

# Conceptual History of the Near East

## *The Sattelzeit as a Heuristic Tool for Interrogating the Formation of a Multilayered Modernity*

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### ABSTRACT

Conceptual history holds tremendous potential to address a central issue in Near Eastern Studies, namely the formation of modernity in the Near East, provisionally located between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The encounter with European powers, primarily Britain and France, was a decisive historical factor in this formation; and European hegemony is, in fact, inscribed into the very concept of “modernity,” which we take as an historical, rather than analytical, concept. The conceptual formation of modernity in Arabic and Turkish was, however, a multilayered process; involving both ruptures and continuities, intersecting various temporalities, and incorporating concepts from several languages. To interrogate this multilayered process, we suggest the metaphor of the *Sattelzeit* (Saddle Period) as a heuristic tool, precisely because of its being tied to modernity. Finally, the article will show what conceptual history of the Near East has to offer to conceptual history more broadly.

### KEYWORDS

Arabic, Islam, Middle East, Near East, modernity, Ottoman Empire, *Sattelzeit*, Turkish

## Conceptual History and Near Eastern Studies

In each field conceptual history is being put to use, it yields different potentials, but also faces different challenges.<sup>1</sup> That said, certain fundamental

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1. See, for example, Jani Marjanen, “Reinhart Koselleck and Begriffsgeschichte in Scandinavia,” *Forum Interdisziplinäre Begriffsgeschichte* 4 (2015): 27–30; Faustino Oncino Coves, “Die Bedeutung und Rezeption von Reinhart Koselleck im spanischsprachigen Raum” [The importance and reception of Reinhart Koselleck in the Spanish-speaking world], *Forum Interdisziplinäre Begriffsgeschichte* 4 (2015): 21–26; Myoung-Kyu Park,



hermeneutical and methodological questions are shared across fields. This certainly holds true for the significant expansion of conceptual history beyond individual languages and national contexts and the formation of “global conceptual history” and “entangled histories.”<sup>2</sup> On this basis, however, differences between fields arise from distinctions in their dominant paradigms, their state of research on historical concepts, and the sources available. In other words, different fields of research yield different “problem spaces”<sup>3</sup> in which conceptual history can fruitfully intervene. Since conceptual history is primarily concerned with language, potentials and challenges tend to be shared in research on individual languages, though disciplinary conventions also play a central role.<sup>4</sup>

For Arabic and (Ottoman) Turkish, languages of primary concern in Near Eastern Studies, conceptual history has been increasingly put to use in recent years. In the case of Arabic, until very recently there existed only two monographs on terminological change in the nineteenth century, both of which are informed by the now-outdated paradigm of modernization as Westernization.<sup>5</sup> Some recent books contain programmatic reflections as part of their overall set-up.<sup>6</sup> For the Ottoman Turkish context, the state of research is slightly more advanced,<sup>7</sup> with the most pertinent works added re-

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“Conceptual History in Korea: Its Development and Prospects,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7 (2012): 36–50, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2012.070103>; Max Stille, “Conceptual History and South Asian History: State of the Art,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14 (2019): 91–112, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2019.140205>.

2. See Margrit Pernau, “Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7 (2012): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2012.070101>; Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmeier, eds., *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ed., *A Global Conceptual History of Asia, 1860–1940* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).

3. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3–4.

4. For example, a political scientist using conceptual history for the Arabic language might primarily share a problem space with other political scientists, rather than with a philosopher doing Arabic conceptual history.

5. Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Helga Rebhan, *Geschichte und Funktion einiger politischer Termini im Arabischen des 19. Jahrhunderts (1798–1882)* [The history and function of some political terms in nineteenth-century Arabic] (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).

6. See Wael Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab World: Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Florian Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition: The Concept of “Society” in the Journal al-Manar (Cairo, 1898–1940)* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

7. Maurus Reinkowski, *Die Dinge der Ordnung: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung über die osmanische Reformpolitik im 19. Jahrhundert* [The things of order: A comparative study

cently.<sup>8</sup> The only exclusively programmatic article on Ottoman Turkish conceptual history has been published two years ago in this journal, authored by Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen.<sup>9</sup>

While we conceive of the same central problem space as Topal and Wigen in their considerations on “Ottoman Conceptual History,” we suggest a different—complementary rather than contradictory—strategy for making conceptual history intervene in this space.

What we fundamentally share, is the intent to overcome teleological narratives of modernization or Westernization, along with the Eurocentric coinage of modern categories of sociopolitical order. Topal and Wigen aim to do so by uncovering concepts that were central to Ottoman actors in the past, but that might have been lost in modernity. Explicitly avoiding the question of “how did we get there,” they pursue a strategy that is archaeological, rather than genealogical.<sup>10</sup> In turn, it is precisely on the question of “how did we get there”—that is, of how modern concepts were formed in Near Eastern languages—that we focus, believing it to be worthwhile and fruitful to do so. To put it succinctly, whereas Topal and Wigen attempt to work beyond modern concepts, we suggest working through them, considering them historical concepts, and aiming to bring into view local variations and plural genealogies of modernity. We thereby seek to “decenter” Europe both historically and conceptually and arrive at a more plural understanding of modernity, which accounts for both commonalities and differences.

It is only under this interest that the *Sattelzeit* (Saddle Period) can be considered a useful heuristic tool. Topal and Wigen specifically caution against the *Sattelzeit* retaining a notion of Eurocentric modernity, which could lead to the neglect of “indigenous dynamics.”<sup>11</sup> The *Sattelzeit* is, indeed, intrinsically bound to modernity and has rightfully been criticized for yielding modernist and Eurocentric biases. The subsequent section will show why the *Sattelzeit* can nevertheless be conceived as a productive analytic tool, which brings into view some indigenous dynamics, and accounts

of Ottoman reform politics in the nineteenth century] (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); Heidemarie Doganalp-Votzi and Claudia Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat: Politische Terminologie des Osmanischen Reiches der Tanzimatzeit* [Rule and state: Political terminology of the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat period] (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

8. Einar Wigen, *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018); Alp Eren Topal, “From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concepts of Reform 1600–1876” (PhD diss., Bilkent University Ankara, 2017).

9. Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen, “Ottoman Conceptual History: Challenges and Prospects,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14 (2019): 93–114, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2019.140105>.

10. *Ibid.*, 103.

11. *Ibid.*

for the complexities in the multilayered formation of modernity in the Near East.

Part of this complexity results from the multiplicity of languages present and entangled in the Ottoman Empire and the Near East. This has also been pointed out by Topal and Wigen, who promote scholarly attention to several languages as being highly desirable, but equally difficult, given the necessary skills required and the current state of research.<sup>12</sup> This article concentrates on examples in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, particularly important languages, whose closely entangled conceptual history has been obscured since the Ottoman Empire's dissolution. Their entanglement with, for example, Persian, Greek, Armenian, or South Slavic contexts would ideally be included in future research. A focus on both Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, however, roots our investigation of the application of conceptual history to studying Near Eastern languages firmly within the disciplinary setting of Near Eastern Studies.

As representatives of *Islamwissenschaft*, we intervene specifically in debates within our own field of research, though we share problem spaces with other fields. The academic field of *Islamwissenschaft*, established as an offshoot of Oriental Studies after World War I, focused on Islam as a phenomenon of cultural history, rather than concentrating on philological and religious topics. The German orientalist and politician Carl H. Becker had an important influence on *Islamwissenschaft's* formation, conceiving of "the World of Islam" as a civilization worthy of serious scholarly study, with particular historical, cultural, economic structures heavily influenced by Islamic religion. Such study, he argued, should be based mainly on texts in Arabic.<sup>13</sup> Becker also postulated that Islamic civilization should be studied in conjunction with what he called the European world, based on their shared Jewish, Christian, Hellenic, and Roman heritage, and continuous interconnectedness. Whereas other of Becker's views are now outdated, these particular ideas had a lasting influence on the formation of *Islamwissenschaft* (today often erroneously assumed to be a branch of religious studies). The field now covers both religious and intellectual topics, as well as the social and po-

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12. Ibid., 94, 111.

