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## **Turkish Nationalists and the Ottoman Imperial Legacy** *Türk Milliyetçileri ve Osmanlı İmparatorluk Mirası*

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### **Abstract**

*This article covers how Turkish nationalists approached the Ottoman imperial legacy from the early republican period to the end of the Cold War. In order not to discredit the secular Turkish nation-state, the Kemalist republic did not rely on the Ottoman imperial legacy in its national construction. Led by Rıza Nur and Nihal Atsız, chauvinist nationalists outside the grip of the state targeted the multiculturalism of the Ottomans as its weakness. Nevertheless, all nationalists Turkified the empire in their narratives and belittled the contributions of the non-Turkish ruling elite (devşirme). Only after the republic was solidified, did the Kemalist state use the Ottoman imperial legacy cautiously against the rising threat of socialism. Pro-Islamic nationalists found the imperial legacy as a useful political tool to boost up nationalism and combined it with its Islamic legacy paving the road for the reconciliation of Islam and nationalism. The religious Ottoman Muslim image nationalists created became an ideal role model for potential nationalists. Any criticism of the Ottoman Empire was seen as an attack on this role model. This predicament only delayed the objective, academic study of the Ottoman Empire and its legacy.*

**Key Words:** *Ottoman Empire, Nationalism, Islam, Ottoman legacy, Turkey*

### **Öz**

*Bu makale Cumhuriyetin ilk döneminden Soğuk Savaş sonuna kadar olan dönemde Türk milliyetçilerinin Osmanlı imparatorluk mirasına yaklaşımlarını konu edinmektedir. Kemalist devlet ulus oluşturma aşamasında laik Türk ulus devleti çizgisini koruyabilmek için Osmanlı imparatorluk mirasından yararlanmamıştı. Rıza Nur ve Nihal Atsız tarafından yönlendirilen resmi milliyetçi söylemin dışındaki ırkçı milliyetçiler de Osmanlı çok kültürlülüğünü zayıflık olarak göstermekteydiler. Ayrıca dönemin milliyetçi kaynaklarında Türk olmayan devşirme yönetici tabakasının katkıları küçümsenmiş imparatorluk adeta millileştirilmişti. Ancak cumhuriyet rejiminin güçlenmesinden sonra Kemalist devlet Osmanlı imparatorluk mirasını yükselen sosyalist tehdide karşı kullanmıştır. İslama sıcak bakan milliyetçiler imparatorluk mirasını milliyetçiliği güçlendirecek önemli bir siyasi araç olarak gördükleri gibi bu mirası İslam mirası ile birleştirerek İslam ve milliyetçiliğin bir araya gelmesine zemin hazırladılar. Milliyetçilerce yaratılan dindar Osmanlı Müslümanı imajı potansiyel milliyetçiler için bir örnek model oldu. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na yönelik herhangi bir eleştiri de bu örnek modele yapılan bir saldırı olarak görüldü. Bu durum yalnızca Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve onun mirası üzerine yapılacak olan objektif akademik çalışmalarını geciktirdi.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Milliyetçilik, İslam, Osmanlı mirası, Türkiye*

## Introduction

As the late historian Eric Hobsbawm quoted from Ernest Renan, “[g]etting its history wrong is part of being a nation.”<sup>1</sup> The modern history of nationalism has proven that history is a useful tool to craft national identities and invent nations. Mushrooming in the last two centuries, modern nation-states did their best to distort historical facts and appealed to imperial legacies to create the social cohesion that the concept of the nation-state prophesized. From the Greek desire to revive the Byzantine Empire and the Italian aspiration to recreate the Roman Empire, to the rise of Third Reich, modern nation states viewed imperial legacies as cultural ammunition to boost up nationalism.

While post-Ottoman Turkey followed the footsteps of its Western forerunners in its quest to create a Turkish nation-state, unlike many modern nation-states that embraced imperial legacies to promote nationalism, the young Turkish republic, which was founded on the remains of the 623-year-old Ottoman Empire, was not comfortable to use the Ottoman imperial legacy for several reasons: primarily, unlike the Byzantine or the German empires, which were brought down by the external forces, the founders of the Turkish republic officially declared the end of the Ottoman Empire; secondly, picking the Ottoman imperial legacy to promote Turkish nationalism would have highlighted the Islamic character of the empire and hindered the foundation of a secular system. Therefore, in order to create a secular nation-state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) made sure the history textbooks of the republic prioritized the pre-Islamic history of Turks rather than the history of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish history textbooks of the modern Turkish republic were primarily written to serve Turkish nationalism and secondarily to teach the pupils the facts of the past. Historical facts often became the victims of nationalist indoctrination.

Previous academic works have largely covered the state’s meddling with academic knowledge and history textbook preparation in the Kemalist period (1923-1938).<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on the intellectual dimension of national identity formation outside direct control of the Turkish nation-state and covers the views of Turkish nationalist groups on the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman imperial legacy. Unlike the official history textbooks that ignored Ottoman history, Turkish nationalists of different convictions used the Ottoman legacy for their nationalist causes. While initially the ethnic nationalists of modern Turkey forefronted the Turkishness of the Ottoman dynasty and ignored or belittled the contributions of the non-Turkish Ottoman ruling elite, for pro-Islamic nationalists the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire was the key component for its greatness. In the Cold War political and intellectual struggle between the Turkish political left and the right, Turkish nationalists collectively embraced the Ottoman imperial legacy as the biggest Turkish achievement and the symbol of right-wing political groups: this approach turned Ottomans into Turks and the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish Empire and allowed the Turkish nation-state to use the Ottoman imperial legacy to boost up nationalism. This nationalist trend viewed any criticism of the Ottoman Empire as

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<sup>1</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Büşra Behar Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de “Resmî Tarih” Tezinin Oluşumu (1929-1937)* (Istanbul: Afa Yayıncılık, 1992); Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine 1931-1993*. Translated from French by Ali Berktaş (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000).

an attack on the collective nationalist heritage and Islam. Consequently, the distorted and ideologically biased nationalist history narratives that used the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire for their benefit delayed the objective academic understanding of the Ottoman history.

