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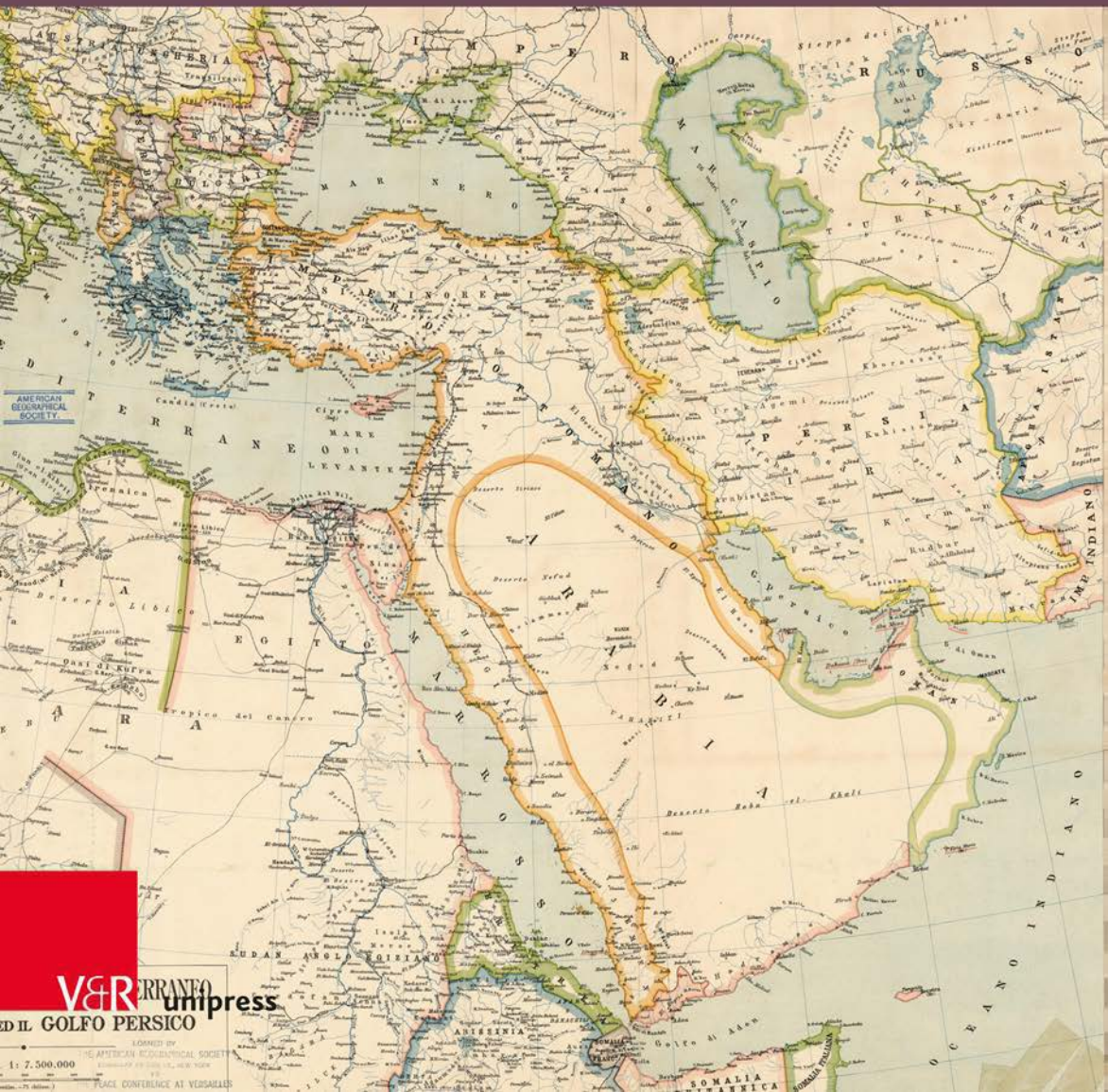
From the Frontiers of the Empire to the Borders of the Nations

Borderland Security and Safety in the (post-)Ottoman Spaces (1700–1939)



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Jovan Pešalj (Leiden University)

Preface

The past can surprise us. It is a foreign country where things were different,[1] yet it can also feel familiar, being oddly similar to our recent experiences or concerns. This volume provides both types of insight, the perspectives relevant for global history and continuities that did not lose much of their significance in the world today. This is a book about a large, multi-continental empire, the Ottoman Empire, its center and its peripheries in the Balkans and North Africa, as well as the successor states. Its chapters cover the period between approximately 1800 and 1945. This is not a comprehensive survey. Instead, it presents a series of case studies, which tell a story of how different polities and societies experienced change, how they were affected by it, and how they responded.

