading Young Turk, Abdullah Cevdet, wrote a poem celebrating microbes, because they were the root cause of all decomposition of matter which enabled the eternal cycle to continue:

> O glorious atmosphere covering our globe!
> O the smiling rays of the sun!
> Every kind of microbe,
> Which cause the decomposition of every living thing!
> You are the source of all life,
> You are the means by which we reach the eternal...[16]

Late Ottoman encounters with the westerner

In this section, I will examine the life and work of a late Ottoman statesman and artist, Osman Hamdi Bey; the travelogue of a prominent writer, Ahmet Midhat Efendi; and sections from two memoirs written by members of the late Ottoman elite, Mehmed Ubeydullah Efendi and Eşref Kuşçubaşı, which are particularly illustrative of the late Ottoman world view.[17] They are interesting also in another sense, in that their writers were not senior statesmen of the Hamidian era, but from the world of arts and letters (Osman Hamdi Bey and Ahmet Midhat), and even members of the Young Turk opposition and, therefore, men of action rather than cerebral statesmen (Ubeydullah and Eşref). Mehmed Ubeydullah Efendi was a man of religion, yet also one of the earliest members of the group of activists who formed the Committee of Union and Progress in 1899. Eşref Kuşçubaşı was a military man who was famous (or infamous) as one of the founders of the Young Turk secret service, the Special Organization or *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, of which Ubeydullah was also a member.

Osman Hamdi Bey—later to achieve renown as the doyen of Ottoman museology, archeology, and even more as one of the empire's earliest realist painters—began his career in the 1860s as an ambitious young man in the entourage of the great reformer Midhat Paşa, then posted as *vali* to the

16 Ibid. The poem *Masumiyet* (Innocence) by Abdullah Cevdet was published in İstanbul in 1311 (1883).

17 Eşref Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber'de Türk Cengi: Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa Arabistan, Sina ve Kuzey Afrika Müdürü Eşref Bey'in Hayber Anıları*, ed. Philip H. Stoddard and H. Basri Danışman (İstanbul: Arba, 1997), Ubeydullah Efendi, *Sıradışı bir Jön Türk Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Amerika Hatıraları*, ed. Ahmet Turan Alkan (İstanbul: İletişim, 1989). The sections from the above memoirs used in this essay will deal specifically with the authors' encounters with foreigners. I would like to make it clear that I am deliberately refraining from using the blanket category of the West because the encounters in question occur in a very specific context. In Ubeydullah's case, the setting is on board a passenger steamer bound for New York and at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. In Kuşçubaşı's case, it is the experience of a prisoner of war in Egypt in 1917.

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province of Baghdad.[18] Osman Hamdi, freshly returned from Paris where he had studied painting in the atelier of Gérome, greatly admired Midhat Paşa whose reformist zeal he fully espoused. His letters to his father in the years 1869-70 show us that—Parisian dandy that he was he still shared many of the hopes, prejudices, and projections of "provincial warhorses," such as his namesake, Osman Nuri Paşa.[19] The most noticeable similarity is his wholehearted devotion to the *mission civilizatrice* of the Ottoman state in Iraq. Osman Hamdi's view of the bedouin is very influenced by the image of the noble savage so current in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, yet it is also very close to Osman Nuri's view of the bedouin as an unspoiled brave race. Osman Hamdi, like Osman Nuri, believed that the Turks were the empire's fundamental element, who had to teach their less favored Muslim brethren the ways of civilization. According to Osman Hamdi, the ideal type of imperial citizen is the Prussian bourgeois: industrious, obedient, and not necessarily very creative (which was not a bad thing).[20]

It was this same Osman Hamdi, who went on to pursue an illustrious career as a pioneer in fine arts, museology and conservation in the Hamidian era. Although he was trained in the realist style of French Orientalist painting, Osman Hamdi's *oeuvre* actually challenged Orientalism and the supremacy of the West that trained him.[21] Unlike the static, passive world of Gérome's Orient, where Muslims are charming snakes while Constantinople collapses, Osman Hamdi's subjects engage and provoke the viewer. His iconoclasm goes so far as to have one of his figures, a beautiful young woman, sit on a Koran stand, with volumes of discarded books at her