### The Ottomans and Nationalism in the Early Republican Period (1923-1950)

Atatürk's path to create a secular Turkish nation-state had several obstacles. In the 1920s the majority of people in Turkey had a religious identity rather than a national identity. The two ideological tools of the Kemalist revolution, the Turkish Historical Society (TTK)<sup>3</sup> and the Turkish Linguistic Society, were tasked with crafting a secular Turkish national identity with academically-backed knowledge. The TTK not only drafted new history textbooks<sup>4</sup> with a heavy emphasize on the pre-Islamic period of Turkish history but also crafted the controversial Turkish History Thesis (THT). The first draft of *Outline of Turkish History*, which covered large segments of world history from ancient China to the Roman Empire in 467 pages, covered Ottoman history in mere 25 pages.<sup>5</sup> The book attributed the success of the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish origin of the Ottoman dynasty, but the responsibility for its failure in its last stage was placed on the diversity of Ottoman culture.<sup>6</sup> It also argued that Turks made Islam great not the other way around. The book claimed that "The majority of states that stretched the borders west, east and south of the Islamic world and established a special civilization in Anatolia, India, and Africa were established by Turkish leaders."<sup>7</sup> The same argument was visible at the First Turkish History Congress in 1932.<sup>8</sup> During the congress, the minister of education Reşit Galib introduced the THT. The THT not only claimed that the Turkish presence in Anatolia predated the Greeks, but also asserted that the Turks were descendants of the early civilizations of Hittites and Sumerians.<sup>9</sup> The idea that the Central Asian Turks were the main force behind the creation of major world civilizations was the backbone of the THT. The Ottoman imperial legacy was deemed too Islamic to be used to create a secular nation-state and so that was left aside. Instead, a new history had to be made up. Years after the end of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish statesmen were still attacking it. In 1934 Prime Minister İsmet İnönü declared that the ongoing Turkish revolution was started as a two-front war against foreign invasion and the Ottoman system.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the republican bureaucracy sold a portion of the Ottoman archives to Bulgaria as junk paper

<sup>3</sup> Türk Tarih Kurumu.

<sup>4</sup> Reprint of the 1930 original text is available with an introduction by Doğu Perinçek, Ed. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları: Kemalist Yönetimin Resmi Tarih Tezi* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Perinçek, 441-466.

<sup>6</sup> Ersanlı, 106; Perinçek, 464-466.

<sup>7</sup> Perinçek, 428.

<sup>8</sup> Şemsettin Günaltay, "İslam Medeniyetinde Türklerin Mevkii," in *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar Müzakere Zabıtları*, (Ankara: T.C. Maarif Vekaleti, 1932), 289-307.

<sup>9</sup> Reşit Galib, "Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumi bir Bakış," in *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar Müzakere Zabıtları*, (Ankara: T.C. Maarif Vekaleti, 1932), 99-193.

<sup>10</sup> İsmet İnönü, "İnkılap Kürsüsünde İsmet Paşa'nın Dersi," in *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I*, Ed. Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Zeynep Kerman, Necat Birinci, Abdullah Uçman (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1992) 264-274.

without even consulting historians.<sup>11</sup> Shortly, a large segment of early republican leaders not only avoided the Ottoman imperial legacy but also disdained the Ottomans. Instead of the Ottoman legacy, the young republic preferred to appeal to the legacy of the pre-Ottoman Turkish states. Even the Mongolian Genghis Khan (1162-1227) was presented as a Turkish leader to boost up nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

In order to forefront the THT at the First Turkish History Congress, organizers disregarded Ottoman history: there was not even a single presentation about the Ottoman Empire. In the Second Turkish History Congress in 1937, four presentations covered different aspects of Ottoman history.<sup>13</sup> The presentations on the Ottoman Empire reflected the Ottomans and their achievements as Turkish achievements<sup>14</sup> and thus they could be seen as reference to the Ottoman legacy but they were far from prominent at the congress. As expected the presentations that aimed to solidify the Turkish History Thesis dominated the congress. In the Second Turkish History Congress the most visible change was the inclusion of religion in a different format: the nationalization of Islam. In his presentation “Prophet and Turks”, İsmail Hakkı İzmirli not only claimed that Prophet Muhammad was most likely a Turk but also argued that Prophet Muhammad wrote a Turkish letter.<sup>15</sup> In another presentation İzmirli further claimed that the Evs and Hazrec tribes of Medina were of Turkish origin.<sup>16</sup> These arguments, presented at the most reputable history congress of Turkey in 1937, may appear insignificant but the arguments raised by İzmirli in his two presentations have long been used by Turkish nationalists. As if it was not enough to turn the Ottomans into Turks, anachronistic historians were determined to turn Prophet Muhammad into a Turk. İzmirli’s effort was a part of the state-sponsored social engineering project to Turkify Islam. Indeed, the Kemalist state and its ideologues developed several projects in that endeavor to nationalize Islam.<sup>17</sup> Had the secular Turkish nation state managed to harness the cultural power of Islam it could have used it to advance nationalism as the ideological father of Atatürk, Ziya Gökalp recommended.

While Ottoman history was briefly touched in the Second History Congress, the Seljuk Empire (1037-1194) received more significant coverage. Şemseddin Günaltay, who later served as president of the Turkish Historical Society (TTK), did his best to counter Ernest Renan’s claim that the Seljuk Empire caused the decline of Islamic civilization.<sup>18</sup> In his presentation titled “Is the Seljuk invasion the cause of the decline of the Islamic world?”

<sup>11</sup>For detailed information on the sold archives see, Mehmet Torunlar and Erol Çelik, *Bulgaristan’a Satılan Evrak ve Cumhuriyet Dönemi Arşiv Çalışmaları*, Ed. (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1993).

<sup>12</sup>Copeaux, 26.

<sup>13</sup>*İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongrenin Çalışmaları, Kongreye Sunulan Tebliğler*, İstanbul 20-25 Eylül 1937 (İstanbul: Kenan Matbaası, 1943).

<sup>14</sup>For example see, Osman Şevki Uludağ “Tıp İlmi ve Osmanlı Türkleri,” in *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 705-734.

<sup>15</sup>İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, “Peygamber ve Türkler,” in *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 1013-1044.

