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Transottomanica: Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics

1. Introduction: Transottoman Mobility Dynamics

This special issue of *Diyâr* gives insights into various projects that epitomise the approach and focus followed within the priority programme Transottomanica. We briefly explain this here, as well as offering a contextual account of the contributions;[1] and we are very grateful to the editors of the journal for giving us the opportunity to do this.

The programme focuses on 'Transottoman' mobility dynamics, that is, societal ties and communication practices that emerged as a consequence of mobility between Muscovy/Russia, Poland-Lithuania, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. Historical societies in this geographical range developed mobility dynamics that evolved and interconnected in chains of situations and dense social, spatial, relational network structures over centuries, consolidating a transregional migration society across the empires. These ties have not been observed in existing studies of individual dominions or bilateral relations, as established area studies segregated these regions of interest (Eastern Europe, MENA region) from each other and discouraged researchers from seeking a common history beyond the container spaces of regions that appeared to be separated. Thus, our post-area studies approach relates to large-scale processes of migration, mobile knowledge, travel, trade, and mobility, consolidating society and encompassing the aforementioned empires between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Within this thematic issue, we illustrate, in the following pages, the main approaches of the programme – mobility, mobile goods, and mobile knowledge – as well as the contributions themselves.

2. Mobility and Migration

We define mobility as the interplay of social and spatial movements (flows) of people and things and concepts (material and immaterial resources, ideas, knowledge, values) via exchange relationships within and between networks. Here, mobility is realised in configurations, namely, in intertwining relationships, which can be both parts and effects of globalisation processes. Thus, depending on the thematic emphasis, different regional and geographical relationships may be relevant. Via the mobile flows of people, goods, ideas, resources in networks, as well as their resulting effects, we highlight

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1   For a general overview of the German Research Foundation (DFG) priority programme Transottomanica, our approach, and the state of the art see Rohdewald, Fuess, and Conermann 2019. See also www.transottomanica.de.

the interconnectivity of the players and the structures that constitute this space. In the Transottoman perspective, mobile phenomena such as the flow of goods, cross-border migration movements, or the 'migration' of ideas and discourses – across imperial, religious, denominational, ethnic, linguistic, social, and cultural borders or negotiated differences – were configuring the societies in question. We assume that a change in a single aspect of this configuration was capable of affecting the entire societal ensemble of networks.

The study of migration is a large section of mobility studies. Migration is generally defined as a spatial, (multi)directional, or circular mobility of people and families, over a relatively long period, with a change of their place of residence, that is, where they spend their lives.[2] The focus of research has shifted to interaction patterns and feedback effects beyond the moment of arrival or departure, with regard to social, cultural, and economic practices.[3] Societal mobility and migration can easily be seen as central to the very historical genesis of the empires involved. In the early history of the empires of the Safavids and Ottomans, these ruling dynasties evolved from a dervish movement or a nomadic population group. In the genesis of both dominions, mobility dynamics between the 'moveable empires' were of pivotal importance, revealing significant interdependences of the entire greater region.[4] The rapid expansion of Muscovy to Kazan and Astrakhan in the sixteenth century gave rise to a significant increase in mobility within the greatly enlarged territory, which naturally changed the whole of society – and accelerated the change of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy into a multireligious and vast empire.[5] The study of migration, and thus the emergent networks of migrating individuals, or the careers of travelling experts in a political, military, economic, and religious respect, between the multilingual and multiethnic empires, greatly illuminates the negotiations of cultural (in)difference and social boundaries that were created by migration. It also sheds light on inclusion and exclusion between the political dominions and within the groups of individuals. Emigrants, immigrants, and destination as well as original societies formed new social relationships as migration societies.[6] This observation is pivotal to the key questions on which we focus in our approach, as we attempt to consider a Transottoman migration society.

Transregional metropolises like Istanbul, as well as peripheral areas of the Ottoman Empire, repeatedly became destinations of forced migration, which led to the formation of intensive contacts between the original region of migrants and the whole city or region of arrival.[7] Former and current power centres of the empires of the focus area, together with multiethnic cities within them, were closely interconnected, as exemplified by the long-term presence of Albanians and Southern Slavs in Cairo, or

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2   For example Droz and Sottas 1997, 70.
3   Hahn and Klute 2007, 10.
4   Kasaba 2009; Tapper 1997.
5   Kappeler 1982.
6   Poros 2011, 161.
7   Harpviken 2009.