18 Osman Hamdi Bey (1842-1910) was born in İstanbul as the son of İbrahim Edhem Paşa, (1818-1893) who served as Grand Vizier, minister and ambassador. The fact that İbrahim Edhem Paşa translated some works of Descartes into Turkish gives us a good idea of Osman Hamdi's family background. Osman Hamdi was sent to Paris to study law in 1857. While studying there, Osman Hamdi also attended the *Ecole Des Beaux Arts* where he studied painting under Jean-Léon Gérome and Gustave Boulanger. He also took courses in archeology. He served in an official capacity during Sultan Abdülaziz's visit to the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1867. In 1869 he returned to İstanbul and served in various official positions. Between 1869 and 1871 he served as "Director for Foreign Affairs of the Vilayet of Baghdad" during Midhat Paşa's term there. In 1881 he was appointed Curator of the Imperial Museum, and spent great effort to institutionalize the conservation and protection of archeological treasures in the Empire. He commissioned the palace architect, Alexander Vallaury, to design the Archeology Museum which opened in 1891. As a major figure in Ottoman intellectual history, this study makes no pretence of examining Osman Hamdi's career. For more information, see particularly, Adolphe Thalasso, *Les premiers salons de peinture de Constantinople* (Paris: 1906). Thalasso referred to Osman Hamdi as the "first really Turkish painter;" Also see, Zeynep Rona, ed., *1. Osman Hamdi Bey Kongresi Bildiriler: 2-5 Ekim 1990* (İstanbul: Mimar Sinan Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1992).

19 Edhem Eldem, "Quelques lettres d'Osman Hamdi Bey à son père lors de son séjour en Irak (1869-1870)," *Anatolia Moderna - Yeni Anadolu* 1, no. 1 (1991).

20 Ibid.

21 İpek Aksüğür-Duben, "Osman Hamdi ve Orientalism," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 41 (1987).

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feet. In many of his famous paintings depicting Oriental scenes—such as *Three Muslim Scholars discussing the Koran at the entrance of a mosque, The Tortoise Tamer*, and *The Fountain of Life*—the figure in the painting is Osman Hamdi himself. By playfully making himself an accomplice, he joins in the game, thus eliminating the distance between the viewer and the viewed. Therefore, Osman Hamdi's paintings are actually "political statements opposing the static view of the Orient and Islam."[22]

Osman Hamdi is credited with bringing the study of the human figure to modern Turkish art. Particularly his studies of women go directly against the Orientalist focus on Muslim women as supine odalisques reclining on divans. Osman Hamdi's women are real, and some of his most famous portraits were actually of his wife, Naile Hanım. Women are portrayed on a basis of equality with men: they study, they work, they confront life and the viewer. Similarly, items such as books are not elements of *décor*, but are strewn about the floor, obviously much read.[23]

Ahmet Midhat Efendi, journalist, publicist, and self- appointed educator of the general populace, was actually a *protegé* of Osman Hamdi Bey. Ahmet Midhat set off on a journey to Europe in 1889 as the official delegate of Abdulhamid II to the Eighth Congress of Orientalists at Stockholm. He was also to visit the World Exhibition in Paris, and recorded his experiences in a travelogue entitled *Avrupa'da bir Cevelan* (A Tour of Europe).[24] I have chosen to include Ahmet Midhat Efendi because he is a particularly good example of an Ottoman intellectual obsessed with bringing civilization to the population at large. Unlike the Ottoman provincial governors or officials mentioned above, his focus is more on the urban population. His appeal, in all his writing, was to a certain newly emerging urban Muslim middle class, who would be people of modest learning, yet aware of the world.[25] In this sense Ahmet Midhat's self designated mission was to instruct his fellow citizens about the "West without" based on their already present perceptions of the West, or the "West within."

22 Ibid. İpek Aksüğür–Duben does not deny that Osman Hamdi continued to be influenced by Gérome after his return to Istanbul, but she points out that his paintings of Oriental subjects continued to be the work of an ideologically motivated artist.

23 Zeynep Yasa Yaman, "Osman Hamdi Bey," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1994).

24 Carter Vaughn Findley, "An Ottoman Occidentalist in Europe: Ahmet Midhat Meets Madame Gülnar, 1889," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (1998).

25 Although I am aware of the pitfalls involved in speaking about a typical İstanbul Muslim middle class family, the class of people that Ahmet Midhat addressed are admirably described in: Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *İstanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Particularly apt in our present context is their chapter, "Westernization and New Family Directions." Duben and Behar draw attention to the frequent presence of newspapers in photographs of families taking their ease in a domestic setting.