The world was becoming increasingly connected and these regions were part of that process. Some of the forces of change were new, such as technological innovations, modern modes of transport, and the rise in intercontinental traffic. Others were new developments within longer trends, such as the shifting balance of economic and political power, which was slow but brought significant consequences for the region and for the world. The agents of change were varied. Some were external, including pressure from Western states, which gained increasing economic, military, and political power, as well as the growing interconnectedness of the world economy. Others were internal, such as social changes and the push for economic and political modernization. Some changes resulted from a combination of internal and external influences, for example the development of sanitary administration.

As we do in the present, the people in the nineteenth-century world had to confront profound and often unsettling changes. The economic relations between different regions intensified. Travel became faster, and the volume of traffic increased. As a result, distant regions appeared closer and more connected than ever before. For the Ottoman Empire, that was partly a continuation of previous trends. In 1718, following a trade treaty with the Habsburg Monarchy,

1 Leslie Poles Hartley, *The Go-Between* (Hamish Hamilton, 1953).

land-based commerce began to expand rapidly. A growing number of actors entered the market, including a new class of domestic merchants. International trade connected central parts of the Balkan Peninsula to markets in Central Europe and the Mediterranean, particularly to Trieste. Ottoman Christians, Muslims, and Jews took part in this commercial expansion. They traveled further and traded in a wider variety of goods. Internal Ottoman markets became increasingly tied to international economic structures, and local populations were drawn into broader social and political developments.

These developments could have some unexpected consequences. What happened in one part of the world could have effects in places far away. This volume shows what these effects looked like from the perspective of a country that was on the receiving end of global transformations, the Ottoman Empire. For example, cheaper shipping, provided by Britain as the leading naval power of the time, made Muslim pilgrimages from British India to the holy sites more accessible to a wider range of people. Along with the travelers, other living organisms began to move faster and over greater distances. One of these was the cholera bacterium. Previously rare in other regions of the world, cholera began to spread from India along the same shipping routes. It reached the holy sites, under Ottoman rule, and from there continued along trade routes in the Ottoman Empire to almost every shore of the Mediterranean. The resulting outbreaks caused high mortality, particularly in urban areas across Europe. At the same time, economic changes helped to integrate regional economies into the global system, and also contributed to what has been described here as the sanitary unification of the Mediterranean.

Some changes were deeply destabilizing. The global shift in economic, military, and political power towards Western Europe was felt keenly by the Ottoman Empire, especially its periphery. European merchants from selected countries had long enjoyed privileges in Ottoman markets, including reduced tariffs and tax exemptions. In earlier times, these arrangements had a limited effect. They usually applied to a limited number of goods and involved modest trade volumes that European and Ottoman markets could absorb. However, in the nineteenth century, backed by European industrial mass production, the same privileges were used to penetrate wider Ottoman markets, undermining local Ottoman production. Ottoman producers could not compete with both new European technologies and an asymmetrical tariff and taxation system, where they, unlike their European competitors, were subjected to full taxation.

The shift in economic power had further consequences. European states used their position to impose some of the costs of their global expansion onto others. The case of cholera offers a clear example. Britain, with its economic and naval dominance, could have introduced preventive measures in India or the Indian Ocean. Instead, it chose to profit from unobstructed trade and ignore the spread

of the disease. The Ottoman Empire, being among the first regions exposed to cholera outbreaks, was left to deal with the consequences. What is more, European governments expected the Ottomans to take on the role of the gatekeepers of Europe at their own expense, guarding it from the epidemics caused by Britain's inaction. This required significant investment in quarantine and sanitary controls. It also meant disrupted trade and closed ports, which caused economic losses in Ottoman provinces. The responsibility placed on the Ottomans was not always followed by support or recognition. Britain, which decreased its trade costs by outsourcing sanitary protection to the Ottomans, expressed its gratefulness by complaining that quarantines were an obstacle to free trade, while other European states, more exposed to disease via Ottoman ports, offered more support.

Some of these developments were undermining Ottoman sovereignty. The effects were especially visible in North Africa, where European interventions took various forms. Using an Ottoman perspective, the book explores how these pressures worked. Although European powers claimed to promote neutral security norms, such as the fight against piracy and slave trade in Algeria, Tunis, and Tripoli, and their policies also targeted the political ties between Ottoman North Africa and its imperial center—seeking to loosen them, or, in some cases, to replace Ottoman rule with their own. Algeria was conquered in 1830. In Tunis, the process was more gradual. After a financial crisis and default, an international commission took control of the country's finances between 1868 and 1881. This arrangement paved the way for France to turn Tunis into a colony.

