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The Vernacular Revolution: Reclaiming Early Modern Grammatical Traditions in the Ottoman Empire

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the remarkable shift toward new literate uses of vernacular languages in the early modern Ottoman empire. It argues that this vernacularization occurred independently of Western European (and, more specifically, German romantic) influences. It explores, first, how vernacular languages like modern Greek, Armenian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Kurdish, and Albanian acquired a new status as a medium of high literature and learning; second, it argues that this process was accompanied by the equally novel phenomenon of writing vernacular grammars, which promoted vernaculars as both an object of knowledge and an object of governmental concern. Thus, the early modern Ottoman empire sees both a vernacularization and the governmentalization of language. Similar patterns, it will be argued, can be found in early modern German, Russian, and Urdu, without any one language or region clearly being the sole origin or cause of this process. Hence, this wave of virtually simultaneous vernacularizations poses new questions for theories of modern nationalism and of the role of the modern humanities in them.

A number of studies have noted the links between the rise of the modern humanities and the development of romantic nationalism in Europe from around 1800 on; but there are rather fewer explorations of similar links between humanities learning and forms of power in non-European settings, at least for the period preceding the onset of European colonialism. Yet, in recent years, the comparative history of the early modern humanities has received a number of important impulses, primarily as a result of Sheldon Pollock's Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project and its subsequent widening to other parts of the early modern world.¹ Accord-

1. On the knowledge systems project, see <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/papers/>. See also Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual*

ing to Pollock, such a comparative view shows that “an early modern transformation in philology may be detectable across much of the world.”² He bases this claim on a relatively restricted sense of philology as “a theory of textuality and a history of textualized meaning”;³ that is, as a critical self-reflection on written language, or texts, that is distinct both from philosophy and from linguistics. One may, however, explore whether the hypothesis of early modern transformations also applies to other branches of the humanities, bearing in mind, of course, that the notion of the humanities as distinct from the natural sciences, on the one hand, and from *belles lettres*, on the other, is itself a nineteenth-century European invention. Here, I will take philology in a somewhat broader sense than does Pollock: as the learned concern with, and study of, language, grammar, and letters. The empirical historical material I will use below comes primarily from an area that until now has remained relatively neglected in comparative studies: the early modern Ottoman empire. Between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, I will argue, one may see here, first, a wave of *vernacularization*, in which local vernaculars are used for new literate purposes, most importantly *belles lettres* and learning; and second, a wave of what one may call the *governmentalization* of language, in which these vernaculars undergo a novel regimentation and standardization by having their rules laid down in the form of a written grammar. In this governmentalization, a language simultaneously becomes an object both of knowledge and of governmental concern. Both processes, as I will argue, are the result of local dynamics rather than foreign influences. They also have some important more general implications: not only can we find similar patterns of vernacularization elsewhere, but their importance in early modern non-Western settings suggests that we have to rethink the role of the humanities in the emergence of modern nationalism.

I. MODERN PHILOLOGY AND ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

Nationalism is based on the assumption that a people constitutes a nation in virtue of its vernacular language and culture. The rise of this ideology in the non-Western world is still widely believed to have resulted from the diffusion of Western (and, more specifically, French and German) ideas. Even Benedict Anderson, who otherwise argues for the pioneering status of early “creole nations” in Latin America, tends to fall back

History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). For the wider comparative vision, see S. Pollock, B. A. Elman, and K. K. Chang, eds., *World Philology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

2. Pollock, *Forms of Knowledge*, 1.

3. *Ibid.*, 22.

on such a diffusionist narrative.⁴ One author mentioned rather often in this context is Johann Gottfried Herder; the main concept he is alleged to have introduced is that of “national spirit” or “people’s soul” (*Volksggeist*).⁵ Yet, for rather elementary chronological and other reasons, Herder—and by extension German Romanticism—cannot possibly have been the source of these nationalisms. First, as I will argue below, the shift toward vernacular languages as the basis for collective self-identification in the Ottoman empire and elsewhere simply occurred too early to have been caused by any Herderian or German romantic influence. Moreover, his influence becomes apparent only at a relatively late date. Although he composed some of his most important works in this context, such as his *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (The voice of the peoples in songs) already in the 1770s, I have not been able to trace his influence among Slavic authors to any works earlier than Jernej Kopitar’s 1810 *Patriotische Gedanken eines Slawen*; among other Ottoman peoples, traces of Herder do not appear until several decades later. Second, closer examination reveals that Herder was not in fact, or at least not unambiguously, a nationalist of the kind he is usually claimed to be. I have no room to pursue this point in more detail here; but the most suggestive piece of evidence for this point is the fact that the term *Volksggeist* does not appear a single time in Herder’s collected works. In short, the claim that non-Western (and specifically Ottoman) nationalisms are merely the result of French and German influences is a serious oversimplification—if not one of the great mystifications—of the literature on nationalism.⁶

Given the currently near-universal spread of such nationalist ideologies and, more importantly, their institutionalization in the nation-state, it may be difficult to appreciate how radically novel they are: they emerged only around 1800. Even less widely known is the role of the then-emerging modern humanities in the modern redefinition of nations in terms of the languages they speak. In the eighteenth century, nations were generally characterized in terms of climate and governmental system rather than language, customs, or culture; it was only at the turn of the nineteenth century that terms

4. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), esp. chap. 5.