13. Carl Heinrich Becker, "Der Islam als Problem" [Islam as a problem], *Der Islam* 1, no. 1 (1910): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam.1910.1.1.1>; and Becker, "Der Islam im Rahmen einer allgemeinen Kulturgeschichte" [Islam in the framework of a general cultural history], *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 76 (1922): 18–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43367744>; see Alexander Haridi, *Das Paradigma der "islamischen Zivilisation" – oder die Begründung der deutschen Islamwissenschaft durch Carl Heinrich Becker (1876–1933): eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* [The paradigm of "Islamic civilization" – or the foundation of German *Islamwissenschaft* by Carl Heinrich Becker (1876–1933): An investigation in the history of science] (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005).

litical histories of Near Eastern societies, complementing philological analysis with approaches from the social sciences and humanities. If we speak here of Near Eastern Studies, rather than Islamic Studies, this is because Near Eastern languages, rather than Islam, form the foundational basis of our endeavor—though the Islamic discursive tradition significantly shaped concepts in Arabic and, as a corollary, in Turkish and other languages. We prefer “Near Eastern” over “Middle Eastern,” as, although they are British and North American concepts, at least in the former case the imperialist implications have receded into the background, whereas in the latter they remain very much prominent.<sup>14</sup>

### The (Conceptual) Formation of Modernity in the Near East

A central problem space of Near Eastern Studies, into which conceptual history can fruitfully intervene, consists of the need to establish alternatives to the obsolete narrative of modernization and Westernization. This narrative, under which much of Near Eastern history had been written, was linked to the paradigm of decline, notably shared between Orientalists and Ottoman or Muslim intellectuals. There was more than one version of this decline narrative, with varying chronologies: Ottoman decline was considered to have started, for example, with the demise of Süleymân the Magnificent in 1566, in a process that lasted for several centuries. Western enlightenment and modernity was then held to have rescued the ailing patient. In its “Arab” or “Islamic” version, decline, or at best stagnation, is often said to have already set in with the Mongol conquest of Bagdad in 1258, resulting in a complete lack of originality in intellectual production. Though they seemed to have been based on sources contemporary to the posited decline, especially in the Ottoman case,<sup>15</sup> such decline narratives later served the respective in-

14. “Near East,” referring to the Ottoman domains, has been termed a “product of nineteenth-century diplomacy” (Bernard Lewis and Peter M. Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East* [London: Oxford University Press, 1962], 1–2). “Middle East,” in turn, was established in the early twentieth century and still functions as a geopolitical term. See Michael E. Bonine, Abbas Amanat, and Michael Ezekiel Gasper, eds., *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), and Osamah F. Khalil, “The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Construct of the Middle East, 1902–2007,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 299–344, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht092>.

15. See, for example, Douglas Howard, “Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of ‘Decline’ of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Asian History* 22 (1988): 52–77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41932017>; Donald Quataert, “Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes Towards the Notion of ‘Decline,’” *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-0542.038>.

terests of nationalists, imperialists, and Islamists. As scholars and students of Near Eastern Studies well know, hardly any paradigm has proven to be as nonsensical and problematic as that of perpetual, general decline.<sup>16</sup> Despite its being shown to be obsolete, the decline paradigm nonetheless produced lasting and severe consequences.<sup>17</sup> Put more constructively, it produced problems that conceptual history has the potential to solve.

A long-term effect of the prevailing view—a gloomy period hardly worth studying—is that an enormous amount of source material still awaits serious study. The practical implications of this requirement shall be addressed in greater detail in the subsequent section, but the vastness of material yet to be explored indeed poses a fundamental challenge: “The quantity of material overwhelms us. There is simply more: more authors, more manuscripts, more copyists, more readers, and more texts. Librarians estimate that more than 3 to 4 million Arabic-script manuscripts currently exist in the world, the vast majority copied in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, today stowed away in public or private collections.”<sup>18</sup>

This state of affairs has surely contributed to the fact that, after the dismantling of the narrative of decline, no new narrative for the formation of modernity in the Near East has thus far been established.<sup>19</sup> It is quite true that the notion of an “early modernity” has, by now, become rather widely accepted. However, the relation between early modern transformations and modernity leaves much still to be established. Here, one encounters

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16. The first challenges to this view actually date back more than half a century. See, for example, Norman Itzkowitz, “Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Realities,” *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 73–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595120>; Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760–1840* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1979); Reinhard Schulze, “Das islamische achtzehnte Jahrhundert: Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik” [The Islamic eighteenth century: An attempt at a historiographical critique] *Die Welt des Islams* 30 (1990): 140–159, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1571049>.

17. See Syrinx von Hees, ed., *Inhîṭāṭ - The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017).

18. Chris Gratien, Michael Polczyński, and Nir Shafir, “Digital Frontiers of Ottoman Studies,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 37–51, here 39, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jotturstuass.1.1-2.37>.

19. For this argument, see Dror Ze’evi, “Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19 (2004): 73–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951896042000256652>. A new grand narrative for the early modern Ottoman Empire has been suggested by Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Tezcan’s suggestions have turned out to be not entirely convincing, however, particularly with respect to his approach to concepts (see Rhoads Murphey, “Review of *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* by Baki Tezcan,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 3 [October 2011]: 482–484, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X11000450>).

the pitfall of teleologically identifying supposed early modern aspects with hindsight of modernity. With this in view, Olivier Bouquet has suggested to merely replace the paradigm of decline with one of “transformation,” without stating what things transformed into.<sup>20</sup> Those sharing a general skepticism toward grand narratives even argue that no new narrative ought to be aspired to. This skepticism is a welcome caution. Nevertheless, there remains a need for narratives or, more cautiously, historical models; for, if the present is understood historically, this requires a sense of how we arrived at the current position. If we, after the demise of the narrative of decline, know that the Near East did not become modern only due to external, European influence, how then did the region become modern?

The potential of conceptual history in Near Eastern Studies lies precisely in its capacity to contribute a piece to the puzzle by establishing an historical model for the formation of one central dimension of modernity, that is, its conceptual order. In doing so, conceptual history not only depends on insights of social, cultural, or political history, but can also inform other historical studies. Nevertheless, conceptual history ought to be configured as an approach in its own right, attending to a particular dimension of the human condition—namely the concepts used to interpret and organize social and political life. As Christian Geulen has noted: “The purpose and aim of studies of conceptual history consist of providing an independent contribution to the understanding of historical contexts through the analysis of meanings, connections of meanings, and transformations of meanings.”<sup>21</sup> Concerning the historical context of Near Eastern modernity, one needs to first interrogate the structure of its conceptual order before inquiring into its formation. Here, conceptual history holds both a critical and a constructive aspect: critically, it inquires into the reach and variance of modern basic concepts, while constructively, it aims at establishing a new model of the formation of modernity in the Near East.

As to the first aspect, conceptual history can critique both universalist as well as particularist postulates of modernity by establishing the actual reach and variance of socio-political concepts. By universalist postulates, we mean the largely outmoded view that there is only one version of modernity, which is epitomized, if not exclusively generated, by “the West”—wherever that

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20. Olivier Bouquet, “Du déclin à la transformation: Réflexions sur un nouveau paradigme en histoire ottomane” [From decline to transformation: Reflections on a new paradigm in Ottoman history], *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 53 (2016): 117–136, here 136, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rh19.5108>.