Not all of these interventions succeeded. As several cases in this volume show, the Ottoman authorities responded with a mix of their traditional flexibility and pragmatism. Both the central government and local elites in border regions, such as North Africa, adopted selected European practices while retaining political control. They accepted elements of European sanitary regulation and formed joint health boards, where European physicians, consuls, and Ottoman officials sat together. In doing so, they contributed to global health protection without giving up political autonomy. Tripoli, Tunis, and Egypt each managed to defend aspects of their administrative independence. The central government in Istanbul followed a similar strategy. It organized and hosted international health conferences, incorporated European sanitary practices, and brought foreign experts and diplomats into Ottoman health boards. It gradually transformed them into an independent Ottoman sanitary bureaucracy and integrated them into the Ottoman progressive tax system.

Building on this, different approaches to modernization were also evident across the region. In some cases, the Ottoman response to external pressure was to take the initiative and modernize. One example, discussed in this volume, is the attempt to create uniform general inspectorates under central government

control. Its goal was to standardize administration, while also adapting it to local needs. It aimed also to help better integrate Arab and Armenian minorities into the Ottoman political community. Modernization reforms did not always start from the center. Often, border regions were the places where they were first implemented. This challenges the assumption that border regions were necessarily politically peripheral. The Romanian policy in Dobruja, for instance, adopted the rhetoric and methods of Western European powers. It described its reforms as a civilizing mission intended to bring progress to a former Ottoman province. This mission included building new roads and railroads, ports, colonization, and land reform. It also involved the Romanianization of the population, restrictions on minority rights, and the late extension of citizenship to non-Christians, all in the name of modernization. The volume also explores the complexities and shifting alliances involved in the nation building and modernization processes within the region, where Bulgarian nationalists ultimately aligned themselves with the conservative party within Bulgaria's Turkish minority.

This example also raises a broader question. Was the old world truly disappearing, or was it simply being reshaped, by using new narratives and ideas to reorganize and recombine many old elements? A careful reading of the chapters in this volume will challenge some common assumptions about modernization. For instance, European involvement in epidemic control in Tunis existed already in the eighteenth century, well before the era of a greater economic internationalization. Many features of nineteenth-century change were not entirely new. The Ottoman Empire had for centuries maintained its long borders both as clearly demarcated fixed boundaries and as loosely defined frontier zones, depending on the local situation. The change sometimes meant that some tools from the administrative toolbox were used more often than before, gaining modern European packaging in the process, while others were temporarily forgotten. Some practices were sidelined for a time, only to be revived by European nation-states and presented as modern inventions. In many respects, the similarities between the Ottoman world and the rest of Europe were greater than the differences; it shared more with the so-called modern world than is often acknowledged. The narrative of European exceptionalism has often obscured this complexity. There were for centuries both champions and opponents of quarantines both in the Ottoman Empire and in the rest of Europe, who continued their disputes deep into the nineteenth century.

The modernization of the last two centuries did not create a unified world by removing old elements and building on a clean slate. It created a world where new ideas and a higher speed of traffic, were combined with many old elements and perennial dilemmas. In the world of liberalism and free trade, power relations, economic development, diplomacy, and political skill continued to significantly

shape outcomes. These factors often decided whether an Ottoman province would be absorbed by foreign powers, manage to resist, or end in a situation somewhere in between. The industrial nation-states were able to muster and use their resources more effectively and in a targeted way. However, their power was not unlimited, and the Ottoman Empire and its successors were able to resist and sometimes to catch up.

Arda Akıncı / Fatma Aladağ / Giorgio Ennas

Introduction

This book is the result of a conversation that took place on the hills of Florence, in Italy, between two Ph.D. researchers, writing their dissertations on distinct features of the late Ottoman Empire. That conversation first turned into an idea to organize a workshop on the Ottoman borderlands. When Stefan Rohdewald and Fatma Aladağ joined, this materialized as a conference of the interdisciplinary Research Group "The Ottoman Europe,"[1] held at the University of Leipzig, co-financed by MSCA COFUND Actions and the Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft. The contributions to this workshop constitute the chapters of the volume that you are currently holding, fitting very well into the series of the priority program *Transottomanica*, focusing on mobility dynamics between Eastern and Southeastern Europe, North Africa, and the Near East.[2]