Polish emigration to Istanbul from the late eighteenth century and their participation in Ottoman society. Migrants, as part of translocal social networks, created social orders/communities both locally and afar, consolidating a large-scale Transottoman migration society, including the non-migrant elements of the population, which were, nevertheless, directly or indirectly affected by the mobilities. At the core of our focus on mobility dynamics is the multiplication of interdependent connections and network relationships, together with personal contacts and exchange relationships at various interconnected levels of the societies, which triggered the genesis and the consolidation of such a Transottoman migration society.

Large numbers of women, men, and children concerned with mobility and migration were involuntarily on the move. Between 1500 and 1800, in the slave raids organised by the Tatars, the Cossacks in Southern Ukraine and Russia, and in Moldavia and Circassia, millions of people of Slavic and Circassian origin were sold and taken to the Ottoman Empire. A much smaller number of Muslims was captured by Cossacks and transported mainly to Muscovy. Jews were involved in the slave trade as merchants, as well as 'live merchandise'. Often, enslavement involved the conversion of the captives.[8]

In the Ottoman Empire, slaves occupied many positions in the urban and rural economy, from Constantinople to Cairo in Egypt; women and men were also recruited into the harem and other central state organisations. Another famous group of migrants in the spatial and the social sense were those who were forcibly recruited into the Ottoman central administration. In the institution known as *devşirme*, young boys from the Balkans were 'collected' from Christian families to serve as Janissaries and administrators, after their cultural and religious conversion. In the long run, they often became part of Transottoman networks inside the Ottoman state administration, formed on account of their former regional identity, which was not entirely abandoned.[9]

In the Safavid Empire, a similar system was adopted at the end of the sixteenth century, when slaves (*ghulam*) captured in the Caucasus were educated in the palace, to fill the highest positions in the state and the army. They were explicitly recruited to substitute the nomadic tribes on which the power of the Safavid dynasty had previously depended.[10]

In general, slaves were very much integrated into Ottoman and Persian society and could expect to be manumitted after a certain time of service or after the death of their master. This is why, despite the attempts to ransom slaves, which became a central, political ideology of the Muscovite state in the second half of the sixteenth century, very few re-migrated. Only those who failed to secure a bearable position in Ottoman society returned to seek a fresh start.[11]

8   Kizilov 2007.
9   Kunt 1975.
10   Babaie et al. 2004.
11   Witzenrath 2015.

Veruschka Wagner, in her piece about slavery, illustrates how the Black Sea region, which included the extensive hinterlands around it (i.e. on the northern shore, the frontier areas of Muscovy/Russia, Poland-Lithuania, and/or the Ukrainian Cossack hosts), was very densely interconnected with the centre of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, through the shipping of slaves. In the seventeenth century, the slave trade reached its peak in the Black Sea region and was fully comparable to, or even larger than, the transatlantic slave trade. Several shiploads per week arrived from the Black Sea region to Istanbul, which was an important centre for the slave trade for a large area, extending as far as Egypt. In the long term, the trade markedly changed the composition of the local population. At the start of the seventeenth century, about twenty percent of Istanbul's inhabitants consisted of slaves and the slave merchants were even organised into a guild. Thus, slavery and the slave trade were an integral part of Transottoman mobility dynamics, changing society at the core and well beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

An essential source for the research of Transottoman slavery is in the form of court registers (*kadı sicilleri* or *şerʿiyye sicilleri*) which provide information about the social, economic, and cultural history of the whole region and contain a wide range of documents dealing with topics on the institution of slavery. The cases recorded in the registers reflect life in Istanbul, the relationships and interaction between different actors involved in, part of, the slave trade, and other information. Based largely on these court registers, Veruschka Wagner's paper deals with the question of mobility by focusing on female household slaves in Ottoman Istanbul who originated from the Black Sea region. It also deals with practical issues of interaction, such as the sale and purchase of slaves, conversion, emancipation, and the relationship between slaves and slave owners. Concentrating on the city of Istanbul, this research sheds light on the practice of Ottoman slavery in the seventeenth century and its actors, illustrating that a core element of the Transottoman situation was based on slavery.