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In writing his travel account, Ahmet Midhat's main aim is to present the "real Europe" to his readers.[26] In a sense Ahmet Midhat is standing the standard power relationship in the travel literature of the period on its head, as usually Westerners traveled in and observed the Orient. Here, an Easterner is observing the West. As in the case of Ubeydullah Efendi below, Ahmet Midhat was quite comfortable with his position: "An explorer in red fez rather than pith helmet, Ahmet Midhat showed [...] people that he was in control. He did not fault the natives for staring as he studied the fine Parisian buildings with binoculars in one hand and guidebook in the other; he persisted because he had to memorize everything he saw."[27] Similarly to Halet Efendi who had walked the same streets some eighty years before, Ahmet Midhat was also to be struck by the difference in morality, and—like his illustrious predecessor—he devoted considerable attention to the forwardness of prostitutes and the apparent moral depravity of the French compared to the higher moral standards of Muslims. Again like Halet Efendi, he arrived at the conclusion that, although the technical and material civilization could not be matched by the Ottomans, their "ancient civilization and Islamic religiosity" was clearly superior.[28]

Ubeydullah's memoir is largely the account of a two-year journey in the United States and in Europe between 1893 and 1894.[29] For the purposes of this essay, the most striking passage in his memoir is an account of his journey from Liverpool to New York aboard the White Star liner *Germanic* in the fall of 1893. Ubeydullah's humorous account of his days aboard the ship is written in the style of a veritable raconteur and makes delightful reading.

> I spoke not a word of English, and none of the crew or stewards spoke any French. Yet I kept wearing my fez, so everyone knew I was Turkish. There is nothing that can attract more attention in such polite European

26 Findley, "An Ottoman Occidentalist in Europe," 22.

27 Ibid.: 26.

28 Ibid.: 48.

29 Mehmed Ubeydullah was born in İzmir on 10 January 1858, to a well known *ulema* family, the Hatiboğulları. His father was a respected religious teacher, Hoca Şakir Efendi, his mother was from another prominent İzmir family, the Musulluzadeler. He was educated at the local *rüşdiye*, or middle school. He then attended the local *medrese*, followed by the Imperial School of Medicine (*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye*) in İstanbul. In those days he became a frequenter of the circle of people who would later come to be known as the Young Turks, or the Committee of Union and Progress. In 1893, after repeated spells of imprisonment at the hands of Abdülhamid's police, he decided to flee the country and travel to the Worlds Fair at Chicago. A colorful character about whose life we know relatively little, Ubeydullah stands out as a "rather unusual Young Turk," which is also the sub-title of the memoir as coined by Ahmet Turan Alkan. Ubeydullah spoke French and acquired a working knowledge of English in the United States and later in Britain where he spent some time in Liverpool.

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> society than being a Turk. Immediately you are surrounded by people who think it a big thing to make the acquaintance of a Turk.[30]

Early on during the journey Ubeydullah makes the acquaintance of a young English woman, Anny Mason, who spoke French and was also *en route* to the Chicago fair. Ubeydullah established a romantic liaison with this pretty young woman he later referred to as "the delectable Miss Mayson" (*mis gibi Mis Mayson*).[31]

When the *Germanic* was two days out of Liverpool, an evening entertainment was organized, and each passenger had to perform a short skit, sing a song, or provide some form of entertainment for his/her fellow passengers. Ubeydullah was also invited to participate. Although at first he demurred, pleading that his French was not good enough, the Master of Ceremonies insisted, and Miss Mayson volunteered to translate. Ubeydullah agreed, and proposed that he give a speech in Turkish and then read two poems. He would provide a French text of the speech for Miss Mayson.

> [After various passengers had performed] the Chief (Master of Ceremonies) rose and shouted. 'Mr Allah!', whereupon Miss Mayson turned to me and said that he was announcing me. I could not understand why I was being referred to in such fashion, as 'Allah Efendi.'

He soon solved the puzzle. When asked to register his name on the First Class passenger list, Ubeydullah had written it as hyphenated, "Ubeyd-Allah". He commented: "We all had a good laugh." His account of his actual speech speaks for itself.