We were interested in the borderlands of the Ottoman Empire, not because they are an understudied aspect but because we have been fascinated by how the borderlands and the frontiers, more often than not, represented a different regime—most of the time of its own. Also, the borderlands often represented the regions where the central power, whether an empire or a nation-state, lacked authority or at least could not assert its authority as they did in the political centers. Therefore, they needed to negotiate their power with the bordering and rivaling states, but, most importantly, with the local societies and non-state actors. Even if one of the most significant aspects of the borderlands is the constant change of authority and sovereignty, especially during the "long" nineteenth century, it was not the only one. The borderlands were relevant to the empires and states more than simply because they represented *shatterzones* but also because of the shifting loyalties of the local communities, the multicultural and diverse ethno-religious dynamics. The shifting and conflicting loyalties of the borderland societies constituted yet another layer of the complex socio-

1 See the following link: https://www.gkr.uni-leipzig.de/en/historisches-seminar/institut/professuren/ost-und-suedosteuropaeische-geschichte/osmanisches-europa.

2 See the following link: https://www.transottomanica.de/de.

political environment of the frontiers. Particularly for this reason, the complex borderland regions, where sometimes more than one authority and sometimes none existed, indeed deserve a closer look from different perspectives. Furthermore, these spaces included not only the state-actors, i. e., the institutions and bureaucrats, but quite often non-state actors, assuming power and filling the vacuums that the inter-state rivalries created in the borderlands.

The transformation of the frontiers of empires to the precise borders of nations happened all around the world and followed similar processes. In that matter, the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, and post-Ottoman spaces, were no different. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman imperial administration perceived multiple threats in its borderlands—ranging from the Balkans to the Arabian Peninsula. These threats included most visible and obvious ones, such as the Russian and European colonial expansion policies that targeted the Ottoman territories far from the center, such as the British interests in the Middle East or the Russian expansion towards the Caucasus. However, this period also included the emergence of other threats to the very existence of the Empire, such as national and religious anti-establishment movements or immense migration from the edges of the empire towards the core —mostly Anatolia—which endangered its demographic composition.[3]

Laura di Fiore describes such complex environment of the borderlands as "where the sovereign state territoriality and other social-economic and cultural 'spatialities' must not be conceived as alternative to, or in contradiction with each other, but rather as coexisting and overlapping."[4] Moreover, as highlighted by Cyrus Schayegh, the formation of the modern Middle East, and of the modern world more broadly, can be conceived as a process of transpatialization, wherein "cities, regions, states and global circuits reconstituted and transformed each other much more thoroughly and at a much faster rhythm than before in history."[5] Exactly, this overlap is what sparked our interest in the borderlands of the Ottoman Empire and in the post-Ottoman spaces, in areas such as Palestine, Bulgaria, or Rumania, and encouraged us to bring a group of scholars working on different aspects of these regions, from imperial sanitary policies to the security measures, and from there to the social interactions and movements on the frontier regions.

3 See, for example, Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2024.

4 Laura Di Fiore, "The Production of Borders in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Between Institutional Boundaries and Transnational Practices of Space," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 48, https://doi.org/10.1080/1350748 6.2016.1183594.

5 Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 2017, Kindle edition, 327.

The interest in (post-)Ottoman borderlands so far has created a rich literature since the early 2000s. Already in 2003, a special edition of the *MIT Electronic Journal of the Middle Eastern Studies* entitled "Borderlands of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries" featured the landmark introduction by Eugene Rogan, who aptly diagnosed the borderlands of the Empire as "borders, frontiers, margins and peripheries catch the imagination. These are the zones of fusion and transition, where hybridity is the norm and orthodoxy the exception. State law is often subordinate to customary law."[6] What Rogan highlighted back in 2003 was more than the hybrid and fluid nature of the Ottoman borderlands; it was furthermore, the state of the art, which back then was moving further away from the political centers and capitals towards the margins of the Empire.