21. Christian Geulen, “Plädoyer für eine Geschichte der Grundbegriffe des 20. Jahrhunderts” [Plea for a history of the basic concepts of the twentieth century], *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1 (2010): 70–97, here 94, <https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-1790>, quote translated by the authors.

may be located. The rather recent interest in non-European concepts also stems from realizing the historicity, normativity, and particularity of European concepts. Stressing the particularities of different historical or cultural contexts has led some postmodern and postcolonial scholars to deny the applicability of concepts across contexts. While furthering self-reflectivity in the usage of concepts, this view can lead to a cultural relativism, which calls into question the very possibility of translation and comparison. This, it should be clear, does not do justice to the shared conditions and factual entanglements of our globalized world. On a fundamental level, then, conceptual history, and historical semantics in general, provides an alternative to the relativism of postmodernity: it acknowledges that historical contingencies, including European dominance, created a lasting conceptual order<sup>22</sup> and consequently inquires into how widely specific concepts are shared and which variations of, as well as alternatives to, these concepts are discernible.

Taking postcolonial critiques into account, European concepts nonetheless are a most fruitful starting point for discerning variations of modern concepts in Near Eastern languages, in what amounts to a heuristic Eurocentrism.<sup>23</sup> This is, first of all, for historical reasons. Precisely because modernity was formed in the colonial encounter, European concepts have often proven hegemonic, either as the dominant elaboration of more broadly shared ideas or as particular expressions that had to be engaged by speakers of Near Eastern languages. Moreover, European and non-European actors alike often perceived European influence as a decisive rupture. Today, as analytical observers, we question this notion of rupture. Still, one cannot write power out of history nor out of the concept of modernity. As Arif Dirlik put it: “Even if cosmic time reveals modernity to be an illusion, it is an illusion that continues to shape human consciousness and activity.”<sup>24</sup> Against this backdrop, it is advisable to investigate modernity and modern concepts as historical ones, rather than using them as analytical ones.<sup>25</sup>

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22. For this argument, see Michael Makropoulos, “Historische Semantik und Positivität der Kontingenz: Modernitätstheoretische Motive bei Reinhart Koselleck” [Historical semantics and positivity of contingency: Theoretical motifs of modernity at Reinhart Koselleck] in *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks* [History conceived: Contributions to the work of Reinhart Koselleck], ed. Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 481–513, esp. 482, 512.

23. For an elaboration of this approach, see Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*, 1–8, 17–26.

24. Arif Dirlik, “Thinking Modernity Historically: Is ‘Alternative Modernity’ the Answer?,” *The Asian Review of World Histories* 1 (2013): 5–44, here 40, <https://doi.org/10.12773/arwh.2013.1.1.005>.

25. Such an historical investigation is what, next to Dirlik, fundamental critics of the concept of modernity suggest as well. See, for example, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press,



This historical investigation aims at a more nuanced understanding of the plural genealogies and variations of modern concepts. It thereby seeks to complicate and undermine European hegemony, highlighting past entanglements in view of a common future. Clearly, this aim is also formulated from within a particular historical moment and a particular position. For, if modernity was constituted under the sign of colonial hegemony, we are reconsidering and rewriting it in the light of postcolonial critique. In doing so, we choose to bring modernity in through the front door and make it the very object of inquiry, rather than trying to circumvent it by identifying possible alternative histories. Such an archaeological approach, as suggested by Topal and Wigen, is indeed complementary to the one proposed here. This bi-directional complement may prove to be a necessary one. On the one hand, our genealogical approach will not bring fundamental alternatives to modernity into view. On the other hand, Topal and Wigen's focus on such alternatives might overlook the variations in modernity and leave untouched the identification of modernity as Western and as rupture. Taken together, both approaches contribute to a less Eurocentric writing of Near Eastern conceptual history and will help to modify or even replace Eurocentric basic concepts.

Hermeneutically, hegemonic European concepts allow for a broader integration of conceptual varieties and alternatives than any non-hegemonic starting point. This is the legacy of Eurocentric modernity that cannot be avoided, but rather has to be put to use productively. What is more, research conducted in Western languages in a European academic milieu inevitably employs hegemonic modern concepts. These concepts remain central, despite postmodern awareness of their historicity and normativity. Here, one goal of this heuristic Eurocentrism is to particularize hegemonic conceptualizations and broaden the applicability of central concepts of the humanities and the social sciences, by integrating additional non-hegemonic, equally particular, conceptualizations. Margrit Pernau has detailed the steps of how, departing from analytical concepts, corresponding historical concepts can be identified and subsequently integrated into modified analytical concepts.<sup>26</sup>

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2005), 113–149, esp. 115, 131, 149; Gurminder K. Bhambra, “AHR Roundtable: Historical Sociology, Modernity, and Postcolonial Critique,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 653–662, esp. 662, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.116.3.653>; Lynn M. Thomas, “AHR Roundtable: Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 727–740, esp. 739, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.116.3.727>.

26. Margrit Pernau, “Provincializing Concepts: The Language of Transnational History,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 3 (2016): 483–499, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-3699031>.

While, thus, the critique of hegemonic concepts also yields a constructive dimension of its own, it is merely the first step toward constructing an historical model of the formation of conceptual modernity in the Near East. The starting point for this construction can only be within modernity. Hermeneutically, this model is, indeed, to be constructed genealogically: it is only with the hindsight of modernity that one can trace earlier meanings and usages of those concepts that came to be central in modernity. One major consequence of this insight is that any search for origins would be in vain—hermeneutically, we can only work our way backward to the point where modern concepts dissolve and no longer make sense. This dissolution would then mark the beginning of the *Sattelzeit*. Practically, however, one mostly resorts to writing a history forward in time—a history, that is, of those concepts identified genealogically. Moreover, discerning the point when modern concepts lose their meanings requires familiarity with the earlier conceptual orders from which they evolved. This hermeneutical challenge is, in some cases, aggravated by ruptures. The Turkish language reforms from the 1920s onward, for example, made earlier Ottoman texts almost incomprehensible to untrained readers. For those that do make the effort, however, these texts are as comprehensible as any other historical form of language.<sup>27</sup> Arabic, in turn, shows much more continuity, at least on the surface. The differences, then, are not categorical, but a matter of degree. Thus, in both cases, the practice of writing conceptual history can and indeed ought to be combined with a genealogical approach.

After having, in the first step, discerned modern basic concepts, the question turns to the process of their formation. The first such concept is, indeed, *modernity* itself. Basic concepts of the modern sociopolitical order, most fundamentally *religion*, *society*, and *state*, are also shared between European and Near Eastern languages—“shared,” of course, not in the sense of being identical but in variation and contestation. Here, it is crucial to focus not only on those terms that came to be established as concepts, but also on alternatives that had been brought forward during the terminologically unstable, formative period of modernity.

Particularly with this end in mind, it is advisable to complement a semasiological approach with an onomasiological one. Thus, one would, in a first step, take the established emic terms as guiding units of analysis. To identify these terms is rather straightforward, since actors themselves have, through acts of translation and in dense networks of communication, established the relation between Arabic and Turkish on the one hand, and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French terms on the other. These

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27. For a more pessimistic estimate in this regard, see Topal and Wigen, “Ottoman Conceptual History,” 103.

terms will guide one to alternative terms, insofar as these were explicitly suggested as alternatives or appear as synonyms in texts. To additionally identify alternative terms that had been marginal and are not brought into view by the established terms would inevitably require spelling out the criteria for relating a particular term to the concept under investigation. It thereby becomes possible to identify alternative attempts at conceptualization before the establishment of basic concepts and to thus account for both ruptures and continuities.