> Ladies and Gentlemen!
> I am a Turk from Asia.
> I belong to a nation which is considered by some of the civilized countries to be a backward nation. I cannot say that they are wrong in this. Because we are quite backward compared to them in education and industry. In my travels to England and France I became acquainted with various aspects of present day civilization. It is not difficult, in my country, to acquire knowledge about diplomatic matters and international relations. What I have seen in these places made me

30 Ubeydullah Efendi, *Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Amerika Hatıraları*, 104.

31 Ibid., 143. The pun will not escape Turkish speakers.

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> wonder whether it was a good thing for my people to be swept up in this civilization. But now seeing all of you assembled here in this fine ship I no longer have any hesitation.
>
> Ladies and Gentlemen!
> I am a lover and admirer of this civilization. What most impressed me about this ship is the accord and harmony among the passengers. It is my heartfelt plea to the Almighty that the harmony seen among the passengers of this ship be endowed upon Mankind. For, verily, is not this earth that we walk on and will be buried under like a great ship that spins along through the heavens? The only difference is that the *Germanic* had been built by the engineers of the White Star company while the good ship Earth was built by the engineer of the universe (*mühendis-i Kainat*).[32]

As he was speaking in Turkish and everyone was smiling politely, the absurdity of the situation dawned on Ubeydullah:

> It was really strange to be speaking in Turkish to three hundred people who did not understand a single word. I had the urge to laugh. I thought to myself, 'My lad, who are you talking to?' Is not man a buffoon? Here I am, proud to be addressing people who do not understand me, and there they are, in front of me, happily listening to a speech they do not understand. Is this not the height of buffoonery? (*Bu maskaralık değil mi?*)

After he finished there was a great wave of applause, followed by an even greater wave when Miss Mayson finished reading the translation.

> The company then insisted that I read the poems. I told them that there was no translation and that I did not want to try their patience any further. Upon their insistence, I read two verses from Nabi and a short poem by Abdülhak Mührünnisa Hanım. They applauded with particular enthusiasm when they were told that the latter was a lady.[33]

Several interesting points stand out in the scene described above. First, there is Ubeydullah's self-confidence in a rather awkward situation. This is

32 Ibid., 128-29.

33 Ibid. Abdülhak Mührünissa Hanım was the younger sister of the famous late-nineteenth century Ottoman poet Abdülhak Hamit.

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evident when he states that he began his speech "by looking each of them in the eye."

Also the fact that foreigners flocked around Turks wearing the fez did not seem to worry him. Ubeydullah's attitude can be summed up thus: "So, you find the Turk wearing this funny headgear interesting? He finds you rather amusing as well." Also he is not worried about admitting in public that his country may well be less advanced on the civilizational scale than others.[34] The attitude is one of assumed equality, and one does not have to go to great lengths to defend it. The speaker and his audience are united in their buffoonery. Even the jejune little speech is charming and would have served as a passable after-dinner speech in polite society anywhere.

Eşref Kuşçubaşı's story is also aboard a ship, but under very different circumstances. Kuşçubaşı was being taken to Egypt on the destroyer *Hardinge*, and later on another ship, the *Lama*, after having been taken prisoner by Arab forces on 25 January 1917.[35] Colonel Eşref Kuşçubaşı was extremely irate with his British captors for not treating him with the respect due to a prisoner of his rank. After being transferred to the *Lama* on February 23, Eşref was approached by an unnamed British officer wearing a fez.

> The man spoke good Arabic but was excessively familiar (*laubali*) and toadied up to me, as he wore a fez, I thought he was Egyptian. He said 'Hello Eşref Bey,' I replied, 'Excuse me, who are you?', 'I am a major in

34 This attitude is more advanced than that of many present-day Turkish intellectuals who get most upset if one of them criticizes his own country in front of foreigners.

