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## After the “Second Empire”: New Horizons of Ottoman Constitutional History

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The history of the modern era of the Ottoman Empire (c.1300–1922) is composed of two constitutional periods: the First Constitutional Period (*Birinci Meşrutiyet*, 1876–1878) beginning with the promulgation of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 (*Kanun-ı Esasî*, i.e. the Fundamental Law), usually called the “Midhat Constitution” after the name of one of its main drafters, Ahmed Şefik Midhat Paşa (1822–1884); the Second Constitutional Period (*İkinci Meşrutiyet*, 1908–1918) introduced through the 1908 Revolution of the Young Turks.

The constitutional history of the Ottoman Empire seems to have been extensively covered in many textbooks and monographs, written not only in Turkish or English but also in Japanese. In fact, several detailed monographs regarding the Ottoman constitutional government have recently been published in Japanese (e.g. Kasuya 2007; Fujinami 2011; Sasaki 2014). These have generally suggested that the First Constitutional Period came into being owing to the constitutional movement led by Muslim intellectuals mainly consisting of young officials and journalists, and that the Second Constitutional Period appeared in the turmoil of the 1908 Revolution led by various political groups dissatisfied with the autocracy of the 34th sultan, Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). It might be thus no exaggeration to say that the modern history of the empire is nothing but the progress of constitutionalism and parliamentarism.

However, it should be noticed here that most of those works discuss Ottoman constitutionalism within the framework of the *modern* history of the empire. They develop their argument about Ottoman constitutionalism on the assumption that either constitutionalism or parliamentarism came from *outside* the empire as an option presented by modernity. They indicate generally that the Ottoman Empire, once it was exposed to Western Impact, was forced to initiate the Reorganization (*Tanzimat*) to keep the state alive somehow, as well as to adopt



Figure Heavy Rains at Constantinople, People Going to Hear the Reading of the Constitution. *The Illustrated London News*, 13 January 1877.

constitutionalism, which seemed to have its origin in the West. To evaluate and critique such a Eurocentric or Orientalistic understanding of Ottoman constitutional history, it might be effective to ask the following questions: Is Ottoman constitutionalism only a modern phenomenon? Did the concept of constitutionalism really come from outside the empire? Is it essentially alien or external to the Ottomans?

To find answers to these questions, I will trace the historical development of Ottoman constitutionalism in a broader context and not limited to the modern era. And I will attempt to relativize the existing historiographies that view constitutionalism and parliamentarism as alien to the Ottomans. I will also explore the possibility of constructing a broader Ottoman constitutional history extending from the early modern into the modern era, applying the results of recent research on the early modern Ottoman Empire.

First, I introduce remarkable progress and new trends in recent studies on the early modern Ottoman Empire. These studies attempt to relocate the historical position of the empire in the worldwide atmosphere of the early modern period and to review critically the so-called “decline thesis,” which affirms that the early modern phase of the Ottoman history is characterized by decline, stagnation, or collapse. Through examining methodologies of global history, or by taking an anti-Eurocentric and anti-Orientalistic point of view, they have sought to relativize the decline thesis and to portray the empire in a new historical light. I think that these studies have the potential to open new horizons in our understanding of Ottoman constitutional history.

Second, to revise Ottoman constitutional history in a broader context, I pay attention to Baki Tezcan’s recent work, titled *The Second Ottoman Empire*, which deconstructs the existing historiography and presents a new image of the early modern Ottoman Empire (Tezcan 2010). He names the early modern Ottoman Empire as the “Second Empire,” and finds its most distinctive feature was a political dynamism fluctuating between Ottoman absolutism and constitutionalism—a dynamism that consists of political equilibrium among the sultanic sovereignty, Islamic jurists (*ulema*), and Janissaries (*Yeniçeri*). Tezcan’s “Second Empire” thesis makes it possible to trace the starting point of Ottoman constitutional history back to the early modern era.

Third, we see that the historical vein of Ottoman constitutionalism was carried on from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century—the transition period between the early modern to modern eras in the Ottoman history (cf. Yılmaz 2008; Hanioglu 2008). Here, we can also find definite traces of the early modern Ottoman constitutionalism in such political documents as the Deed of Islamic Law (*Hüccet-i Şer’iyye*), the Deed of Agreement (*Sened-i İttifâk*), and the Imperial Rescript of Gülhâne.

And finally, analyzing several historical sources published in Ottoman Turkish, I demonstrate that the traces of this vein were handed down in the ideas of the Young Ottomans (*Yeni Osmanlılar*) who were Muslim intellectuals expanding the first constitutional movement in the history of the Ottoman Empire during the 1860s and 1870s. There are some researches on the political ideas of the Young Ottomans, and it is usually said that their constitutional ideas originated from Islamic intellectual traditions and/or Western ones (e.g. Mardin 1962; Türköne 1991). The Young Ottomans are also said to have reinterpreted such concepts as constitutionalism or the separation of powers in the context of the Islamic intellectual tradition, and to have attempt to make them suitable for introduction to the Ottoman common people. This is, however, nothing but a view that either constitutionalism or parliamentarism came from outside the empire.

Examining the constitutional ideas of the Young Ottomans carefully, we find some descriptions of the political equilibrium among the sultanic sovereignty, Islamic jurists, and Janissaries. After the “Second Empire” came to an end through the abolition of the Janissary corps in 1826, the Young Ottomans succeeded an ideal type of the political system of the early modern Ottoman Empire. They saw a constitutional government with a

written constitution and parliament as one of the most viable alternatives to a new political system for the modern Ottoman Empire, a political system of the “post-Second Empire” or the “Third Empire.” There is no doubt that the emergence of the modern Ottoman constitutional government resulted not only from such external factors as pressures from abroad or the influx of Western ideas but also from internal factors peculiar to the political history of the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the political tradition of the early modern Ottoman Empire had a great influence on modern Ottoman constitutional ideas. Now we can clearly see the new horizons of Ottoman constitutional history extending from the early modern to the modern era.

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## Notable Politics and Parliament in Modern and Contemporary Egypt

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In July of 2013, large scale demonstrations demanding the resignation of Egypt's first democratically elected, President Morsi, took place in the center of Cairo, at Tahrir Square, the iconic place of the Egyptian revolution. Just then, the Supreme Commander of the Egyptian Army and also the Minister of Defense, Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, carried out a coup d'état and dismissed President Morsi in response to the demands of the Egyptian people.

The Egyptian people ultimately rejected President Morsi for a variety of reasons, and depending on whom you ask, the primary reason could be for political, economic, or security reasons. Most noteworthy, however, is that the people who rejected Morsi regarded the election results as suspect due to Morsi's mobilization of farmers