### The *Sattelzeit* as a Metaphor and a Heuristic Tool

Considering that the *Sattelzeit*, since its name was coined almost half a century ago, has been applied, refined, criticized, and rejected in manifold ways,<sup>28</sup> it is important to recall that it was just that: a heuristic tool. Reinhart Koselleck coined the *Sattelzeit* as a heuristic device for the monumental project of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, which saw the light of day in 1972.<sup>29</sup> This project was primarily interested in the formation of basic modern social and political concepts in Germany. The core heuristic presumption (*Vorgriff*) ordering the vast material at hand was that this formation largely took place between the years 1750 and 1850. This period, in which “the past was gradually transformed into the present,” Koselleck designated as *Sattelzeit* or *Schwelldenzeit* (threshold period).<sup>30</sup>

In its basic sense, then, the *Sattelzeit* was a metaphor depicting (interest in) the formation of the modern conceptual order. It directs the focus to the transformation and contestation of terms and concepts in the terminologically varied and conceptually unstable formative period of modernity. Additionally, it facilitates communication between individual research projects, both within and across disciplines. It is linked to a set of hypotheses, but does

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28. Daniel Fulda, “Sattelzeit: Karriere und Problematik eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Zentralbegriffs” [Sattelzeit: Career and problems of a central concept in cultural studies] in *Sattelzeit: Historiographieggeschichtliche Revisionen*, ed. Elisabeth Décultot and Daniel Fulda (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 1–16.

29. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* [Basic concepts in history: A historical dictionary of political and social language in Germany] (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997).

30. Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela Richter, “Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011): 1–5, 7–25, 27–37, here 9, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2011.060102>. In the English translation, both *Sattelzeit* and *Schwelldenzeit* are rendered as “threshold period.” However, while every epoch is preceded by a threshold period, the *Sattelzeit* designates specifically the threshold to modernity.

not, as such, include a specific method.<sup>31</sup> As a heuristic tool, the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit* will appropriate, but modify, some of Koselleck's premises and will formulate specific hypotheses and points of interest.

Most fundamentally, the *Sattelzeit* was underpinned by a modernist bias: Koselleck stresses ruptures over continuities and links the *Sattelzeit* more to modernity than to the preceding era.<sup>32</sup> Thus, viewed critically, the *Sattelzeit* functions as yet another means by which modernity asserts itself as a new and self-sufficient era. The understanding of modernity as a rupture with tradition, occurring within one decisive period, already proves untenable when investigating the 122 concepts dealt with in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* itself. Furthermore, contrary to modernist assertions of modernity as self-sufficient, the establishment of the modern conceptual order did not preclude further semantic transformations. Christian Geulen has even argued that our present is separated from modernity by yet another *Sattelzeit*.<sup>33</sup> Rather than a rupture, the formation of key modern concepts is better understood as a change, with different zones of varying density and acceleration.<sup>34</sup> This is especially important when considering both ruptures and continuities in the formation of Near Eastern modernity.

In fact, Koselleck himself later problematized his own suggestion of rupture<sup>35</sup> and has conceived of each historical time as multilayered in a way that actually "defies periodization,"<sup>36</sup> as Helge Jordheim has shown:

Koselleck developed his theory of multiple temporalities, organized in the form of temporal layers that have different origins and duration and move at different speeds, as an alternative to the linear and empty time of periodization. . . . Periods, discontinuities, and structures of chronological succession form part of this theory, but so do nonsynchronicities, structures of repetition, sudden events, and slow, long-term changes.<sup>37</sup>

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31. See also Melvin Richter, "A Note on the Text of Reinhart Koselleck: 'Offene Fragen an die Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe,'" *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 54 (2012): 249–266, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24361689>.

32. Gabriel Motzkin, "On the Notion of Historical (Dis)Continuity: Reinhart Koselleck's Construction of the *Sattelzeit*," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 1 (2005): 145–158, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187465605783406244>.

33. Geulen, "Plädoyer."

34. Christoph Dipper, "Die 'Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe': Von der Begriffsgeschichte zur Theorie der historischen Zeiten" [The 'Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe': From the history of concepts to the theory of historical times] *Historische Zeitschrift* 270 (2000): 281–308, here 294.

35. Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 151–171, here 156, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2012.00619.x>.

36. *Ibid.*, esp. 157.

37. *Ibid.*, 170–171.

This multilayeredness of time, the co-existence and interaction of different times, is indeed a constitutive feature of the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit*. With concepts within one language already holding different temporal layers (*Zeitschichten*), further complexity is added by the entanglements of different languages. In the formation of Near Eastern modernity, entanglements with concepts coined in, or epitomized by, “leading” European countries received a new quality of density, permanence and practical relevance. In addressing questions of modernity, Near Eastern actors engaged with European concepts and ideas, but also drew on their own discursive traditions. In this light, the fissure between the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation,” identified by Koselleck,<sup>38</sup> gains additional relevance. The aspect of temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*), which Koselleck named as one of the four trends of the *Sattelzeit*,<sup>39</sup> is thus included as a hypothesis in the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit*. However, one must not expect this trend to have been linear nor to have ever led to one exclusive temporal regime. Rather, the modern regime of time co-existed and intersected with other temporal dimensions, often linked to the intersection of languages. Thus, if each historical time holds multiple temporalities, the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit* is the time in which other temporalities were related to, if not measured against, the empty homogeneous time of modernity, usually on a scale of progress.<sup>40</sup>

### Dating the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit*

As should be clear from the preceding section, the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit* is not a period with a clearly demarcated beginning or end. Rather, under a specific interest in the formation of modern concepts, it marks an initial space for observation. It depicts a zone of condensed and accelerated conceptual change in which basic modern concepts were established. These concepts serve as a starting point from which to inquire into the means and trajectories of this formation. This does not at all preclude earlier semantic transformations becoming relevant in modernity. Beyond individual concepts, this also holds true for overarching processes of temporalization or

38. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–275.

39. See also Margrit Pernau, “Einführung: Neue Wege der Begriffsgeschichte” [Introduction: New ways of conceptual history] *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44 (2018): 5–28, here 15–17, <https://doi.org/10.13109/gege.2018.44.1.5>.

40. On the attempted, but never fully realized, synchronization of multiple times under modern time and its notion of progress, see Helge Jordheim, “Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization,” *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 498–518, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10728>.

politicization. Not least to avoid teleological readings, and to allow for historical contingencies, a genealogical approach allows us to bring these earlier transformations into view. Correspondingly, “modernity” and modern concepts must be treated as historical categories, and European hegemony would be considered inscribed into modernity. Under these considerations, the years between 1850 and 1950 are a plausible candidate for initially dating the *Sattelzeit* for Near Eastern languages, since this was a time of exceptionally dense and accelerated conceptual change, and of major sociopolitical transformations.

Both conceptual and sociopolitical transformations are tied to the heightened interaction with European powers and to the engagement with European concepts. While interaction was, of course, not novel, it now occurred on a permanent and unequal basis, and thus, alongside domestic factors such as politics of civilization and public education, firmly contributed to the establishment of both sociopolitical institutions and concepts.<sup>41</sup> That particular attention is paid to the role of European concepts is also the result of the legacy of Near Eastern Studies, as elaborated in the previous section.