<sup>16</sup>Also see, İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, “Şark Kaynaklarına Göre Müslümanlıktan Evvel Türk Kültürünün Arap Yarımadasındaki İzleri,” in *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 280-289.

<sup>17</sup>An earlier work in this journal covered these proposals in detail. Tamer Balcı, “From Nationalization of Islam to Privatization of Nationalism: Islam and Turkish National Identity,” *History Studies* 1:1 (2009) 82-107.

<sup>18</sup>Şemseddin Günaltay, “İslam Dünyasının İnhitatu Sebebi Selçuk İstilası mıdır?” in *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 350-366.

Günaltay's primary goal was to defend the Turks and prove that Turks did not cause the decline of Islamic civilization. In doing so his presentation listed the Turkish contributions to Islamic civilization and, intentionally or not, exhibited Islam and Turkishness as inseparable entities. Günaltay's presentation was later reprinted several times by Turkish nationalists to evidence the inseparability of Islam and Turkishness. The Third Turkish History Congress, which met after the death of Atatürk, aimed to further strengthen the Turkish History Thesis but this time it included quite a large number of presentations on the history of the Seljuk Empire, the Ottoman Empire and other medieval Turkish states.<sup>19</sup>

Historian Zekidi Velidi Togan (1890-1970) challenged the arguments of the Turkish History Thesis during the First Turkish History Congress and consequentially was forced to leave his job at Istanbul University and he left Turkey. The THT was a political investment not a well-researched historical fact. Up until the death of Atatürk in 1938, historians could not publicly criticize the THT. Moreover, from 1923 to 1954, the semi-official nationalist *Türk Yurdu* journal published only one article that appealed to the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup> The article on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Mohac Battle, which brought Hungary under Ottoman rule, does not have an author but an initial D.<sup>21</sup> *Türk Yurdu* as well as other nationalist periodicals presented Ottoman culture, art and architecture as Turkish culture, art and architecture. The multicultural products of the Ottomans were presented as the products of Turkishness.<sup>22</sup> The secular Turkish nation-state as well as official and unofficial nationalist groups systematically selected what aspects of the Ottoman Empire could be useful for the nationalism project and used them effectively. The nationalist history narrative turned not only the Anatolian peasants into Turks but also the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire into a Turkish empire.

The Turkish History Thesis remained unchallenged in academic circles during the rule of Atatürk. The Kemalist THT relied on the pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic history of Turks which was a relatively new research area at that time. That gave the early pioneers of this period a large space to interpret: if facts could not be found, they were crafted. After all, the THT was created by the bureaucracy for domestic consumption. Their target audience was the Anatolian peasant not academic minds. The Ottoman recipe for a long-lasting empire was its ability to cohere multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual groups together with religious and cultural tolerance. The Kemalist Turkish republic was taking an illiberal path toward establishing a homogenous, secular nation-state. Presenting the multi-ethnic, multi-religious tolerance of the Ottomans and the Ottoman inclusiveness would not promote the nation-state. The second and the third history congresses showed that the elephant in the room could no longer be ignored. Still the state apparatus and its publication arms largely remained idle toward the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>19</sup> III. *Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongreye Sunulan Tebliğler*, Ankara 15-20 Kasım 1943.

<sup>20</sup> Hüseyin Tuncer, *Türk Yurdu Bibliyografyası, (1911-1992)* (İzmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1993), 182-184. It should be noted that *Türk Yurdu* was not published between 1931 and 1942.

<sup>21</sup> D., "Muhaç Meydan Muharebesi'nin 400'üncü Yıldönümü," *Türk Yurdu*, 4:23 (November 1926) 422-431.

<sup>22</sup> For an example see, Mimar Hikmet, "Türk Mimarisinde Bursa-İznik Evleri," *Türk Yurdu*, 3:23 (February 1929) 34-37.

### Turkish Nationalists and the Ottoman Imperial Legacy

In order not to attract Soviet enmity, Kemalist Turkey refrained from pan-Turkism and limited its nationalism to within its own borders. Racism became another source to feed nationalism especially in the 1930s but it was used selectively by the state.<sup>23</sup> Still, nationalist groups outside the state apparatus used racism unsparingly. As the state loosened its grip on the expression of nationalism, in post-Kemalist Turkey, nationalists of various views quickly mushroomed. The first nationalist groups outside the grip of the state were chauvinist nationalists, who were highly influenced by the racist rhetoric of the 1930s. Led by Rıza Nur (1879-1942) and Hüseyin Nihal Atsız (1905-1975), this group attached nationalism to blood: in their view anyone who did not carry Turkish blood was not Turkish.

Rıza Nur had long been an ardent supporter of scientific racism while historian Atsız later incorporated culture to his understanding of racism especially with the influence of his professors at Istanbul University: Zeki Velidi Togan and M. Fuad Köprülü. Rıza Nur left Turkey in 1926 after he was blamed for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Atatürk. Although Nur was a trained medical doctor, he left behind more works on history and politics including his 14-volume work on Turkish history, where he presented the Ottoman Empire as a Turkish empire and blamed the misfortunes of the empire on the non-Muslim *devşirme*<sup>24</sup> class. Ironically, the third Ottoman sultan Murad I (1462-1389) created the *devşirme* system in order to have a reliable army because his Muslim Turkoman warriors were after money and they regarded themselves as equivalent to the Ottoman rulers.<sup>25</sup> The next sultan Bayezid I (1389-1402) employed *devşirme* in the imperial bureaucracy as well. Throughout Ottoman history there were more viziers and grand viziers of *devşirme* origin than ethnic Turkish.<sup>26</sup> The long-lasting empire owes much of its achievements to *devşirme* statesmen, who sometimes had to put down the Celali uprisings of Anatolian Turks. These facts were masterfully omitted in nationalist publications. Instead, often-repeated platitudes were engraved on the minds of young generations, such as “A Turk does not have a friend other than a Turk”, while the reality was manifestly different.