Consequences of migration include the (re)invention or strengthening of individual or collective identity perceptions, or the way they overlapped with new self and group perceptions of identity, in the context of the origin or destination and the overall populations. These can be seen in the emergence of cultural practices of remembrance, which were performed, for example, by members of the trans-ethnic imperial elite loyal to a dynasty, as well as by emigration or 'circulation societies' (as with Aslanian,[12] we prefer this term to 'diaspora').

3. Mobile Objects

Several approaches are relevant to assessing the role of various objects within our general Transottoman endeavour, including materiality, material culture, consumer history, and actor-network theory. The material aspects of mobility apply to research on the underlying infrastructures, as well as the resources, and the merchandise itself.

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12   Aslanian 2011.

The focus on the fluctuating meaning of objects, the negotiation of which is based on mobility and can be reflected both in their value and in different types of use, seems to be pivotal. Social meanings of objects in general have to be settled as a core aspect of the consolidation of societal relations. As can be seen from a more detailed examination of 'clothing' (i.e. social practices of clothing and clothing production), objects allow the actors to emerge and link the small but far-reaching merchant networks to larger and more localised consumer groups in the Transottoman context. This applies to court cultures,[13] urban elites, or other social groups, such as the (trans)regional clergy of all religions or the military. Everything considered, seen from a metaperspective, these social practices consolidated a Transottoman society, defined even in their non-moving parts by the impact of general mobility dynamics in our focus regions.

Robert Born discusses the mobility of objects and networks of actors connected with Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia. The premodern influx of 'oriental' goods into the eastern parts of Central Europe took place through various channels, such as trade, war trophies, and, as in the case of the three named Ottoman tributary states, within the framework of diplomatic ceremonies. This contribution focuses on the symbolic and material components of the objects involved in the various contacts between these three tributaries and the Empire. It discusses the efficacy of artifacts as objects of translation, as well as the new codes attached to oriental goods, such as the rugs integrated in the liturgical setting of Protestant churches in Transylvania.

Born's contribution makes it clear not only that Transottoman object mobilities were continually occurring within our focus regions, but that they must be seen and contextualised in a much larger spatial setting, thus giving our Transottoman lens an even more important function. The regions in our focus have always been the interlocution or hinge, the arena of exchanges between Africa (especially Egypt), Asia, and Europe – and even more concretely, between the 'Indian Ocean World' and Europe. Thus, one of the main characteristics of our Transottoman focus region was precisely its central function; and, in this focus, locally, spatially condensed linkings of the most important routes from China, South Asia, and India, as well as Eastern and Southern Africa to the Near East and even further, to the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe, not least via Central Asia and Eastern Europe, and especially via the Ottoman Empire. Clearly, these aspects are not central to volumes concerning other spatial frames – volumes on European infrastructural networks, where our focus region remains, at best, a footnote.[14] Nor are these aspects considered in globalised volumes.[15] Nevertheless, these transcontinental linkages, which condense precisely into our Transottoman focus, take centre stage in a very large, quite global setting, connecting Transottoman society to neighbours and partners.

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13   Fuess and Hartung 2011.
14   Högselius, Kaijser, and van der Vleuten 2015.
15   Diogo and van Laak 2016.

4. Mobile Knowledge

In the Transottoman context, the Ottoman Empire played a key role as a hub for the circulation of knowledge. In terms of transnationality, the focus is on the cross-border interaction between players from different cultural milieux. With regard to the transferred concepts, we are interested in the changes that took place in the transmission, negotiations, and adaptions of norms and representations.[16]

Knowledge flows not only affected astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, but also business practices, military strategies, and nautical knowledge.[17] The emergence of regional education centres in the early modern period, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, led to the dissemination of the practice of reading, knowledge production, and knowledge exchange.[18] The theologian Petro Mohyla, a native of the Ottoman tributary regions Moldavia and Wallachia, founded an Orthodox academy modelled on Jesuit colleges in Kyiv in 1632, which was not only copied in Moscow, but also in the vassal states of the Ottoman Empire.[19] Orthodox Church leaders unfolded both pastoral and extensive diplomatic activity between the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe, which was coordinated by the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the question of the institutionalisation and professionalisation of academic knowledge attained a special significance.[20] This is exemplified by the establishment of the Oriental Faculty in St. Petersburg, in 1856, and the founding of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople, in 1895.[21] At the same time, the influence of visual representation and public media could be found in cartography[22] or in journalism.[23] Under these conditions and challenges evolved new, pan-imperial or ethnic-identity concepts such as Pan-Slavism or Pan-Turkism.