35 For detailed biographical information on Eşref Kuşçubaşı, see; Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber'de Türk Cengi*, 215-25. Eşref Bey was born in 1873 in İstanbul. His father was Mustafa Nuri Bey, originally a notable of the Ibıh peoples in Caucasia who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire after the Russian invasion of his homeland. They were initially settled in a farm about 80 km. to the west of Bursa sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. Through family connections, Nuri Bey eventually became the Falconmaster (Kuşcubaşı) of Sultan Abdülhamid. He was educated at the elite *Kuleli* military high school, later went on to the Military Academy, graduating as a cavalry officer. He and his family fell out with Abdülhamid who had them exiled to Hicaz. They arrived in Hicaz in 1900, whereupon Eşref was captured soon after in Jeddah while attempting to board a ship for India. By now a well known troublemaker, he was incarcerated in the Medina fortress. He escaped, and in 1903, formed the "Arabian Revolutionary Committee," together with his brother Selim Sami, Tahir the Circassian, and an Arab named Faraj ibn al-Mısri. Eşref Bey's Committee soon became famous among the Arab tribes, organizing guerilla raids against the sultan's forces, pushing their daring to the point of attacking the *sürre* caravan. (The *sürre* was the collection of symbolic gifts that Sultan Abdülhamid sent every year to the Hicaz). All of these experiences account for his intimate knowledge of the bedouin and his experience in survival in the desert. After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, he rose steadily to become the trusted right hand man of Enver. He was one of the founders of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, the Ottoman Secret Service. His reference to his experiences in British India are most likely to have been referring to his days of clandestine activity there. He was captured while on a mission to deliver money to the Ottoman army besieged in Yemen. He ended up as a prisoner of war in Malta.

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> the Egyptian army' he replied adding, 'you are a very famous man.?" So this is how you treat famous men" I rejoindered, referring to the heavy guard and the insults I had endured since we left Jeddah." The British officer answered that it was because Eşref Bey was so famous for escaping from tight spots and the orders were to guard him closely. Kuşçubaşı replied, "to guard closely is one thing, to deliberately insult is quite another. I was never insulted like this even by the bedouin.[36]

Eşref Bey was constantly beleaguered by British naval personnel who photographed him and posed alongside him. This outraged him, as he commented:

> As I walked up the boarding ladder of the *Lama*, all of the soldiers were leaning on the rail watching me, even their officers went about the thievery of photographing me without my permission. I finally had to have stern words with one particularly impudent fellow whom I pushed aside as he put his machine up to my nose.

Eşref Bey's attitude is one of a commanding officer, not of a prisoner. When asked by the *Lama*'s captain to give his word of honor in writing that he would not "even think about escape," Eşref Bey told him he would consent to this only on his own terms: "I told the Captain that my thoughts were none of his concern, the most I could promise was to try to prevent my thoughts from turning into action." This was evidently good enough for the captain, as Eşref Bey was given liberty in some areas of the ship.[37] When they landed in Suez and were interned in a camp, Eşref Bey found that the only way they could procure basic necessities was through bribery:

> I had already witnessed the corruption among British officials during my experience in India, here I was experiencing it for the second time, yet still I found it hard to believe [...] I met hundreds of British soldiers who put their hands out for a petty coin called a peni (penny) which is worth about twenty paras.[38]

Yet further humiliation awaited him when he arrived in Egypt. Imprisoned in the Qasr al-Nil barracks, Eşref Bey—seriously wounded and very ill—

36 Ibid., 144.

37 Ibid., 145.

38 Ibid., 149. Eşref took pains to exonerate the captain of the *Lama*, who, he said, "tried to whitewash the rudeness of his countrymen."

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still tried to maintain his dignity. This was becoming increasingly difficult, as even mundane things like going to the lavatory became a torment: "I was given an armed guard of four soldiers, bayonets at the ready and marched off. What a performance!" Even worse was to come, his guards insisted that he keep the lavatory door open causing Eşref Bey to command them to take him back to his cell. "I was finally allowed to close the door but that I should stick my feet out from under the door so they could be chained. This was the first time I did my business with my legs chained." Colonel Eşref complained in writing to the British High Command, and a few days later the barracks translator, an Egyptian named Zeki Bey came to his cell accompanied by no one lesser than Commander Simpson, General Inspector for all prisoners of war in Egypt. This gave Eşref an occasion to vent his anger.

> First of all this rude man appropriated my chair, forcing a sick and wounded man to stand. He then asked me, 'why did you complain to GHQ rather than to me?' I stared at him and said, 'First of all, who are you? Please introduce yourself'. At this point Zeki Bey told me, 'He is the Chief Inspector of prisoners of war for all Egypt.' I turned to him, 'Efendi, I am not asking you, I am asking this person, you do your job.'

