

Editorial

Gizem Tongo

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his *inquiry*, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time...¹

Thus writes Herodotus in his monumental account of the conflict between Persia and the united Greeks, *The Histories*. Herodotus (c. 485-420 BC) is generally accepted as the father of history, because, in contrast to the chroniclers or “logographers” who preceded him, he aimed to write a sustained story of the past and record the causes and effects of political events. Herodotus defined his writings as *historia*, which was the Greek word for “inquiry”; an inquiry to be delivered to people in narrative form as an act of commemoration.

It has been more than twenty-three centuries since Herodotus first used his literary skill to preserve the memory of events and human achievements so that the past would not be obliterated by time. Though much has faded from the world since then, the desire to inquire into and record the past has not. The initial ethical statement Herodotus left to us in his inquiry is still valid for our twenty-first century world: the responsibility of the historian and how it stretches forward to the present. It has been said that all history is contemporary history, or, using the ancient Greek word, all inquiry is contemporary inquiry. As fashionable as it might sound, there is also something significant in this phrase. History is not only embodied in books, archives or documents, but lives in people’s minds, to be observed and interpreted by the historian within the dynamics and conditions of his/her contemporary world. For that very reason, the past is never concluded. Probably one of the best phrases to epitomise the relation between the past and the present comes from a non-historian: for the literary critic Edward Said, history “is still being made, rather than finished and settled once and for all.”² And this thought brings me to the 2013 protests in Turkey, which continue as I write this editorial.

Having started in Istanbul on May 28, 2013, the Gezi Parkı protests have triggered an intense wave of solidarity across Turkey. The initial objective was to defend an urban green space, Gezi Park, against the recent attempt of the assembly of the Beyoğlu Municipality to replace the park with the reconstruction of the former Taksim Kışlası (Taksim Military Barracks). Besides the proposed plan to reconstruct an Ottoman-era structure, the

Municipality intended to rebuild the barracks as a shopping centre, sacrificing one of the last green areas of the Beyoğlu district to another neoliberal development project led by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his conservative Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP). On the third day, May 30, the peaceful ecological protest was brutally suppressed by the Turkish riot police, armed with tear gas and water cannons that immediately induced the struggle over the park to enter a new stage, and it became the biggest civil resistance movement Turkey has witnessed in recent years. The excessive use of police violence, the silence of the Turkish mass media towards the demonstrations, the heavy-handed response of the government, and the Prime Minister's provocative vocabulary, and above all his unwillingness to compromise, have all led heterogeneous oppositional groups—leftists, feminists, students, Kemalist-secularists, anti-capitalist Islamists, football supporters, Kurds—to fill the streets in resentment at the increasingly authoritarian policies of Erdoğan's administration (to name a few; restriction of labour rights, legal changes for privatisation, anti-abortion policies, alcohol restrictions, controversial construction projects, and a narrowing of freedom of expression and now of assembly). It has been almost one and a half months since the protests started, with thousands injured and arrested and several deaths, according to the Human Rights Association (IHD). Yet the protests continue unbowed, with daily mass demonstrations and park forums all around the country. This movement is notable for the way it has united in common struggle different groups for across Turkey's many social divides—between ethnic Turks and the Armenian, Greek and Kurdish minorities, between Sunni Muslims and Alevis, Christians and Jews, between liberals, leftists and rightists, between state and civil society—divisions created during our often violent past and consolidated in its historical retelling.