It was also in this time period that the concept of “the modern age” was established in Arabic and Turkish. While a history of the present Arabic term for “modernity,” *ḥadātha*, is still lacking, this term seems to have become established only after the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> However, the attributes of “modern,” “new,” or “novel” (*‘aṣrī, ḥadīth, jadīd*) had come to be increasingly used in a normative sense throughout the nineteenth century. More significantly still, actors used the concepts of “the new age” (*al-‘aṣr al-jadīd*)<sup>43</sup> or even of simply “the age” (*al-‘aṣr*) to express their sense of what was later grasped by the concept of “modernity.” This is, for example, prominently visible in an editorial on “The Spirit of the Age” (*rūḥ al-‘aṣr*) in 1870 published in the journal *al-Jinān*, founded and edited by the Christian intellectual Buṭrus al-Bustānī and his son Salīm al-Bustānī.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the Islamic intellectual Rashīd Riḍā, in the first issue of his journal *al-Manār* in 1898, admonishes

41. For the expansion of schooling since the second half of the nineteenth century, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), and Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

42. For later usages, see Nils Riecken, “Modernity, Ḥadātha, and Modernité in the Works of Abdallah Laroui: Conceptual Translation and the Politics of Historicity,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14 (2019): 67–90, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2019.140204>.

43. This was also the title of an Egyptian journal founded in 1880; see Rebban, *Geschichte und Funktion*, 6.

44. See Buṭrus Abu-Manneh, “The Christians between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Buṭrus Al-Bustani,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 3 (1980): 287–304, here 296, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800054647>.

his readers to “know that this age is the age of science and of action (*‘aşr al-‘ilm wa-l-‘amal*); so he who knows and acts will rule, and he who is ignorant and lazy will perish.”<sup>45</sup> In 1933, Riḍā translated the very term “modernism” as *rūḥ al-‘aşr*.<sup>46</sup> These few examples show that when treating “modernity” as an historical category in Arabic, one can, at least to some extent, fill the hole that the absence of “modernity” leaves in the center of the semantic web of modernity,<sup>47</sup> namely by attending to *al-‘aşr* and its related terms.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Turkish, the term *modern* (taken from French) is usually connected with progress, an idealized West, as well as often with wealth and beauty (depending on the author, of course, and including ironic usage). In dictionaries, the analogue in post-language reform Turkish is *çağdaş* (*çağa uygun*, *çağcu*), literally contemporary, and both are taken to mean the opposite of traditional.<sup>48</sup> In late Ottoman publications and administrative correspondence, modernity was inextricably linked to civilization (*medeniyet*), so that civilizing and modernizing appear to be intended simultaneously by neologisms such as *medenileşme*.<sup>49</sup> This tendency seems to have continued under Kemalist auspices in *modernleşme* and *çağdaşlaşma*, both meaning modernizing or modernization. Atatürk’s concept of modernity aimed at lifting Turkey’s “national culture to the level of contemporary civilization”<sup>50</sup> in order to share in the modern (i.e., Western) world’s blessings. *Çağdaşlaşma*, in particular, is often connected to secularism, as opposed to “religionization” (*dinselleşme*).<sup>51</sup>

45. Rashid Riḍā, “Fātiḥat al-sana al-ülā” [Editorial of the first year], *al-Manār* 1, no. 1 (1898): 9–14, here 10.

46. Rashid Riḍā, “al-Ḥāja ilā ḥādhihi al-tarjama” [The need for this translation], *al-Manār* 33, no. 7 (1933): 536–542, here 537.

47. The expression of a “hole in the center of a semantic web” (originally with reference to Urdu concepts of modernity) is taken from Margrit Pernau, “Die gefühlte Moderne: Emotionen und Begriffsgeschichte in Nordindien, 1870–1920” [The felt modernity: Emotions and conceptual history in North India, 1870–1920], *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44 (2018): 54–78, here 57, <https://doi.org/10.13109/gege.2018.44.1.54>.

48. Şükrü Halûk Akalın, Recep Toparlı, Gürer Gülsevin, Mustafa Öner, Erdoğan Boz, Hatice Şirin, Özkan Özteken, Özgür Ay, Mehmet Yasin Kaya, Yücel Dağlı, Şefik Bilâl Çavuşoğlu, eds., *Türkçede batı kökenli kelimeler sözlüğü* [A dictionary of words of Western origin in Turkish] (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 2015), <https://sozluk.gov.tr> (accessed 30 May 2020).

49. Doganalp-Votzi and Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat*, 71.

50. “Millî kültürümüzü muasır medeniyet seviyesinin üstüne çıkarmak,” cited in Cengiz Dönmez and İrem Namlı Altıntaş, “Atatürk’ün Çağdaşlık ve Evrensellik Anlayışı Açısından Üniversite Reformuna Bir Bakış” [A look at university reform from the perspective of Atatürk’s concepts of modernity and universality] *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 54 (2014): 71–106, here 77.

51. See Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma* [Modernization in Turkey] (Ankara: Bilgi Yayinevi, 1973).

A major arena for the contestation and establishment of modern concepts was the private press. Whereas in 1860 the private press was non-existent in Arab lands, newspapers and journals mushroomed in subsequent decades. To give an idea of this tremendous development: between 1876 and 1914, a total of 849 Arabic newspapers and journals were founded in Egypt alone. After the abolition of censorship in the Ottoman Empire, more than 1,200 publishing licenses for periodicals in Turkish were applied for just in 1908 and 1909.<sup>52</sup> Periodicals in other languages could be added, and several journals also published books through their own presses. Concerning the intersection of multiple temporalities, it is worth further noting the fact that most journals and print publications gave the dates in both the Islamic and the Rūmī calendars,<sup>53</sup> sometimes alongside an additional third calendar. Many journals, moreover, had a decidedly transnational outreach, responded to readers from all over the world, and included reprints and translations from a variety of publications. Since terms and concepts become established in contestation and through repetition, the press formed an unprecedentedly dense and wide-reaching zone of communication, in which modern concepts were produced and established.

We thus conceive of this zone as a productive problem space. Historically, it was at this time that basic modern concepts became established, in a contested process between different actors. Rival terms to those that came to be established as basic concepts, therefore, still featured prominently during that period. A case in point is that the classical Arabic-Islamic term *umma*, while retaining its previous semantic layers, jostled with other terms over the shared semantic field of society, before the concept of society came to crystallize in the term *mujtamaʿ*—that is, *mujtamaʿ* became the basic Arabic concept of society.<sup>54</sup> Discerning such rival terms is crucial in order to inquire into the genealogy of modern basic concepts. For, to continue with this example, the reference of *mujtamaʿ* to the overall social collectivity stems only from the nineteenth century, whereas *umma* had already referred to a social collectivity long before.<sup>55</sup> The question then arises as to when and how this

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52. Ami Ayalon, “The Press and Publishing,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 6, *Muslims and Modernity; Culture and Society since 1800*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 572–596, here 579. For the Turkish language press after 1908, see Erol Baykal, *The Ottoman Press, 1908–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), esp. 44–45.

53. The Rūmī or Māliye calendar was based on the solar Julian calendar but started with the year of the Hijra (622 CE).

54. Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition*.

55. See Ulrich Haarmann, “Glaubensvolk und Nation im islamischen und lateinischen Mittelalter” [Community of faith and nation in the Islamic and Latin Middle Ages], in *Berichte und Abhandlungen*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.



social collectivity came to be conceived as modern society—to what extent did this occur in reaction to French and English concepts of society, and to what extent did it continue earlier semantic transformations? The *Sattelzeit*, then, is that contested, conceptually unstable, and varied space in which the historical production of modern basic concepts becomes visible.