Indeed, in recent years, this cue mobilized many scholars. Historians, such as Schayegh, Peter Sahlins, Isa Blumi, and Maria Pia Pedani, investigated in multiple ways the fluidity and fragility of concepts such as those of borderlands, boundaries, borders, and frontier areas.[7] Based on the work of these historians, the Early Modern Age separated the "frontiers," "boundaries," and "borderlands," here described as regions along the border controlled by members of the provincial notabilities, able to negotiate their loyalties with the central administrations of different states, from the "borderlines" of the late eighteenth and twentieth centuries, ideal demarcation lines marked by military, police, and sanitary institutions controlled by the central state. More specifically, in the last years, the border regions of the Ottoman and (post-)Ottoman world became highly productive fields of research, discussed in numerous international workshops and conferences, and within monographs.[8] Furthermore, recently, the focus also shifted from the policies of the central bureaucracies towards how the volatile and fragile borderlands provided suitable social and political envi-

6 Eugene Rogan, "Introduction," *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (Spring 2003), 1.

7 Maria P. Pedani, *Dalla Frontiera al Confine* (Venezia: Università Ca' Foscari, 2002); Isa Blumi, "Agents of Post-Ottoman States: The Precariousness of Berlin Congress Boundaries of Montenegro and How to Define/Confine People," in *War & Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. Yavuz M. Hakan and Peter Sluglett (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 194–231; Maria Baramova, Grigor Boykov and Ivan Parvev (eds.), *Bordering Early Modern Europe* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag), 2015; Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1989; Tilly Charles, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990–1990* (Boston: Blackwell), 1990; Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (Routledge: Milton Park), 2017.

8 Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2013; Schayegh, *The Middle East*; Jordi Tejel and Ramazan Hakki Öztan, *Regimes of Mobility. Borders and State Formation in the Middle East, 1918–1946* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 2022.

ronments that benefited non-state actors, who managed to impose their own agendas on the imperial centers rather than vice versa.[9]

From their works on shaping borders in the nation-building period, a new understanding of imperial borderlands and their societies emerged.[10] This understanding does not focus only on the shaping, re-shaping, and formation of borders within the empire/nation-building process in areas such as the Ottoman–Qajar border, but also on the various aspects of life in the borderlands of an empire or of a newly emerged nation-state, such as Serbia and Bulgaria. Together with the increasing number of works conducted on the borderlands and their societies in the (post-)Ottoman period, the workshop held at the University of Leipzig in September 2024 entitled *From the Frontiers of the Empire to the Borders of the Nations* demonstrated that there is still significant room to address and analyze the processes of shaping borders and the transformation that borderland societies underwent between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. With a special emphasis on the Ottoman and post-Ottoman spaces, particularly in southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North African territories, the workshop highlighted in the same framework different aspects of the imperial and national borderlands from the eighteenth century until the beginning of the Second World War. The workshop highlighted in the same framework different aspects of the border-building processes and the transformation of border societies, such as security practices in the newly emerged borderlands and the creation of institutions for the administration of migratory waves; health, with the foundation of structures aimed at ensuring the control of pandemics; and, finally, the transformations which occurred within human border societies that occurred from the eighteenth century until the beginning of the Second World War.

In the first section of the workshop on the securitization of borders, the researchers analyzed the gradual end of the *ancien régime* states and the transition to the new model of nation-states between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries in the Ottoman frontier regions, from southeast Europe to the northern Black Sea region. This "securitization" process led to the formation and implementation of new security regimes. New security institutions were created and

9 Alp Yenen and Ramazan Hakki Öztan, "Age of Rogues: Transgressive Politics at the Frontiers of the Ottoman Empire," in *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 3–52. See also Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans. Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800–1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2011.

10 Jovan Pešalj, "The Distinctiveness of the Habsburg-Ottoman Border in the Eighteenth Century," in *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maria Baramova, Grigor Boykov and Ivan Parvev (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2015), 32–33; Jovan Pešalj, Annemarie Steidl, Leo Lucassen and Josef Ehmer, *Borders and Mobility Control in and between Empires and Nation-States* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

developed, such as customary services and police forces in charge of controlling migration policies in border areas by the new states, which increased individual states' control over their borders and surrounding areas. This phenomenon, which originated in Europe, is particularly evident in the nation-states that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

In the second section on the preservation of health in border areas, the researchers investigated the case studies of new border and sanitary structures' development in the frontier regions, like quarantines, sanitary offices, and hospitals, aimed at systematic health controls in border areas, modifying their "natural porosity." In this way, new centralized states aimed at limiting the spread of pandemics from the Asian continent by monitoring and controlling migratory flows and pilgrimages between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, from the Ottoman–Greek to the Ottoman–Qajar border.

Finally, in the third section on borderlands' societies, researchers investigated the transformation of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman border societies, due to the migratory waves, and the cross-border mobility between borders in old and newly established countries between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Case studies like the transformation of Austrian and Bosnian borderland societies in this period were symptomatic of the complex changing process that gradually led from the *ancien régime* state to the building of nation-states.