In their analysis of texts written by Şams-al-dīn Aḥmed b. Süleymān b. Kemāl Paşa, also known as Kemālpaşazāde (873–940/1468–1534), Hasmik Kirakosyan and Ani Sargsyan show how this eminent Ottoman scholar was manoeuvring, linguistically, to enhance Ottoman Turkish texts by appropriating Persian and Arabic lexicographical models and vocabulary to his own. This contribution exemplifies the very concrete density of linkages of languages within and across genres, discourses, and beyond imperial boundaries, by focusing on the 'writing acts' of one very sophisticated and prominent intellectual. By adapting his writings to Persian scholarly practices, he

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16 Baumbach, Michaels, and Nünning 2012; Neumann and Nünning 2012; Bachmann-Medick 2014.
17 Darwin 2007.
18 Helmedach et al. 2014.
19 Podskalsky 1988, 309, 318.
20 Sarıkaya 2005; Kreiser 2011.
21 Tolz 2011; Jobst 2007.
22 Seegel 2012.
23 Adam 2002.

made them and himself compatible within a larger, transimperial community of scholarship, taking part in, and consolidating, to some degree, a Transottoman society.

Taisiya Leber examines the history of printing in the Ottoman Empire through the prism of mobility, focusing on mobile actors, tools, and ideas. She pursues questions such as the role of mobility in the life of printers, as reflected in the prefaces or postfaces of their books. Characteristic of the first Jewish, Serbian, Armenian, Greek, and Ottoman Muslim printers in general was their migrational background from Western or South-Western Europe. Some were fleeing persecution; others were seeking the possibility to print without religious censorship and/or just profiting from benevolent business conditions in a growing market of printing and a rising demand for books. This contribution explains how the knowledge of printing circulated and was translated into several interconnected milieux of expertise, whether via contacts between printers of different religious backgrounds, or whether helped by the omnipresence of functional multilingualism. Case studies from the start of printing in the Ottoman Empire until the middle of the eighteenth century evaluate the role of mobility in the consolidation of a Transottoman societal context through books, knowledge of books, and printers.

Dennis Dierks considers the making of Muslim modernity as a translocal process of renegotiating commonality and belonging within our Transottoman context. In Eastern Europe, the region he focuses on, the end of Ottoman rule was often accompanied by a process of more or less radical de-Ottomanisation, which might be read as a Transottoman postcolonial condition. Nevertheless, in some regions, such as Habsburg Bosnia or Russian Crimea, where Muslims were not forced outright to leave their homes, affirmative cultural links with the other areas of our Transottoman interest persisted, in some cases they were reappropriated and reshaped. Muslim periodicals as they emerged all over post-Ottoman Europe from the 1880s played a crucial role in keeping or restoring cultural, emotional, and also linguistical bonds with the old imperial metropolis, Istanbul, as well as other regions of the Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman Europe. Part of this process was the circulation of concepts and imaginations of society and culture, the most prominent being the late Ottoman discourse on *medeniyet* (civilisation). Focusing on Bosnian Muslim press reporting on the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–12, Dierks' contribution analyses the role that media coverage played in the process of inverting Western geographies of civilisation and maintaining transboundary solidarities with the Ottoman Empire by making the war a Transottoman media event.

All in all, the contributions in this issue make it clear that the concrete usage of a Transottoman perspective is extremely productive. This perspective allows us to analyse the regions in focus in their very dense interweavings, so that rather than regarding them as being influenced 'only' by Persia (Persianate), or being characterised 'simply' as a 'post-Byzantine Commonwealth', or 'just' as 'Ottomanised' parts of Europe and the Middle East, we can see beyond the empires and beyond these approaches to call the region 'Transottoman'. Indeed, this term seems to be suitable for

exploring large-scale contexts of mobility dynamics in our area of focus, interconnecting the whole of Europe and the 'Indian Ocean World'. [24]

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24   Faroqhi 2004, 2019.

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