As also indicated in the preceding example, the *Sattelzeit* has to be conceived of as a stretchable space. That is to say: while starting out with a focus on the conceptually most dense and productive time, between 1850 and 1950, we do not at all posit that it was only during this time that modern concepts were produced. Rather, we ask which meanings and usages of the basic concepts visible in this period were coined only then, and which can be traced back to earlier times. The answers to this question will vary in a number of respects: topics, genres, the range of actors using a certain concept, and the theoretical and practical dimensions involved. Of course, semantic transformations did not end in 1950. However, the basic concepts of sociopolitical order seem to have been established by then, and, tellingly, they remain the concepts postmodern thought now critiques. That said, our interest is less in the transition from modernity to late modernity or postmodernity, but rather in the formation and genealogy of modernity. This inevitably necessitates systematic inclusion of source material produced in the decades prior to the presumed threshold around 1850. The *Sattelzeit* thus problematizes the question of conceptual ruptures and continuities on different levels, and thereby aims at establishing a model that accounts for this complexity in the formation of Near Eastern modernity.

## Languages and Sources

While translating, interpreting, and adapting concepts from European languages into Near Eastern ones played a key role in the establishment of modernity, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian nevertheless remained entangled with each other. From the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, Turkish was the language of politics, the military, and administration in the Ottoman Empire, while literary Arabic retained a special status as a language of law, religion, and learning. Both linguistic spheres remained in close contact for centuries, and only became increasingly disentangled over the course of the twentieth century. The entanglement of Arabic and Turkish is obvious in the Syrian and Iraqi provinces, but also true in regions further afield, such

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ten (1996): 2:161–199; Nāṣif Naṣṣār, *Maḥmūd al-umma bayn al-dīn wa-l-tārīkh: Dirāsa fī madlūl al-umma fī al-turāth al-‘arabī al-islāmī* [The concept of *umma* between religion and history: A study on the meaning of *umma* in the Arab-Islamic heritage] (1978; repr., Beirut: Dār al-ṭalī‘a li-l-ṭibā‘a wa-l-nashr, 2003).

as Egypt<sup>56</sup> or Algeria.<sup>57</sup> Nationalist historiographies, however, have downplayed these close links that once bridged what one would today perceive as ethnic, linguistic, or religious divisions. Indeed, this contact connected, especially on the elite level, speakers not only of Turkish and Arabic,<sup>58</sup> but also of Slavic, Greek, Armenian, and more.<sup>59</sup> However, conceptual exchange between these languages remains understudied and underestimated. The task of a Near Eastern history of concepts is thus complicated by the fact that it has to take into account long-term multilingualism and multireligiosity, including the hierarchies and power relationships this interconnectedness entailed.

Near Eastern source material tends to pose greater challenges than most European contexts, not least as an effect of the aforementioned decline paradigm. Only a limited number of texts are available in scholarly critical editions; in many cases one has to refer to prints that are not always reliable, or else to manuscripts. What is more, the aim of conceptual history to be more than just intellectual history, requires the inclusion of a broad range of sources.<sup>60</sup> After the material turn, this potentially also includes non-linguistic sources.<sup>61</sup> To integrate concrete cultural practice and social history into intellectual discourse remains a considerable challenge, but is necessary to achieve an adequately comprehensive perspective. Research in conceptual history of the Near East therefore needs to include a broad range of different

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56. Şâlih, Şâlih Sa'dâwî and Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *al-Thaqāfa al-turkiyya fî Mişr. Jawānib min al-tafā'ul al-ḥadāri bayn al-mişriyyîn wa-l-atrāk, ma'a mu'jam al-alfāz al-turkiyya fî l-āmmiyya al-mişriyya* [Turkish culture in Egypt: Aspects of cultural interaction between Egyptians and Turks, with a list of Turkish expressions in Egyptian colloquial Arabic] (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2003).

57. Tal Shual, "The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000): 323–344, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800021127>.

58. Ehud R. Toledano, "The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700–1800): A Framework for Research," in *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within*, ed. Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma'oz (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), 145–162.

59. See Johann Strauss, "An den Ursprüngen des modernen politischen Wortschatzes des Osmanisch-Türkischen" [At the origins of the modern political vocabulary of Ottoman Turkish], in *"Herrschaft" und "Staat": Untersuchungen zum Zivilisationswortschatz im südosteuropäischen Raum 1840–1870. Eine erste Bilanz* ["Rule" and "state": Studies on civilizational vocabulary in Southeastern Europe, 1840–1870; a first assessment], ed. Radoslav Katičić (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 195–256.

60. Rolf Reichardt, "Allgemeine Bibliographie, Einleitung," [General bibliography, introduction] vol. 1–2, *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680–1820* [A handbook of basic political and social concepts in France, 1680–1820], ed. Rolf Reichardt, Eberhardt Schmitt, and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (Munich: De Gruyter, 1985): 39–148, here 63.

61. Pernau, "Einführung," 26–27.

texts, from scholarly works to administrative and, as far as possible, “popular” sources. While the following presentation of different source types accounts for the extent of their variety, we particularly highlight those sources that promise to be especially fruitful for exploring the conceptual formation of modernity through both continuities and ruptures.

The limited number of studies dedicated to Near Eastern conceptual history has mostly remained on the high-brow *Höhenkamm* level. Researchers typically consulted dictionaries and encyclopedias, journals, histories, and learned treatises, which were generally products of the intellectual elite or rather a section thereof. Even these sources are far from having been sufficiently investigated, though. For instance, writings on political ethics should be studied more closely for conceptual change or re-interpretations, and the publications of the “Ottopol” project, led by Marinos Sariyannis, provide invaluable guidance for the centuries preceding the putative *Sattelzeit*.<sup>62</sup> Thus, with the neglect of intellectual history in the supposed period of decline and the novelty of conceptual research in our field, even elitist sources merit greater attention than they have so far received.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the belated acceptance of printing technology limits the quantity of books and low-brow publications in comparison to Europe after the printing revolution.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, newspapers and journals remain a most pertinent and promising set of sources, as periodicals lend themselves to the study of contentious usage and conflicts over meaning. With appropriate digital processing, newspapers and journals can be utilized as corpora for serial, lexicometric, or connotational analyses. Periodicals published over a longer period of time allow the identification of terminological and conceptual trends, and those with a translocal outreach allow that of transregional networks of communication and of interlingual conceptual interaction. For example, journalists and activists from Iran, and the Indo-British, Ottoman, and Russian Empires published articles in Ottoman or Tatar Turkish, Arabic, Urdu, and Persian, related to the constitutional revolutions in Iran, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire in 1905–1908. Moreover, while most authors were educated urban literati, periodicals aimed at a wider audience: they were read aloud on the streets, some even experimented with vernacular language and included pictures to reach the less educated.<sup>64</sup> Thus, periodicals form rich sources for discerning the contested

62. Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); see also the project website: <http://ottopol.ims.forth.gr> (accessed 22 June 2020).

63. See Topal and Wigen, “Ottoman Conceptual History,” 97–98.

64. Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 124.

formation of modern key concepts, in the translocal and interlingual public discourses of Near Eastern societies.

This potential is enhanced by the increasing possibilities of the Digital Humanities (DH), which have started to make their way into Near Eastern Studies. An edited volume, published in 2016, pinpoints the basic potentials and challenges of DH in our field;<sup>65</sup> larger conferences and projects underline the ongoing dynamics in this regard, as do the many technical articles of rather short-lived significance.<sup>66</sup> As of today, using DH to process texts in Arabic script often proves as frustrating as it is productive. Nevertheless, given the ongoing development of DH in Near Eastern Studies, the glass is clearly half full rather than half empty, and it is certain that enhanced possibilities of DH in the not-so-distant future will not only assist with carrying out research projects, but will more often figure in the very design of projects.