From these contributions, the idea for the present volume arose, which aims to show the state of the art and the high level of productivity of border studies revolving around the borders of the Ottoman Empire, from the quarantine stations of the Ottoman–Persian border, the regencies of North Africa, to the Dobruja, the researchers demonstrated the high vitality of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman borders.

In his contribution, **Salvatore Speziale** underscores the sanitary turning point represented by the 1830s, which contributed to the flourishing of sanitary councils in the Mediterranean area and played a crucial role in shaping border control mechanisms in response to epidemics. Speziale demonstrates how the emergence of cholera, coupled with increasing European political and economic influence, led to the establishment of formalized health boards across Mediterranean Africa, redefining the interaction between public health and border administration. Focusing on the Tunisian case, **Giorgio Ennas** investigates the early process of transforming the borders of the Regency of Tunis from borderlands to borderlines as the result of intense negotiation and cooperation between transimperial agents in the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, **Şahin Yeşilyurt** describes the peculiar development of the Ottoman tax and regulations system. Yeşilyurt examines the fiscal dimensions of Ottoman quarantine policies, demonstrating how health-related taxation reshaped the

socio-economic landscape of border regions and reflected broader state-building efforts.

Gianpietro Sette reports the legal constitution of a new maritime border of the Ottoman regencies with the European powers, between clashes and negotiations. Sette sheds light on how the Ottoman Empire navigated the suppression of piracy and the establishment of maritime borders in the Mediterranean, reflecting the impact of European diplomatic pressures and the Empire's evolving legal frameworks. **Patrick Schilling** describes the creation of new administrative borders for the Ottoman provinces at the beginning of the First World War. Schilling explores the introduction of the 1913 general inspectorates as a novel administrative framework, balancing centralized governance with regional particularities during the late Ottoman period. **Giuseppe Motta** investigates the development of security measures within and outside the Ottoman borders at the end of the "long" and the beginning of the "short" centuries. Motta's study highlights the strategic integration of Dobruja into the Romanian state, illustrating the region's role as a dynamic site of military, cultural, and economic securitization at the intersection of Ottoman, Romanian, and European influences.

The last two chapters of this volume focus on the period between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. **Zeynep Arslan Çalık** analyzes the porosity of the Habsburg–Ottoman border (1772–1826), the Habsburg registration modalities, and what it is possible to extract from these registers about the Ottoman subjects resident in the Habsburg Empire. Finally, **Arda Akıncı** highlights the socio-political polarization of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of two new independent nation-states, i. e., the Bulgarian Kingdom and the Turkish Republic, with a particular focus on the interwar period. In this way, Akıncı demonstrates how this process, and the continuous inhabiting of the same region, led the Muslim and Turkish inhabitants of Northern and Eastern Thrace to an identity crisis that peaked with the establishment of nation-states and their local politics.

As highlighted by Jovan Pešalj, this volume demonstrated how many things are still waiting to be said about the nature of Ottoman and non-Ottoman borders, inviting a general re-evaluation of the heritage of the Early Modern dynastic states.[11] This re-evaluation could still give us interesting answers about the nature of borders and border societies as those which have been reinforced from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis until today. One of the key findings of this volume—in conformity with the recent trends in the historiography of the borderlands—and not just the ones on the Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman

11 Jovan Pešalj, key lecture for the conference *From the Frontiers of the Empire to the Borders of the Nations*, University of Leipzig, September 2024.

spaces—is the way in which the historians began to question the marginality of the frontier regions. For many years, the distinction between the periphery and the political center was not only taken for granted but also remained unquestioned. With the contributions in this volume and the recent studies on the (post-)Ottoman borderlands, the former peripheries of the Empire began to receive the attention that they truly deserved and were placed at the very center of the transformations that the Ottoman Empire passed through in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In other words, these "borderlands" were not merely the edges of the empires, but on the contrary, in many cases, acted at times as the centers of nation-/state-building processes.

This volume aims to stand as a testament to the enduring significance of Ottoman and post-Ottoman border studies, revealing the transformative processes that shaped the frontiers of empires and nation-states alike. By integrating case studies that span from the Black Sea to North Africa and from the Mediterranean to the Balkans, the contributors collectively highlight the multifaceted roles played by borders, not only as sites of conflict and negotiation, but also as crucibles for cultural exchange, economic development, and political innovation. As highlighted by Schayegh, these "cities and regions continued to matter even after 1918,"[12] and still today continue to promote and influence international social and political transformations. We hope that this compilation will inspire further scholarship, prompting historians and social scientists to delve deeper into the complexities of borderlands as dynamic spaces that continue to influence global historical narratives and contemporary discourses on mobility, security, and identity.