The chauvinistic narrative twisted Ottoman history to serve its goals. The strengths of the empire, such as its tolerant multiculturalism, were presented as its weakness. After returning to Turkey, Rıza Nur launched his nationalist periodical *Tanrıdağ*, which served well to present the distorted Ottoman imperial legacy. In the first issue of *Tanrıdağ*, Nur declared that “[n]ationality is not a cultural issue. Nationality is a race, blood issue.”<sup>27</sup> After lining up several examples from early Turkish history to the Ottoman Empire, Nur argued that non-Turkish elements in the state’s service were the main culprits in the failures of Turkish history.

<sup>23</sup> Tamer Balci, “The Rise and Fall of Nine Lights Ideology,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 12: 2 (June 2011): 145-160.

<sup>24</sup> The Ottoman *devşirme* or the child-levy system was a system to recruit soldiers from the Christian families.

<sup>25</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol 1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> İsmail Hâmi Danişmend, *Osmanlı Devlet Erkânı* (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971). An English list of Ottoman grand viziers and their ethnic origins, primarily based on Danişmend’s work is accessible at “List of Ottoman Grand Viziers,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Ottoman\\_Grand\\_Viziers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ottoman_Grand_Viziers), retrieved on October 16, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Rıza Nur, “Türk Nasyonalizmi,” *Tanrıdağ*, 1:1 (May 1942) 4.

For example, Nur pointed to foreign involvement in Seljuk domestic politics rather than the Mongolian invasions to explain the collapse of the Seljuk Empire (1037-1194). Similarly, according to Nur, foreign elements and multiculturalism brought the end to the Ottoman Empire. Nur's solution was nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Again he omitted the betrayals of Turks in key positions, such as Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha, who had an ulterior motive to replace the Ottoman dynasty with the Çandarlı dynasty and thus was executed by sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481). Furthermore, Nur's argument implicitly suggests that had the Ottomans been controlled solely by Turks the empire would have remained strong.

Another chauvinist Mustafa Hakkı Akansel declared religious bigotry as the main culprit in Turkish decline.<sup>29</sup> Akansel defended the Ottoman practice of royal fratricide and advanced that the Ottoman sultans' practice of having their brothers killed was a necessity for the sake of empire: the end justified the means. Also, Akansel blamed Ottoman decline on the non-Turkish wives of sultans.<sup>30</sup> According to Akansel, "[u]ninterrupted marriages with other races changed the quality of blood. While it carries the same name, the nation does not preserve the race of the state's founder."<sup>31</sup> What Akansel could not explain was the fact that the Ottoman sultans started intermarriages with non-Turkish women early on, starting from the second sultan Orhan. Indeed, these Ottoman marriages were politically motivated. By marrying with princesses from rival nations, the Ottomans gained the opportunity to involve themselves in the internal affairs of these states using the relationship card.

While chauvinists criticized the *devşirme* system and the Ottoman intermarriages with non-Turkish women, they refrained from a total demonization of the Ottoman Empire. For instance Nihal Atsız was extremely displeased with a sentence in the literature textbooks prepared for high school students in 1937. Narrating the *tanzimat* (reorganization) period of the late Ottoman Empire, the book's author Ali Canib stated that "Then Abdülmecid came to throne. Like every Ottoman sultan he was an unwary and helpless man..."<sup>32</sup> Atsız found this statement very offensive and wrote a lengthy article analyzing all 36 Ottoman sultans. In his final judgment Atsız found the majority of sultans successful. One of the major disagreements between the Turkish nationalists and Kemalist historians was the way Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) was presented to the young generation. Coming from the ranks of the Committee of Union and Progress, the ruling Republican Public Party had no positive word to use for Abdulhamid II, who shut down the first Ottoman parliament and forced the Unionists to go underground. Atsız defended Abdulhamid II against his critics and blamed his critics as collaborators with foreign elements.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Nur, "Türk Nasyonalizmi," 5.

<sup>29</sup> Mustafa Hakkı Akansel, "Türk Irkının İstikbali Büyüktür," *Tanrıdağ*, 1:3 (May 1942) 6.

<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Hakkı Akansel, "Türkler Vahşi midir," *Tanrıdağ*, 1:7 (June 1942) 9. As early as in the Seljuk Empire and later in the Ottoman Empire, princes married Byzantine or other Christian princesses. The second Ottoman sultan Orhan married Princess Theodora. Orhan's successor Murad I married both the Bulgarian Princess Tamara and the Byzantine Princess Helena. Murad's son Bayezid I married the Serbian Princess Despina. Shaw, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Mustafa Hakkı Akansel, "Yabancı Kan ve Devletlerin Batması," *Tanrıdağ*, 1:8 (June 1942) 6.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Nihal Atsız, "Osmanlı Padişahları," *Tanrıdağ*, 1:10 (July 1942) 6; "Osmanlı Padişahları II" *Tanrıdağ*, 1:11 (July 1942) 8-10; Nihal Atsız, *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler* (Istanbul: Baysan Basım ve Yayın, 1992) 89-112.

<sup>33</sup> Nihal Atsız, "Abdülhamid Han (= Gök Sultan)," in *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler*, 81-88.

During WWII, the Turkish state did its best to stay out of the war but Turkish racists explicitly supported Germany against the Soviet Union and expected Turkey to join the war on the side of Germany. Nihal Atsız and his brother Necdet Sançar (1910-1975) did their best to glorify war and pulled their examples from the Ottoman history.<sup>34</sup> Atsız as well as his fellow chauvinist compatriots, such as Nur, Akansel and Sançar were strong believers in natural selection. They believed that war was the best way to solve problems. For instance Sıtkı Tuncer recommended that Turkish nationalism should not be peaceful.<sup>35</sup> Despite several attempts and plots to involve Turkey in WWII, Turkey remained neutral. Moreover, toward the end of WWII pan-Turkish nationalists, who saw the war as a chance to save the Central Asian Turks from Soviet tutelage, were purged.<sup>36</sup> Once acquitted, nationalists declared May 3, 1944<sup>37</sup> as “Turkism Day” and used the trial to reach a larger audience. Annual commemoration of “Turkism Day” has helped them to recruit new generations with a story of victimization. Nationalists regarded May 3<sup>rd</sup> as a milestone of Turkism from an idea to a movement as the demonstration was their first activism.<sup>38</sup>