A wealth of source material is provided by digital repositories containing full texts of works that had been referred to for centuries and/or were constituted as Islamic “classics” during the *Sattelzeit*.<sup>67</sup> There are also databases relevant for down-to-earth issues, as recorded in court registers. Probably the most comprehensive digitized series of this type is the collection of *ḳāḍī* court registers from Istanbul, encompassing about forty thousand entries.<sup>68</sup> This is still a small subset of the total: published in print, they comprise forty volumes of registers, out of approximately ten thousand in total, just covering historical Constantinople, Galata, Üsküdar, and Eyüp. Converted into Latin characters, this selection of metropolitan material is indexed and fully searchable, so that practical usage can be traced and related to, for example, jurists’ theoretical treatises. It has to be kept in mind, however, that rendering Ottoman Turkish into Latin script not only may contain transcription errors, but often entails interpretation on the part of the person who inserted vowels and other elements absent in the original.

Administrative and legal records kept at *ḳāḍī* courts throughout the Ottoman Empire form a massive body of source material, with the Turkish Na-

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65. Elias Muhanna, ed., *The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

66. For a useful overview, see Digital Islamic Humanities Project, “Resources,” <https://islamicdh.org/resources/> (accessed 4 January 2019) and Digital Ottoman Studies, “Home,” <https://www.digitalottomanstudies.com> (29 January 2021); see also Lambertus Willem Cornelis van Lit, *Among Digitized Manuscripts: Philology, Codicology, Paleography in a Digital World* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

67. See especially al-Maktaba al-Shāmīla, <http://shamela.ws/> (accessed 14 August 2021) and al-Warrāq, <http://www.alwaraq.net> (accessed 14 August 2021). For the constitution of Islamic classics, see Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

68. İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri, <http://www.kadısicilleri.org> (accessed 14 January 2019).

tional Library in Ankara<sup>69</sup> and two dozen other successor states each holding thousands more volumes of court registers. The overwhelming quantity and potential of archival sources is, however, epitomized by the Ottoman section of the Turkish National Archives, containing an estimated 95 million individual documents and 400,000 volumes of registers.<sup>70</sup> It is true that the number of manuscripts, and even printed books, in Ottoman Turkish was much smaller than that of books printed in major European languages, and that printing in Arabic and Turkish only took root in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> However, it has to be kept in mind that Ottoman book collections contained large numbers of books written not only in Turkish, but in several languages, particularly Arabic. For instance, the Süleymaniye collection in Istanbul alone encompasses more than 88,000 manuscripts,<sup>72</sup> about 80 percent of which are in Arabic. Alongside such largely scholarly collections, unknown quantities of low-brow sources remain in private hands, such that the depths of Ottoman sources are far from exhausted.

Prescriptive legal texts, by contrast, might not, at first glance, seem to be very fruitful with regard to conceptual history, as they retain their technical terminology in spite of societal or political changes. However, precisely because of their terminological stability, they lend themselves to long-term analysis and provide relevant material in the realm of jurists' law (*sharī'a*, *şerī'at*), as well as in edicts and regulations promulgated in royal decrees, and, since the nineteenth century, codified law.<sup>73</sup> For a study of long-term changes in legal concepts, provincial law codes and collections of executive orders (sing. *kānūnnāme*) may prove just as fruitful, because of their restrictiveness on the one hand and their relatedness to varying local circumstances on the other. In the nineteenth century, law codes (*niḡāmnāmes*) were promulgated for European and Asian provinces alike (for example, Mount Leb-

69. Yunus Uğur, "Mahkeme Kayıtları (Şer'îye Sicilleri): Literatür Değerlendirmesi ve Bibliyografya" [Court records (judicial registers): A literature overview and bibliography], *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2003): 305–344, here 309.

70. T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi* [Guide to the prime minister's Ottoman archives] (Istanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017), 3.

71. On the relative scarcity of Ottoman Turkish manuscripts, see Topal and Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History," 108.

72. For details, see Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, <http://www.suleymaniyeyek.gov.tr> (accessed 25 July 2020). The number does not include Ottoman prints and several further collections under Süleymaniye's supervision.

73. See Doganalp-Votzi and Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat*; Avi Rubin, "Modernity as a Code: The Ottoman Empire and the Global Movement of Codification," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016): 828–856, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341415>.

anon, Crete, or the Danubian principalities),<sup>74</sup> establishing conceptual links between regions and communities across the empire, which have not been explored so far.

If the objective is, however, to analyze concrete past communication in which conceptual usage was embedded,<sup>75</sup> attention should be paid not so much to the occurrence of novel usages as indications of change, but rather to contentious usage: to the shaping and negotiating of concepts and arguments in a specific communicative situation. In this case, it is helpful to focus on conceptual clusters, semantic networks and fields, or even metaphor, performance, and narrative pertaining to a context or argument, to carve out concepts that might not even have been expressed by a specific word. Willibald Steinmetz therefore suggests that, to explain semantic change, it is necessary to study short-term changes of practice (*Mikrodiachonie*).<sup>76</sup> For these purposes, the archival record of everyday administrative practice deserves special attention.<sup>77</sup> Its language may be shaped by jargon and administrative necessities or standardized by requirements of the supplication process, but it is precisely this external standardization and stereotyping, however, that renders changes visible.

Petitions and complaints addressed to the provincial or imperial government provide a particular wealth of material for observing changes in vocabulary and strategy, precisely because their authors had to conform to bureaucratic standards and expectations. This communication was regulated by political norms and governmental discourse, on the one hand, and by a process of interpretation and translation into bureaucratic parlance on the other. This was because the main actors in this process, apart from the complainants, were professional petition scribes (sing. *'arzuḥālci*) who acted as interpreters between a particular local context and provincial or metropolitan authorities, and often also between another language

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74. See Erkan Tural and Selim Çapar, eds., *1864 Vilayet nizamnamesi* [The provincial regulations of 1864] (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 2015), esp. 370–373, 384–393, 401–420.

75. See Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504188>.

76. Willibald Steinmetz, “40 Jahre Begriffsgeschichte: The State of the Art,” in *Sprache – Kognition – Kultur: Sprache zwischen mentaler Struktur und kultureller Prägung* [Language – cognition – culture: Language between mental structure and cultural imprint], ed. Heidrun Kämper and Ludwig M. Eichinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 174–97, here 183.

77. See, for example, Reinkowski, *Die Dinge der Ordnung*, and Marc Aymes, “*Un Grand Progrès—sur le papier*”: *Histoire provinciale des réformes ottomanes à Chypre au XIXe siècle* [“A great progress – on Paper”: A provincial history of Ottoman reforms in Cyprus in the nineteenth century] (Paris: Peeters, 2010).

and Ottoman Turkish.<sup>78</sup> Petitions were, whenever possible, delivered in Turkish.<sup>79</sup>

The degree, variation, and historical development of this standardization have so far not been explored, but the centrality of these processes of translation and interpretation for political communication across the empire can hardly be overestimated. Within this framework, the change and negotiation of concepts, arguments, and strategies, as well as contentious usages and practices, had to take place when these were taken down in writing. Precisely because of the strict norms of governmental discourse, and the risks associated with the highly power-laden context, even slight changes are significant. Analyzing the pragmatics of political language as an historical phenomenon is facilitated by the fact that Ottoman complaint petitions have been preserved in large quantities, starting from the seventeenth century and continuing well into the twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> Concepts particularly used in complaint petitions, such as justice, order, dependence, or protection may also link these relatively “vernacular” texts to intellectual genres like political ethics or legal treatises.

Inside and outside of the bureaucracy, the ways of conceptualizing and categorizing differed. For instance, a local chronicler, scholar, or journalist-intellectual may construct social groups in a rather different way from a census official sent from the capital or a foreign traveler, let alone the classified people themselves. Accordingly, different types of sources—from census registers and official annals, to local histories, memoirs, or journalistic essays—may be combined to achieve a more comprehensive picture. Categorization would also change depending on purpose, with a different outcome in matters of taxation than in matters of recruitment, for exam-

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78. See, for example, Michael Ursinus, *Grievance Administration (Şikayet) in an Ottoman Province: The Kaymakam of Rumelia's "Record Book of Complaints" of 1781–1783* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005); Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: Tauris, 2013).