This brings us to the urgent question of the uses and abuses of historical inquiry. The nineteenth-century French philosopher Ernest Renan once said, "Getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation."³ Every nation-state creates a link with the past in order to legitimize the present through rituals, symbols and ceremonies, and the AKP's neoliberal nation-state is no exception. In contrast to the "nation building" project of the early Republic, which did not see itself as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire yet rather as a liberator from the Ottoman yoke, the AKP has glorified the Ottoman imperial past with a particular emphasis on its Sunni-Hanefi history. Though the ideological picture the AKP government aims at is totally different from what was attempted by the Kemalists ninety years ago, it has adopted the same epistemological tools and methodologies. History has again become, to borrow a phrase from Eric Hobsbawm, "part of the fund of knowledge" which is "selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalised"⁴ by those whose function it is to do so. The challenge is, of

course, what to select and leave aside. Erdoğan's selective historical vocabulary yearning for a Sunni-Muslim, male-dominated Ottoman imperial past does not set aside much place for non-Sunnis or non-Muslims. Firstly, the planned naming of Istanbul's third bridge "Yavuz Sultan Selim," after the Sultan Selim I (r.1512-1520), known for his assimilation and persecution policies towards the Alevis in the sixteenth century, shows us how insensitive and sectarian historical revitalizations can be. Secondly, the aim to reconstruct an Ottoman building from the reign of Sultan Selim III (r.1789-1807) shows us how this selective historical inquiry excludes the non-Muslim parts of Ottoman history. The AKP's construction project does not make any historical reference to the Armenian past of the lands on which the Surp-Hagop Armenian Cemetery (1551-1939) existed for four hundred years. In fact the Armenian Cemetery had already been demolished and replaced with Gezi Park and other buildings (three hotels and TRT Radio Buildings) around Taksim Square during the early Republican period. Leaving the rich historical layers of the land aside, the Prime Minister did not even commemorate the name of the Armenian architect of the original barracks, Krikor Balyan, who was indeed one of the architects belonging to the famous Ottoman imperial architect family, the Balyan family.

Last but not least, another dimension of historical inquiry relating to the protests is certainly about the sources of narrative and the modes of representation. How will the future historian, looking back, observe today's events? What will be her sources; the news published in the Turkish mass-media, official speeches given by the government, narratives of the protestors, news shared on facebook and twitter? And to what extent will her picture of today's events be different from us as "participant observers"? This is not to make a judgment or claim that the future historian will be worse or better off than we are. Yet it is rather about the enduring epistemological and ethical questions of how to know the past and the responsibility of the historian towards that past. There is always something ethically enticing about the "other" stories of the past; those of the underrepresented, marginalized, and muted. Surely, the historian has a critical responsibility to delve into the dynamics of these distorted pasts so that, to remember Herodotus, they "may not become forgotten in time."

For our third issue, we are pleased to be able to publish one interview, two papers and five book reviews. Our interview for this third issue is with Argentinian-Israeli academic Gabriel Piterberg, Professor of Ottoman history at UCLA. In conversation with his doctoral student Ceren Abi, Piterberg reflects on the development of aspects of his own multifaceted intellectual project, which combines methodologies of palaeography, close reading, intellectual history, and activist interventions in illuminating new comparative perspectives, such as between Ottoman and Qing Chinese early

modernity, and between American/Antipodean and Israeli settler colonialism. Piterberg gives a hopeful prognosis for the international field of Ottoman studies, lamenting the increasing saturation of studies of the late-Ottoman period, but noting the wider field's increasing rigour, competitiveness and "interpretive daring."

The first of this issue's two papers is by Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen, who makes an important methodological case for increased archival rigor in Ottoman cinema studies on the basis of careful and rigorous scholarship. Çeliktemel-Thomen points out the difficulties historians of Ottoman and Republican cinema face in confronting a field which, though increasingly dynamic, remains spread across private, state and international collections, and lacks a national museum which could start to centralize or at least definitively catalogue its sources. She makes appeals to cinema historians to broaden their focus and use official and oral sources to tell the economic and social story of cinema in the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey, advocating the use of archival research to undermine discourses of nationalization, Turkification and other essentialisms that have tended to constitute the underlying assumptions of the field. In her article she also provides an inventory of cinema related sources at the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, BOA) to promote these resources to colleagues undertaking work in this emerging field.