In the article noted earlier, Tuncer also stated that despite Islam’s disapproval of nationalism, the combined force of Islam and nationalism during the Turkish war for independence (1919-1922) became successful. Then he suggested that because Turkish nationalism was an immature idea it needed a supportive idea on its side.<sup>39</sup> Although Tuncer explicitly said that he did not know what supportive idea would take the side of Turkish nationalism, his example implicitly pointed to Islam. Tuncer’s implicit suggestion was one of the early steps toward reconciliation between Islam and nationalism after the destructive illiberal secular practices of the last decade. His compatriots did not object to this reconciliation but objected to Tuncer’s statement that Islam disapproves of nationalism.<sup>40</sup>

Compared to physicians Rıza Nur and Mustafa Hakkı Akansel, who mainly focused on scientific racism, historian Atsız was more familiar with history and culture. Pre-1945 nationalist literature heavily focused on identity formation. The imperial legacies of the Ottoman Empire as well as other pre-Islamic Turkic empires served as important resources in crafting Turkish national identity. While the state bureaucracy appealed to the Turkish History Thesis with its distorted facts, non-state actors used whatever they could gather from the arsenal of history. Atsız viewed Turkish history as a continuous line. He regarded the foundation of the Turkish republic as a continuation of the Ottomans.

According to our inaccurate dominant historical understanding, the Ottoman state collapsed and the Turkish republic was founded in its place. This is a wrong thought because there was not an Ottoman state to collapse. There was

<sup>34</sup> Necdet Sançar, “Türk, Ordu ve Savaş,” *Tanrıdağ*, 1:3 (May 1942) 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Sıtkı Tuncer, “Milliyetçiliğimiz Nasıl Olmalıdır?” *Tanrıdağ*, 1:10 (July 1942) 10.

<sup>36</sup> Balci, “The Rise and Fall of Nine Lights Ideology,” 148.

<sup>37</sup> On May 3, 1944 after a day of trial some nationalists gathered for a demonstration in Ankara.

<sup>38</sup> Necdet Sançar, “3 Mayıs’ın Manası” in *Türkçülük Üzerine Makaleler*, (Ankara: Töre-Devlet Yayınevi, 1976) 30-33.

<sup>39</sup> Tuncer, “Milliyetçiliğimiz Nasıl Olmalıdır?”

<sup>40</sup> Nebil Buharalı, “Bir Yanlışlığın Düzeltilmesi,” *Tanrıdağ*, 1:12 (July 1942) 12.

only the Ottoman dynasty: that one tumbled. I mean the regime changed in the state. That is all...<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, by referring to the Ottoman army as the Turkish army, Atsız, Sançar, Nur and Akansel as well as other nationalists did their best to complete the Turkification of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>42</sup>

### The Ottoman Imperial Legacy and Islam in Cold War Nationalist Literature

Cold War nationalist literature focused on a new threat, communism. Anti-communism became the rallying cry of Cold War nationalists constituting a different spectrum from secular chauvinists to pro-Islamic nationalists. A new nationalist periodical, *Kızılçelma*, launched by Atsız in 1947, covered more contemporary issues. Perhaps the most visible change in the tone of chauvinistic writings was a gradual appearance of Islam in the periodical. As stated earlier, Mustafa Hakkı Akansel regarded religious bigotry as a significant factor in the decline of Turks in the past. In the early days of the Cold War, his articles in *Kızılçelma* were published along with a *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>43</sup> In the following issues more and more articles with religious content became visible in *Kızılçelma*. For instance, the mufti of Beyoğlu authored an article series on the Quran in several issues.<sup>44</sup>

The reappearance of Islam in the nationalist literature was not a coincidence. As Turkey switched to a multi-party political system, Islam became a crucial subject for all political parties. President İsmet İnönü and the Republican Public Party entered the first free elections of modern Turkey in 1950 with conservative prime minister Şemsettin Günaltay. Furthermore, Islam was a strong cultural construct against the rise of communism in the Cold War. How would this rapprochement of Islam affect the approach toward the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman imperial legacy? Would the secular republic and chauvinists reconsider their treatment of the Ottoman Empire? Cold War nationalists reassessed their approach toward the Ottoman Empire. As state-controlled nationalism was unleashed to get optimum benefit in the ideological struggle against communism, Turkish nationalist periodicals mushroomed in the early Cold War period. While nationalist literature focused on its struggle against communism, fewer articles on the Ottoman Empire appeared in the nationalist periodicals. Nevertheless, nationalists did not refrain from defending the Ottoman legacy. In *Orkun* Nejdet Sançar stated that enmity toward the Ottomans was a natural outcome in the early years of the republic, but after twenty-five years the republic had solidified and it was no longer necessary or acceptable to attack the Ottoman Empire. Sançar warned that “sinking the Ottoman period, which was the shiniest period of the Turkish past” would only help communists.<sup>45</sup> As communism gained

<sup>41</sup> Nihal Atsız, “Türk Tarihine Bakışımız Nasıl Olmalıdır?” *Çınaraltı*, 1 (August 9, 1941); *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Nihal Atsız, “Varna Meydan Savaşı,” *Çınaraltı*, 15 (November 15, 1941); *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler* (Istanbul: Baysan Basım ve Yayın, 1992) 73-80.

<sup>43</sup> Mustafa Hakkı Akansel, “Türk Milletinin Yükselmesine Ait Düşünceler,” *Kızılçelma*, 11, (January 9, 1948) 6; Akansel, “Türk Milletinin Yükselmesine Ait Düşünceler II,” *Kızılçelma*, 12, (January 16, 1948) 5 and 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ali O. Tatlısu, “Kurandan Hikmetler,” *Kızılçelma*, 13, (February 13, 1948) 5; Ali O. Tatlısu, “Kurandan Hikmetler,” *Kızılçelma*, 14, (February 27, 1948) 5 and 13.