79. Some examples are studied in Henning Sievert, *Tripolitanië und Bengasi um 1900: Wissen, Vermittlung und politische Kommunikation* [Tripolitania and Benghazi around 1900: Knowledge, intermediation and political communication] (Istanbul/Baden-Baden: Ergon, 2020). Turkish continued to be used in petitions even in semi-autonomous Egypt; see Naşir ‘Abdallāh ‘Uthmān and Aḥmad Zakariyyā al-Shalluq, eds., *al-Sulṭa wa-‘arḍuḥālāt al-maẓlūmīn min ‘aṣr Muḥammad ‘Alī, 1820–1823 m.* [Power and petitions of the oppressed from the time of Muḥammad ‘Alī, 1820–1823 after the Gregorian calendar] (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-wathā‘iq al-qawmiyya, 2009), esp. 7–8. The petitions in this collection were translated into Arabic in the 1920s.

80. Henning Sievert, “Intermediaries and Local Knowledge in a Changing Political Environment: Complaints from Libya at the Turn of the 20th Century,” *Die Welt des Islams* 54, no. 3–4 (2014): 322–362, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-05434P03>.

ple. Since belonging to a particular group or category had important consequences, these classifications and processes were bound to be contentious.<sup>81</sup>

Combining different perspectives and types of sources is crucial, both for analyzing conceptual transformations, and for tracing long-term change. To illustrate the first point, significant changes and the process of determining new meaning can be observed by studying the records of reform institutions. Periodicals published in various languages in the Ottoman Empire also show marked differences between the years before and after 1908. Rapid change during the following years can further be traced through periodicals from all over the empire, as well as through the extant parliamentary records from the Ottoman chamber of deputies, into the period of the Turkish Republic.

Concerning a medium-term perspective, archival documentation enables researchers to trace contentious usages and conceptual change with regard to a certain place, institution, or field of administration, either combining it with various types of sources to achieve a “thick” coverage of that area or scouring just one type over a longer period to identify subtle changes. Apart from the language and strategies of petitions, this is reflected, for example, in official reports from remote regions, commenting on vernacular as opposed to governmental usage. Combining petitions with reports may also throw some light on how the subjects reacted to and (re-)interpreted reform decrees, to transcend the internal discourse of reform treatises and bureaucratic soliloquy.<sup>82</sup> This, in fact, was not so much a monologue, but an indirect conversation, often enough with (at least perceived or imagined) proponents of Western progress and civilization.

Further levels of complexity are added by the reception and re-interpretation of, for example, twelfth- or seventeenth-century discourse by nineteenth-century Ottoman writers, and by continuous contact with neighboring regions in Europe and Asia, long before Western political dominance. The complexity is further compounded by the Near East’s plurality in linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious terms within a context of thousands of years of literacy. However, it provides ample opportunity for unexpected findings and relations, and can assist in a rethinking of “Western” concepts. Therefore, the entanglement of Arabic and Turkish with other languages contributes greatly to the relevance of Near Eastern Studies for conceptual history.

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81. See Henning Sievert, “Klassifizierung und Privilegien von osmanischen Untertanen: Einige Beispiele aus Kleinasien und Südosteuropa im 18. Jahrhundert” [Classification and privileges of Ottoman subjects: some examples from eighteenth-century Asia Minor and Southeastern Europe], *Dhau – Jahrbuch für außereuropäische Geschichte* 5 (2020): 85–112.

82. See Reinkowski, *Die Dinge der Ordnung*, and Tobias Heinzlmann, “The Ruler’s Monologue: The Rhetoric of the Ottoman Penal Code of 1858,” *Die Welt des Islams* 54 (2014): 292–321, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-05434P02>.



## Outlook: Near Eastern Studies and Conceptual History

Having argued for the potential of conceptual history in Near Eastern Studies, we want to also briefly point to what conceptual history more broadly can gain from this field of research. Two central characteristics that become especially visible in the Near Eastern *Sattelzeit* are the intersection of multiple temporalities, and the entanglements of languages. While multiple temporalities can be interrogated by research on one particular language, Near Eastern conceptual history forcefully underlines the need to reflect upon the factual historical entanglements of languages in the very setup of one's research. This also has implications for research on European concepts: they, too, cannot be studied in isolation, and they certainly cannot be considered a standard to which non-European concepts are to be subsequently compared. Integrating different languages and contexts in the setup of one's research enriches the understanding of all parts involved, which often mutually affected each other and only approach something like a whole when taken together.

Conceptual history here is to be viewed within the wider relationship between non-European and European fields of knowledge and the relationship between the disciplines ploughing these fields. The hegemony of Europe, as the only empirical and historical context considered worthy of theorizing, has long been criticized, but is still far from being overcome. Researchers within Near Eastern Studies continuously need to borrow their methodologies, theories, and concepts from other disciplines, be it sociology, literature, political science, linguistics, or history. Too rarely do they manage to have their findings speak back to the disciplines they borrowed from. Against this background, conceptual history is especially well suited for integrating different disciplines and diverse fields of knowledge on equal terms.

After all, the structuring unit of conceptual history is language, which is in itself less normative and less hierarchical than the idea of different civilizations, not to mention "the West" and "the Islamic world." Of course, the status of different languages varies greatly across time and region, but also across genre—and the current hegemony of English in academia is a case in point. However, precisely such varying status must form part of the analysis of any given language. Conceptual history also turns "civilization," "the West," or "the Islamic world" into an object of analysis, inquiring into their historicity and normativity, rather than using them as supposedly descriptive analytical categories themselves. In this line of inquiry, Arabic, Turkish, or Persian conceptualizations of, for example, civilization are on an equal footing with English, French, or Korean conceptualizations of the same concept. These conceptualizations mutually provincialize each other and only

taken together do they approach a more general concept.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, Near Eastern conceptual histories add pieces to a greater picture, of which European conceptual histories, too, only form part.

This basic insight holds consequences on at least two levels: one concerns the categories of the humanities and the social sciences themselves. To take their historicity seriously means that categories of broader applicability can only be attained by taking up the historical experiences and empirical configurations of the different contexts these categories are to be applied to; in other words, to construct broader categories through integrating different conceptualizations, rather than taking Europe or the West as the only context able to produce theoretical categories. A second, but closely related, level concerns the historical production of not only individual concepts, but also of the different contexts in which they are produced and to which they are applied. That is to say: one should not only integrate European and non-European conceptualizations, but, on another level, one also has to inquire into the production of Europe and its others as supposedly distinct contexts. To take the insights of global or entangled histories seriously is to acknowledge that they do not merely present one possible approach, combining and integrating different histories, but rather that no writing of any of these histories would be possible in isolation.

Due to geographical proximity, as well as to intellectual, political, economic, and military interaction, the entanglements between Near Eastern and European societies were especially strong. Inquiring into these entanglements is thus enlightening both for the Near East and for Europe. For, oddly enough given its proximity, the Near East came to function as Europe's primary other, especially when reference is made to Islam. Given the heuristic Eurocentrism sketched above, and our suggestion of combining conceptual history and genealogy, it ought to be clear that the conceptual formation of "Europe" and the "Near East" itself is also to be interrogated.

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83. Concerning the concept of civilization, see, for example, Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Orit Bashkin, Christian Bailey, Oleg Benesch, Jan Ifversen, Mana Kia, Rochona Majumdar, Angelika C. Messner, Myoung-kyu Park, Emmanuelle Saada, Mohinder Singh, and Einar Wigen, *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).