Our second paper is Yasemin Baran's brilliant medical and cultural history of the role of bloodletting and the leech in Ottoman medicine from the early modern period to the early twentieth century, which is also the story of the uneasy truce and then increasing antagonism between the methods of the Arabo-Persian medical tradition with an increasingly professionalized Western medicine. Baran traces the status of bloodletting therapies in works from the early modern period, through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the start of the Western-led "Leech craze" itself in the mid-nineteenth century. Her focus on the place of the leech in Ottoman medicine allows us to view the process of Ottoman modernization separately from teleological paradigms of scientific progress, as it constitutes a blind alley in Western medical discourse that ultimately served economic rather than palliative goals, and brings into relief the institutional conflicts that ensued as particular methodologies grappled over who was authorized to give what treatment.

In the first of our five book reviews for this issue, Altay Atlı reads Ian Lyster's *Among the Ottomans*, which combines the wartime diaries of the editor's grandmother, Marie Lyster, a British citizen who resided in Istanbul during World War I, enduring the wartime privations of its populace, and the later memoirs of his father, Henry Lyster, a soldier who held key posts in the occupied Ottoman territories.

Zeynep Küçükceran reviews Benjamin Fortna's attempt to turn to literacy as a fundamental historical indicator along the lines of gender and class in *Learning to Read in The Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic*. Küçükceran details the major contours of Fortna's argument, which traces the continuities and ruptures in Ottoman education policy, private publishing, and reading practices between 1880 and 1930, detailing the tension between the public (official) and private (commercial) rationales for reading.

Yan Overfield Shaw reviews Fatma Müge Göçek's tracing of the historical tropes and tics that inform and recur in the Turkish present in her *Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*. A historical analysis of the present phenomenon of cultural and political "neo-Ottomanism" in Turkey, Göçek's book collects her recent scholarship relating to the roots of Turkey's current ethnic divisions between ethnic Turks and the country's Kurdish, Greek and Armenian minorities, and contributes a major essay on what she calls the "Sevres syndrome," or the socio-cultural fallout from the defeat of Ottoman empire in World War I.

Gizem Tongo evaluates Wendy Shaw's definitive statement on the field of Ottoman art historical studies in her recent book *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*. Informed by new critical insights deployed by postcolonial studies, Shaw's study is a survey of Ottoman visual culture from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1930s, tracing the story of the institutionalisation of the European artistic practices in the context of late Ottoman and early Republican history.

Finally, Funda Üstek reviews Brian Silverstein's sociological study of the Sufi *cemaats* (orders) in his *Islam and Modernity in Turkey*. Based partly on Silverstein's participative fieldwork with a modern Naqshbandi group in the 1990s, the work combines an account of the disjunctures in the history of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic with an account of the various practices the modern day *cemaats* use to reproduce Muslim subjectivity in their members and the wider Islamic and social discourses in which they operate, in particularly that of the post-2002 AKP government.

This issue of *Tarih* has been, as ever, a deeply collaborative affair. First of all, I would like to thank all interviewees and contributors for their patience as the limited availability of our editors and the events in Turkey this summer have caused delays to our launch. Many thanks go to our manuscript editor Yan Overfield Shaw, for his scrupulous editing of all submissions, and for preparing the final web pages. Thanks must also go to Nilay Özlü for her characteristically inspired work on the cover and graphics. Looking to the future, *Tarih* hopes to launch a new website in Winter that will familiarize

student contributors with the latest practices in online journal submission practices, and we are planning a new issue to be released early next year on the topic of “resistance.”

On a more personal note, though I will be happily continuing my role in the editorial board, this is my last official editorial for *Tarih*. I wish to thank all those who have contributed to making our graduate journal a success. Now it is with great pleasure that I am handing on our Journal to my colleague, Firuzan Melike Sümertaş. In her hands and under new generation of student editors, *Tarih* will further flourish and continue to bridge the gap between teachers and students of history, and to provide young historians with a rigorous and professional platform for learning, expression and debate.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Justin Marozzi, *The Way of Herodotus: Travels with the Man who Invented History* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008), 1. My emphasis.

² Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25.

³ Ernest Renan, quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, “What Can History Tell Us About Contemporary Society”, in *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 34-5.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.