When Inspector Simpson was duly introduced, Eşref Bey let loose a tirade in fluent Arabic, of all the ills he had suffered since he had been handed over to the British by the Arabs:

> I was treated humanely and with respect by these savages, and subjected to the direst insults by this English race for which I had the greatest respect. Yet I am a reasonable man and I tried not to pass judgement on the whole of the English race on the basis of the misbehaviour of a few officials. How should I know who you are? Did you once show yourself to me?[39]

Even this short passage in a memoir rich in historical detail gives the reader a rare insight into the world view of the late Ottomans. First of all—like Ubeydullah—Eşref Bey sees himself as the equal of any other civilized human being on earth. In fact, his whole attitude to his British captors is one of contempt for their uncouth behavior. He greatly resents being photographed as a human trophy, and insists that he be treated with the

39 Ibid., 157-58. In fact, Eşref Bey was treated with respect bordering on reverence by the bedouin who captured him, many of whom were former comrades in arms from his guerilla days.

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dignity commensurate with his rank.[40] At the risk of being attacked as an Orientalist in the negative sense of the word, I will venture to say that neither Ubeydullah nor Eşref behave in the way an Easterner is supposed to behave as imagined in the minds of the victors in war and civilization. Ubeydullah frankly confronts the curious stares, and Eşref Bey defies and challenges his captors to behave in the civilized fashion that they claim to have invented.

If any one characteristic is shared by these two men, it is daring. This daring stemmed from a tradition of long-time familiarity with the West and the self-assurance (even if misguided) that came with that familiarity. If one can talk about a collective attitude on the part of the two men, one would note a combination of self-assurance, cynicism, self-criticism, and a sense of urgency. Ubeydullah, Osman Hamdi and Ahmet Midhat do not shirk from self-criticism. Ubeydullah has no qualms about telling his audience that Turks have a long way to travel down the road of civilization. Ahmet Midhat agrees with his Russian colleagues that the Turks and Russians "were still on the lower rungs on the ladder of civilization." Yet they are also at times highly critical of that very civilization. Eşref Bey is not at all impressed by what he sees in British-controlled Egypt and tells a fellow prisoner:

> We used to think that everything a l'anglaise was the epitomy of correctness and fortitude. Now that we are here we see the harsh reality. Our dandies who are so fond swinging their arses (*kıç atan*) a l'anglaise back home should come here and see what the British are really like![41]

Conclusion

When one knows the end of a story or a given outcome, it is always tempting to say: "I told you so." Given the tremendously divergent paths of the historical fates of Japan and Turkey, it would now be too easy to look at the recent history of both polities and spot the initial divergences that foretell the immensely different historical and political conjunctures they find themselves in now. Yet, for the historian whose job is to somehow make sense of the past this is precisely what we must do. Let us begin with some basic realities: The Ottoman Turks encountered the West much earlier and never really underwent the culture shock of the Japanese. On the

40 Eşref Bey would have fully understood the unequal power relationship involved in being an object on display. On the issue of people as trophies, see, Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*, 20. Çelik is quoting from, Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Berkeley: Scolar Press, 1983).

41 Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber'de Türk Cengi*, 155.

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other hand, there always remained an underlying self-confidence (perhaps a little too much) in the Ottoman/Turkish mind that if they only could master Western material progress, their own society could stand up to it. Seen from Istanbul, the Japanese encounter with the West appears to have come very late. After the pioneering visit of a Tokugawa mission to America in 1860, in 1862 the Takenouchi mission of the Tokugawa government set off for Europe for the first time, in order to argue for Japan's case to postpone opening ports and cities to foreign trade because of the rising violence against foreigners. The second task of the mission was to study European institutions and society in order to serve the objective of acquiring wealth through trade and military technology through an expanded knowledge of the West. The British envoy Alcock who engineered the visit found that, when it came to bringing the Japanese mission into contact with Western diplomats, the Japanese were not familiar with Western social ranks. Alcock therefore "hurriedly arranged suitable translations."[42] By that time, the Ottomans had been giving decorations to Europeans and had become completely integrated into the system of European diplomacy. The Japanese also had to adjust to other usages that had long since been part of Ottoman life—such as the use of tables, chairs, knife and fork, and so on. Another major issue for the Japanese was the matter of warships firing salutes upon entering port. In Japan itself they objected to this practice, whereas in Ottoman domains it had long since been accepted as matter of routine. When the Japanese envoys were taken to a concert, they asked why the conductor was waving his arms. In the same period, the Ottoman sultans and the Istanbul elite regularly invited famous opera singers, such as Caruso, to Istanbul.[43] When the mission returned to Japan, its understanding of things Western was so limited that one of them—Fukuzawa Yukichi, the famous liberal intellectual-reformer of the Meiji era who was known as an advocate of learning from the West in later years—actually stated that their mission had been "carrying the policy of seclusion all around Europe." One member admitted that they had been unable to "make enquiries and form opinions, or obtain knowledge of these peoples, their customs, manufactures, and dispositions, since he had learnt neither their 'crab-writing' nor their 'shrike-tongued languages.'"[44] Many of the Ottoman civil and military officials were familiar with French as a diplomatic language.