<sup>45</sup> Çiftçiöğlü Nejdet Sançar, “Osmanlı ve Padişah Düşmanlığı,” *Orkun*, 53 (October 5, 1951) 6-7.

ground in the early Cold War, attacks on the Ottoman Empire, especially chauvinist criticism of the Ottoman sultans' marriages with the non-Turkish women, were gradually abandoned. The Ottoman Empire became a symbol of Turkish nationalism and the Ottoman imperial legacy turned into an ideological tool of Cold War Turkish domestic politics. Nationalists viewed any criticism of the Ottoman Empire as an attack against Turkish nationalism. Similarly, the pre-war negative chauvinistic approach toward Islam dramatically changed. *Orkun* author Gözler explicitly stated his desire to merge religion with nationalism but he was not explicit to spell out which religion it was. In his article he did not use the term Islam even once.<sup>46</sup>

Temporary ideals in place of religion can never provide strength to a nation to survive...If an ideal has roots, strong on its spiritual side, and is embraced by the majority of the nation with love, then it can certainly serve as a bond. Religion is natural cement that binds ideals.<sup>47</sup>

If Islam was the cement, the Ottoman Empire was the proof that the cement worked well to realize Turkish ideals. Whether or not the Ottoman Empire had an ideal of Turkism was a question nationalists of different camps did not want to answer. By the 1950s, nationalists collectively regarded the Ottoman Empire as a great Turkish empire.

Published by the Turkish Hearths, the oldest Turkish nationalist periodical, *Türk Yurdu* had been the flagship of nationalist periodicals but it ceased publication in 1931 as the Turkish Hearths was shut down. While *Türk Yurdu* was resumed briefly in 1942, it was closed the next year. Once revived again in 1954 *Türk Yurdu* carried on its mission to disseminate nationalist thought. Although *Türk Yurdu* was not in publication in 1953, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, it caught up a year later to commemorate the event. In its first issue historian Osman Turan wrote on the conquest of Istanbul and its historical significance.<sup>48</sup> Commemorative articles on the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul were not previously visible in *Türk Yurdu*. During the Cold War no nationalist periodical omitted important dates such as May 29, 1453.

Another visible change in the Cold War nationalist literature was the increasing number of articles written by career historians rather than activists. Three historians; Osman Turan, Zeki Velidi Togan, and İbrahim Kafesoğlu all studied the history of pre-Ottoman Turkey especially the Seljuk Empire and other Muslim Turkic states.<sup>49</sup> An increasing number of academic works on the history of the Seljuk Empire further solidified the place of Islam in

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<sup>46</sup> Many Cold War nationalists refrained from using the term Islam explicitly in order to avoid persecution. Borrowed from fascist Italy, the Article 163 of the Turkish penal code penalized not only the personal or political appeal of religion for political gains but also the suggestion to do so. Nationalists were unofficially exempted from the condemnation of this law as far as their abuse of religion was to protect the state. Still they had to be careful in their abuse to avoid the wrath of an ambitious prosecutor.

<sup>47</sup> Hamidoğlu H. Fethi Gözler, "İnsan ve Din," *Orkun*, 64 (December 21, 1951) 11.

<sup>48</sup> Osman Turan, "İstanbul'un Fethi ve Tarih," *Türk Yurdu*, 1: 234 (July 1954) 30-35.

<sup>49</sup> İbrahim Kafesoğlu, "Selçuklular" 353-416, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, no. 104-105, V. 10 (Istanbul: MEB, 1980); A. Zeki Velidi Togan, *Kur'an ve Türkler "The Qur'an and the Turks"* (Istanbul: Kayı Yayınları, 1971); Osman Turan, "The Ideal of World Domination among the Medieval Turks," *Studia Islamica* 4, (1955): 77-90; Osman Turan, *Türk Cihan Hakimiyeti Mefkûresi Tarihi: Türk Dünyası Nizamının Milli İslami ve İnsani Esasları* (Istanbul: İstanbul Matbaası, [1969] 2005).

Turkish culture and history. Historiography gradually shifted to present Turks and the Ottomans as the saviors of Islamic civilization as opposed to widely accepted Western claim that Turks had dealt the death blow to medieval Islamic civilization. Part of this accusation stemmed from the fact that up until the 1950s many historians, including Zeki Velidi Togan, regarded Turks and the Mongols in the Altaic part of the Ural-Altaic Language group as being closely related.<sup>50</sup> Hence Turks shared the blame for the Mongol invasions that brought Islamic civilization to its knees. A more recent study has challenged the widely accepted claim that the Mongols destroyed the famous Baghdad library and triggered the decline of medieval Islamic civilization.<sup>51</sup> Prominent historian Bernard Lewis shared the view that the Ottomans defended Islam from the Crusades and the Mongols.<sup>52</sup> The Cold War Turkish historical narrative evolved to dislodge the negative views about the Turks and the Ottomans.

The Ottoman imperial legacy served nationalists in the Cold War ideological struggle but the way nationalists narrated Ottoman history in the Cold War indicated that the Turkish socialists actually set the course of intellectual arguments and pulled nationalists into discussions. For example, a leftist branding of all nationalists as racist urged conservative nationalists to denounce racism. Turkish nationalists had to shake off the racist, chauvinist reputation they received because of explicitly racist nationalists like Nur, Akansel and Atsız, and Sançar. If a reconciliation of Islam and nationalism was to stop communism, racism had to be surgically removed from Turkish nationalist thought. A Sorbonne law school graduate and a prominent conservative nationalist Ali Fuad Başgil felt the necessity of this operation and authored an opinion piece in *Türk Yurdu*:

Nationalism is an ethical, peaceful and humanitarian inclination. However, racism is a violent, aggressive policy that aims to unite all people from the same race and the ones regarded from the same race under one flag and command. It is very natural and lawful for the people to love and help out the people of the same race they live among. Nevertheless, turning this love into a principled international political program would be one of the factors preventing world peace.<sup>53</sup>

While peace-seeking nationalists denounced violence, chauvinist nationalists led by Atsız regarded peace as dangerous.

One of the biggest dangers for a nation is to swallow and sleep with the opium of peace and friendship. A state that does not desire to expand is doomed to get smaller. A nation that does not attack is attacked.<sup>54</sup>

Published in 1944, these words could be seen as a reflection of war-time psychology but Atsız stayed on the same racist course until the end of his life and wrote many other

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<sup>50</sup> Zeki Velidi Togan, *Moğollar, Çingiz ve Türkler* (Istanbul: Arkadaş Matbaası, 1941) 3. Togan's argument was later challenged by İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Tahlil ve Tenkit: Türk Tarihinde Moğollar ve Cengiz Meselesi* (Istanbul: Osman Yalçın Matbaası, 1953) 109-110.