12 Schayegh, *The Middle East*, 23.

Salvatore Speziale (University of Messina)

The Turning Point of the 1830s: Epidemics and Health Controls at the Borders in Mediterranean Africa

Abstract
The 1830s constituted a truly turning point in the fight against epidemics throughout the Ottoman Empire and, for partly different and partly coincident reasons, in Mediterranean Africa, with important repercussions in the configuration of its internal borders. From an epidemic point of view, it took place the transition from the age of the dominant plague to that of cholera with an important series of repercussions on medical theories (contagionism and anti-contagionism) and above all on the practical implications in the health field which, it must be underlined, are divergent between the two shores of the Mediterranean. On the political side, during the long process of progressive autonomy of the provinces, we witness the advent of French colonialism in Algeria and the resumption of control over the Regency of Tripoli by the Ottomans after the long government of the Caramanli. These are all factors of great change that undermine the traditional lability of borderlands, especially in times of epidemic. Furthermore, the different and often opposing directions in the field of combating epidemics, undertaken by the various European countries, often dictated by economic-commercial demands, constituted further complications to the indicated framework as they lead to significant interference in the health management of the territories of the Empire. For these and other reasons that will be highlighted in the contribution, in the short space of the 1830s health councils of different configurations were created in all the provinces of the Empire and with particular implications in Mediterranean Africa. With them, a different and more regular control of maritime and land border areas was achieved in view of real demarcations that prefigured the colonial period. It is therefore a complex combination of epidemic, medical-health, political and economic motivations that we intend to explore starting from the existing bibliography and archival sources of various European and North African origins.
Keywords: Epidemics, Borderlands, Sanitary councils, Mediterranean Africa, Ottoman Empire

1. Epidemics and borders: a confluence of studies

Historians have long investigated health control and border control issues separately within two rich traditions of study. As far as health control is concerned, several historians have focused their attention on epidemics spreading paths from Plague to Cholera and from Cholera to the new coming epidemics from local and global perspectives.[1] Consequently, the paths of research have varied from the human efforts made to understand the epidemic phenomenon in a scientific and/or in a religious framework, to the practical efforts to prevent or stop its diffusion, to the strivings to reduce its impact on demographics and economies. Concerning the Mediterranean lands with peculiar attention to the Ottoman Empire, from Biraben's and Panzac's pioneering works of the 1970s and 1980 s[2] to the more recent works of Boujarrah, Bulmuş, Yaron, and Varlık, among others,[3] a vast range of aspects have been examined, and an in-depth literature is now available. The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated new questioning and a new flourishing of publications. As concerns border control, in the last decades, under the stimulus of the national identitarian issues, of the international migration waves and of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the monitoring, protection, physical and symbolic value of borders, on the one hand, and their fluidity, fragility, and permeability, on the other, have become some of the cornerstones of the political and social *agora*. Consequently, they became central issues in the historiographical debate not only in Western countries but also in the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores. From the opening works of Sahlins and Pedani,[4] to the recent ones of Sabri, Pešalj, Öztan,

1 William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City (NY): Anchor Books, 1976); Jacques Ruffie and Jean-Charles Sournia, *Les épidémies dans l'histoire de l'homme, de la peste au SIDA* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999); Jo N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics. Their Impacts on Human History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005).

2 Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1975–1976); Daniel Panzac, *La peste dans l'Empire Ottoman (1750–1850)* (Leuven: Peeters, 1985).

3 Husayn Boujarrah, *Al-Tâʿûn wa bidʿah al-tâʿûn: al-harâk al-ijtimâhi fî-balâd al-maghrib bayna al-faqîh wa-l-tabîb wa-l-amîr* (Beyrut: Markaz dirâsât al-wahidah al-ʿarabiyyah, 2011); Birsen Bulmuş, *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Yaron Ayalon, *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire: Plague, Famine, and Other Misfortunes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Nükhet Varlık, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Salvatore Speziale, *Il contagio del contagio. Circolazioni di saperi tra Africa ed Europa dalla Peste nera all'AIDS* (Reggio Calabria: Città del Sole, 2016).

4 Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Maria Pia Pedani, ed., *Dalla Frontiera al Confine* (Venice: Herder, 2002).

and Tejel,[5] a wide range of issues have been dealt with concerning the "shaping" of borders inside the "shaping" of nations and of borderlands' people, and other questions have been posed waiting for new research.