42 Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian*, 76.

43 Ibid., 83.

44 Ibid., 88-89.

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This relative familiarity with things Western is reflected in the residual arrogance that we witness in the Ottoman intellectuals studied above. There was no Ottoman equivalent to the Iwakura Embassy of 1871-73, when the Japanese delegation had no qualms about telling the Westerners that what they wanted was to study their institutions with a view to their wholesale adoption in their own country.[45] Nor was there ever any systematic attempt to formulate an "enormous shopping list," as Beasley names it, calling for the study of topics ranging from Parliament to the Bow Street Magistrates of London and the opium dens and prostitutes in the East End of London. (Whatever similar activity the Young Turks in Paris indulged in was more in the line of participant observation and was carried out on a strictly free-lance basis). Nor was there any equivalent of the aim to revise unequal treaties in the Turkish context. The Ottomans, although much more integrated into the Western scheme of things, were in a much weaker bargaining position. Japan was not heavily in debt to the financial powers of the West, as was the Ottoman Empire. With the Treaty of Paris in 1856, the Ottomans, as one of the victors, had managed to obtain a partial revision of the unequal treaties after the Crimean War, which from now on allowed them to sign treaties of equality and reciprocity with new parties. But, the Ottomans were still obliged to adhere to the existing treaty privileges of the Western powers. Hence, the Ottomans did not envision a radical revision of the treaties to be feasible in the near future. Nor were the Western Powers willing to revise the treaties that gave them privileged influence in the world power rivalry in the Near East. Ultimately, Japan succeeded in revising the unequal treaties between 1898 and 1901, with Great Britain taking the lead, and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 sealed the Great Power status of Japan, whereas the Turks could only abolish the Capitulations in 1923, after the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk.

Yet, it is also interesting that one of the everlasting briefs of Japanese missions abroad was to procure an agreement on the banning of the firing of salutes by foreign ships entering Japanese harbors, presumably because it alarmed the population. This was never an issue for the Turks, because the degree of foreignness in such a practice was much higher for the Japanese than for the Turks. Still, the Iwakura mission left Japan with a very detailed agenda of what it wanted to study, whereas the Ottomans had only a very foggy idea about *ilim ve fünun*. Interestingly, some of the recurring themes of modernity in both the Ottoman and the Japanese cases were visits to

45 Ibid., 165. Iwakura Tomomi said as much to the British Foreign Secretary Granville.

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prisons and to schools for the deaf and blind. The Ottoman Empire also made a point of establishing showcase schools for the blind and modern prisons at this time. Yet, the Iwakura Embassy did not bother to officially visit the Ottoman Empire and only sent a secretary, Fukuchi Genichiro, to Istanbul to inquire about the capitulation treaties which were similar to the unequal treaties signed by Japan, presumably because it was not important enough. However, the secretary briefly paused in Egypt to study the system of mixed courts dealing with disputes between locals and foreigners, a vexed topic in Japan.[46] On the other hand, the very reason for the Iwakura mission was to confirm the Meiji regime as legitimate in the eyes of the world, whereas the Ottoman Empire had no such agenda. Yet, Esenbel is right to point out that, in the final analysis, the dilemma of the Turks and the Japanese was the same: "Members of Japanese and Turkish society have shared a common agenda of having to attribute a meaning to the incorporation of Western culture into their personal lives."[47]

So why did Japan take off in leaps and bounds from the 1890s onwards, while the Ottoman state could barely hold its own against the West? This is much too vast a question to be answered here, but the answer must lie somewhere in the footsteps of people like Ahmet Midhat, Ito Hirobumi, Fukuzawa Yukichi and Osman Hamdi Bey. Their intellectual encounter and perception of the West indicates some similarities, but also significant nuanced differences in the mentality of the people who were participants in the construction of modernity in their environments.

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46 Ibid., 173.

47 Esenbel, "The Anguish of Civilized Behavior."

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