<sup>51</sup> Metin Yılmaz, "Göreceli Tarih Anlayışına Bir Örnekleme: Bağdat Kütüphanesi Gerçekten Tahrip Edildi mi?" *EKEV Akademi Dergisi*, 8:18 (Winter 2004): 319-342.

<sup>52</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve İslamiyet" Translated by Şinasi Siber, *Türk Yurdu*, 11: 281 (February 1960) 5-7.

<sup>53</sup> Ali Fuad Başgil, "Millet Milliyet Milliyetçilik" *Türk Yurdu*, 271 (March 1959) 3-5.

<sup>54</sup> Nihal Atsız, "Ülkücüler Saldırcıdır," *Orhun*, 14: 1 (February 1, 1944); Also in Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, *Türk Ülküsü*, (Istanbul: İrfan Yayımcılık, 2003) 73-80.

articles arguing the same view.<sup>55</sup> None of his fellow nationalists could persuade him to abandon his antiquated chauvinism. Perhaps the most bothersome of all is the fact that in 1991 the Turkish Ministry of Education included Atsız's racist literature on the list of recommended readings for teachers!<sup>56</sup>

Another challenge from the Turkish left was anti-imperialism. Socialist anti-imperialism rhetoric remained strong throughout the twentieth century despite its silence toward Soviet imperialism. Under the heavy bombardment of anti-imperialist rhetoric, the term "empire" and "imperialism" gained a negative connotation and associated it with imperialist exploitation. This fact urged the Turkish nationalists to avoid using the term "empire" in reference to the Ottoman Empire and a large segment of Turkish historians used the Ottoman State as an alternative expression. Also a myth spread among Turkish conservatives about the Latin term *imperium* which literally means order, command or power.<sup>57</sup> The myth alleged that the origin of the term "empire" stems from exploitation, but none of the Latin-Turkish or Latin-English dictionaries I searched for this research gives "exploitation" as a meaning of *imperium*. In Cold War political discussions, Turkish socialists attached their interpretation to the meaning of the term *imperium*. Turkish nationalists and the conservative intelligentsia often refers to this interpretation-injected meaning of the term empire and argue that because the Ottomans never exploited the population they ruled, the Ottoman Empire was not an empire but a large state.<sup>58</sup> The methods of political and economic domination of overland empires like the Ottoman Empire were certainly different from the overseas empires of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries but dislodging the term empire from the Ottomans to dodge the socialist attack on empires in general never worked. Whether or not the Ottoman Empire economically or politically exploited the population it ruled is not a question that can be simply addressed with a yes or no answer. Nationalist activists can certainly give a quick answer but historians need to study the complex institutions, the land systems, and the economic structures as well as the meticulous tax systems of the empire before passing judgment.<sup>59</sup> Nationalists, conservatives as well as some historians avoided the term empire but not the imperial legacy the empire left behind. As the studies on the history of the Ottoman

<sup>55</sup> Balci, "The Rise and Fall of Nine Lights Ideology," 150.

<sup>56</sup> The first page of Atsız's *Türk Ülküsü* and *Türk Tarihinde Meseleler* has the same note: "According to the August 13, 1991 dated decision of the Ministry of National Education, Directory of Educational Division and 660 numbered Assistant Textbook Branch Management, [the book] is found appropriate for recommendation to teachers." ; "Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Eğitim Daire Başkanlığı'nın 13-8-1991 tarih ve 660.Yar.Ders Kit. Şb.Md. sayılı yazılılarıyla öğretmenler için tavsiyeleri uygun görülmüştür."

<sup>57</sup> "Imperium" *The Latin Dictionary*, <http://latindictionary.wikidot.com/noun:imperium>, retrieved on October 30, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> For a recent example see, Yavuz Bahadıroğlu, " 'Osmanlı Devleti mi, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğu' mu?" *Vakit*, (July 13, 2010) <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/makale/yavuz-bahadiroglu/osmanli-devleti-mi-osmanli-impatorlugu-mu.html> Retrieved on October 30, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> The most through study on the economic history of the Ottoman Empire was lead by Halil İnalcık. Halil İnalcık, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, Volume One: 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, Volume Two: 1600-1914*. Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Empire advanced, the term Ottoman Civilization emerged as a new reference to the Ottomans.<sup>60</sup>

Soon after Turkey experienced its first free elections in 1950, historian Z. Velidi Togan spearheaded the foundation of the Islamic Research Institute (IRI) and its publication *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* at Istanbul University in 1953. *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* started the first academic study of Islam and Islamic institutions in post-Ottoman Turkey. Pan-Turkist Togan used to be the president of the Bashkortostan Republic in Central Asia. He favored using the combined power of Islam and nationalism against communism. The Islamic Research Institute was to curb the rise of Turkish socialism, which gained momentum in the Cold War. Renowned historian and Togan's colleague M. Fuad Köprülü served as the Turkish Foreign Minister from 1950 to 1955. While Köprülü's political connections were helpful in the foundation of the IRI, his book *Origins of the Ottoman Empire* filled an important gap in the history of the empire. Köprülü's book was first published in French in 1935 and it was not available in Turkish until 1959.<sup>61</sup> Köprülü did not mind calling the Ottoman Empire an empire.<sup>62</sup> Once the number of academic works on Ottoman history increased,<sup>63</sup> activists left the ground to professionals but they never withdrew the distorted nationalist narrative to benefit from the Ottoman imperial legacy. In the nationalist narrative, the Ottoman Empire became a Turkish empire as the Ottomans became the Turks. The Kemalist Turkish History Thesis, which was expected to overshadow the Ottoman legacy, fell from favor in the post-Kemalist Turkey.