Starting from these rich heritages of positions and literature, this contribution aims at giving another insight into the history of Mediterranean Africa rightly putting into relation both health control and border control in a specific phase of the nineteenth century: the 1830s.[6] It will prove to be a fundamental decade since it witnessed a series of complex and intertwined transitions in the Mediterranean landscape produced by epidemic, political, economic, and social factors. As will be shown, all of them had relevant and undeniable consequences in the different actions taken by local authorities to control the epidemic diffusion and to reduce demographic and economic losses. Consequently, they had also a probable impact in the process of defining the borders of the different political entities of Mediterranean Africa, a vast territory without a tradition of fixed and precise borders near to the Western conception, in a range of ways that deserve further investigation.

2. The remarkable 1830s: epidemics, politics, economics, societies

First of all, a "new" and terrible disease for the Mediterranean peoples, cholera, emerged and ruthlessly marked this decade. It rapidly became a formidable epidemiological threat, suddenly replacing the long-dominant plague as the primary concern for public health authorities and so causing the dramatic shift from the so-called era of Plague to the era of Cholera. The watershed due to its first invasion implied all Mediterranean and continental countries of Europe

5 Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands. Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jovan Pešalj, "The Distinctiveness of the Habsburg-Ottoman Border in the Eighteenth Century," in *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maria Baramova et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 21–40; Jovan Pešalj et al., *Borders and Mobility Control in and between Empires and Nation-States* (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Ramazan H. Öztan and Jordi Tejel, eds, *Regimes of Mobility. Borders and State Formation in the Middle East, 1918–1946* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2022).

6 An impulse for this research came from the project *Pandemics and Borders* of the Swiss Network for International Studies with Giorgio Ennas as Principal investigator (years 2021–2023). A fruit of the project is: Ennas Giorgio, "Borders and Contagion. Ottoman Administration of Bosnia between Border Reinforcement and Health Protection (1866–1867)," *Historical Searches / Historijska traganja* 22 (2023), 91–122.

from the Balkan to the Iberian Peninsula as well as the Mediterranean Asia and Africa from Anatolia to Morocco during the years 1830–1837.[7]

The apparition of this epidemic disorder, that easily infiltrated the sanitary cordons, rapidly outwitted the quarantines, and inexorably led to the horrible death of a considerable percentage of people, shocked all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean and of Continental Europe. It can be argued that the psychological impact was even stronger for the Europeans since they had long considered themselves almost free from high-mortality epidemic occurrences. Actually, the last plague outbreaks in Central and Western European countries went back to 1722 in Marseille, 1743 in Messina, in 1813 in Malta, and during the period 1815–1816 in Noja (today Noicattaro), towns or islands which held continuous commercial intercourses with the Ottoman Empire and/or were geographically very close to it. Those epidemics, besides, had been very limited in space since, thanks to the draconian sanitary measures immediately ordered by the authorities and executed by the armies, did not spread outside the circle of the abovementioned localities.[8]

Since cholera provoked that profound loss of confidence in the internal public health services, it induced the Europeans to favor the implementation of the health service in the Ottoman Empire from whence, or better through which, the cholera waves came. Europeans effectively reputed the consular informative network still capable of detecting the presence of epidemics and of diffusing alarms, but they considered it incapable, or at least not sufficient, of preventing the propagation from the Ottoman shore. Therefore, they thought that a new "active" network of public health boards was indispensable to avert the voyage of cholera from the Bengal mouth to the Mediterranean lands following the routes and the tracks of the commerce and pilgrimage.

Secondly, the 1830s increasingly resented the expanding political and commercial influence and pressure of the European powers (principally France and the United Kingdom, but also Spain, the Austrian Empire, Italian states, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the United States) on the "markets" of the Muslim shore of the Mediterranean. This bivalent pressure became heavier and heavier after the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818) and particularly in the 1830s. As a direct consequence,

7 Cholera ravaged the Balkans and Anatolia from 1830; France in 1832 and 1833; England in 1832 and 1834; Spain in 1832 and 1833; the Italian peninsula from 1835 to 1837. In the meantime, it struck Syria and Egypt from 1834; the Regencies of Tunis and Tripoli from 1835 to 1836; Algeria from 1834 to 1837; the Empire of Morocco from 1834 to 1835. Salvatore Speziale, *Oltre la peste. Sanità, popolazione e società in Tunisia e nel Maghreb (XVIII–XX secolo)* (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 1997), 353–379, 528.

8 Giuseppe Restifo, *I porti della peste: epidemie mediterranee fra Sette e Ottocento* (Messina: Mesogea, 2005); Speziale, *Il Contagio*, 193–243.