After the 1960 military coup Turkey embraced a new constitution in 1961. The foundation of the Institute of Turkish Culture Research (TKAE)<sup>64</sup> in 1961 and its periodical *Türk Kültürü* brought along more academic history research compared to the works of activist historians in earlier decades. The academic tone of *Türk Kültürü* made it one of the long-lasting nationalist periodicals. The 1960s became the transitional years when nationalist activist left the ground of history writing to academically-trained scholar activists. *Türk Kültürü* served as a vessel to academically endorse the Ottoman Empire as a Turkish Empire.

In the Cold War ideological battle nationalists rushed to the defense of the Ottoman Empire and Islam. While Turkish socialists labeled the Turkish right with an ambiguous term *irtica*, backward or reactionary, they also implied that the right had a desire to bring back *sharia*. The left targeted not only Islam but also the Ottoman Empire, which practiced *sharia*. These political steps further brought nationalists closer to embrace Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Any criticism of the Ottoman Empire was viewed as a political assault. Nationalists had no desire to see the source of their pride hammered by anyone whether the critics were honest historians or left-leaning scholars. They viewed Islam and the Ottoman Empire as the same and defended the empire as if the criticism was against Islam. The religiously-observant

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> M. Fuad Köprülü, *Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, Trans. and Edt. Gary Leiser, (New York: SUNY Press, 1992) xiii.

<sup>62</sup> Original French name of his book was *Origines de l'Empire Ottoman*.

<sup>63</sup> Some of the leading works on the Ottoman Empire were published by İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlimiye Teşkilatı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988 [1965]); *Osmanlı Devleti Saray Teşkilatı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988 [1945]).

<sup>64</sup> Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü.

Turkish-Muslim Ottoman image served as a role model for the nationalists. Criticism toward the Ottomans has largely seen as a criticism of this “perfect” image. One of the best book series by a scholar/activist depicting the perfect Ottoman image was written by Ahmet Akgündüz in the 1980s. The five-book series titled “Documents Speak Truths” addressed human rights in Islam, the Ottoman judicial system as well as the controversial issue whether or not the Ottoman sultans consumed alcohol.<sup>65</sup> Today Akgündüz and many other Turkish historians not only defend the legalized practice of fratricide by the Ottoman Empire and do their best to fit it into Islamic law. Anyone who disagrees with Akgündüz’s assessment are simply called “some Ottoman enemies.”<sup>66</sup> This type of approach to scholarship made it harder for historians to study the Ottoman Empire objectively. From the legalized practice of fratricide to alcohol consumption by some Ottoman sultans, many controversial issues about the Ottoman Empire have become part of Cold War domestic political discussion rather than academic historical discussion.

In Cold War Turkey neither nationalists nor historians could write freely without consequences. In 1968 nationalist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) authored a book on the last Ottoman Sultan Vahidettin (1918-1922) and his support for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the Turkish Independence War (1919-22). The book presented the last Ottoman sultan as a hero as opposed to the officially-sanctioned history that depicted him as a traitor.<sup>67</sup> After the publication of his book Kısakürek had to defend it in courts until the end of his life. Only death saved him from prison.

### Conclusion

Post-Ottoman Turkey set itself a clear ideological course: foundation of a secular nation-state. In its early years the young republic did its best not to rely on the Ottoman imperial legacy to boost up nationalism as it would have discredited the republic. Instead, the bureaucrats of the republic searched for an imperial legacy to use in the nation-building project in the distant past as far back as in ancient Mesopotamia. Prepared by the state-run Turkish Historical Society for domestic consumption and presented by the Ministry of Education, the Turkish History Thesis (THT) claimed that Turks created the oldest world civilizations. The first history congress of the official Turkish Historical Society ignored the Ottomans and focused on the pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic Turkic states, but the 623 years of Ottoman history could no longer be ignored. The republican disdain for the Ottomans went so far that

<sup>65</sup> Ahmet Akgündüz, *Belgeler Gerçekleri Konuşuyor (1)* (İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 1989); Ahmet Akgündüz, *Belgeler Gerçekleri Konuşuyor (2)* (İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 1990). Soon after it was published in 1989 the first book of the series was placed on the recommended book list of Turkish Ministry of Education.

<sup>66</sup> “Kanunnamedeki metin, ileride yapılacak şer’î tahlillerden anlaşılacağı üzere, bazı Osmanlı düşmanlarının iddia ettiği gibi, şer’î hükümlere ve hukukun yüce düsturlarına aykırı değildir.” Ahmet Akgündüz, “Kardeş Katli Meselesi 1- Kardeş Katli Meselesi ve Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleriyle Alâkalı Bazı İtirazlara Cevaplar,” <http://www.osmanli.org.tr/en/dosyaara.php?bolum=2&id=98> Retrieved on October 31, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, *Vatan Haini Değil Büyük Vatan Dostu Vahidüddin*, (İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları, 1976 [1968]).

many Ottoman structures were ruined and a portion of the Ottoman archives were sold to Bulgaria as junk paper.

While the Kemalist state approached the Ottoman Empire negatively to legitimize its existence, chauvinist nationalists outside the grip of the state joined the chorus and blamed the Ottoman decline on the non-Turkish ruling elite or the non-Turkish wives of sultans. Nevertheless, both sides gradually turned the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish empire and the Ottomans into Turks. One big issue was how to deal with the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire: both the Kemalists state and the chauvinists followed the Orientalist course by blaming Islam for the decline of the Ottomans. However, looming Cold War conditions and the emergence of socialism forced both nationalists and the Kemalist state to reassess their judgment on Islam and the Ottoman Empire.

During the Cold War racist and anti-Islamic nationalists lost their prominence as pro-Islamic nationalists emerged and explicitly denounced racism. The Ottoman imperial legacy matched with its Islamic legacy and the two became inseparable entities in nationalist literature. Defending the Ottomans was akin to defending Islam and vice versa. Likewise, any criticism of the Ottoman Empire was seen as an attack on Islam. For pro-Islamic nationalists the Ottoman Empire symbolized not only Turkish strength but also the Islamic past, for which neither Kemalists nor socialists had a taste. Turning the Ottoman imperial legacy into a domestic political tool silenced historians and prevented the objective academic study of the Ottoman Empire for years. Only after the dust of the Cold War settled and more documents in the Ottoman archives became available to historians, did academic studies of the Ottoman Empire expand and history started to be written by historians rather than bureaucrats or activists.

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