5. Thus, Anderson (*ibid.*, 67–68) briefly—and disparagingly—refers to Herder as the alleged source of the doctrine that peoples are distinguished by their native languages, only quoting secondary sources to make his point.

6. The erroneous claim, widespread in the Anglo-Saxon realm, that it was Herder who coined or popularized the term *Volksggeist* appears to originate in Isaiah Berlin’s influential essay, or possibly in the late nineteenth-century German nationalist authors that have arguably shaped Berlin’s reading of Herder. See Isaiah Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” reprinted in *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. 206; for a detailed criticism of Berlin, see Robert K. Norton, “The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (2007): 635–58.

like the German *Volk* underwent a shift in meaning, from “the common people” or *vulgus* to “people” or “nation,” defined on the basis of the language spoken. The newly developing philological sciences of language played a pivotal role in this process; thus, Joep Leerssen quotes Jakob Grimm’s linguistic definition of the German fatherland as “wherever the German tongue is heard.”⁷ Leerssen also calls attention to the ways in which modern philology in a broad sense (including historical comparative linguistics, folklore studies, archive-based historiography, and art history) supported and perhaps even shaped early nineteenth-century nationalism; but he does not elaborate and is generally cautious with such claims.

Other authors have likewise noted that there is a link between the modern humanities and romantic nationalism, but rarely have they explored the exact character of this connection. Thus, in his well-known history of linguistics, R. H. Robins briefly mentions the “effects” of humanism and nationalism on linguistics, and the “inspiration” that linguists like Bopp and Grimm received from the historicism and nationalism characteristic of the romantic era. He does not, however, address these alleged links in greater detail; moreover, his is a very broad notion of nationalism that covers not only the romantic age but also the formation of the modern state in Renaissance Europe.⁸ Likewise, in his comprehensive and comparative history of the humanities, Rens Bod mentions—and bemoans—what he calls the “nationalist exploitation of philology,” reflecting a tacit internalist assumption that philological learning itself is politically neutral or innocuous.⁹ There are other historians of science, of course, who maintain a strict distinction between internal developments in the sciences and external social and political contexts; it may be argued, however, and it has in fact been argued, that modern historical-critical philology as it arose from around 1800 and the emergence of romantic nationalism are in fact more deeply mutually implicated than such internalist histories allow for. One of the earliest authors to argue this was Michel Foucault, who in *The Order of Things* wrote, “The birth of philology has remained much more hidden from Western consciousness than that of biology and that of economics . . . even though its consequences have extended much further in our culture.”¹⁰ Foucault does not elaborate on this sweeping claim; but if we construe it as suggesting that modern philology played a constitutive role in the creation of national languages and identities in the nineteenth century, it seems to contain more than a grain of truth.

7. Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006): 147.

8. R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, 1997), esp. 79, 199.

9. Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 278.

10. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2002), 282.

Neither here nor elsewhere, however, does Foucault systematically discuss the links between the emergence of historical-critical philology and the rise of nationalism and the nation-state, let alone colonial rule and imperialism. In passing, he suggests that the modern philological notion of language is fundamentally linked to the nationalist concept of *Volk* when he argues that languages originate in and are animated by a collective will and by the “spirit of the people”; a language, he continues, “makes visible the fundamental will that keeps a whole people alive.”¹¹ In his later, genealogical writings, Foucault links the birth of a number of “human sciences,” as he calls them—notably political economy and the life sciences—to the rise of specifically modern modalities of power, such as discipline, which targets the individual, and biopolitics, which targets the population as a group of living beings rather than a collective of rights-bearing citizens; but he conspicuously fails to develop a similar genealogy of the modern sciences of language.¹² Thus, a genealogy of modern philology remains to be written. I have no intention of doing that here;¹³ instead I will pursue the possible internal links between philology and nationalism, especially in non-Western settings. I will focus on one such setting: the reforming Ottoman empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

II. OTTOMAN NATIONALISMS AND GERMAN ROMANTICISM: AGAINST THE HERDER CONNECTION

There is a long and venerable tradition of reducing the rise of nationalist ideas in the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire to the import of an essentially alien ideology from Europe, with results that were as ruinous as they were inevitable. Possibly starting with Elie Kedourie’s influential 1961 essay on nationalism and Bernard Lewis’s hardly less influential overview of modernization in Turkey,¹⁴ the belief that Ottoman nationalisms are primarily if not exclusively the result of foreign intellectual or ideological influences has become a virtual orthodoxy and has entered the handbooks on Middle

11. *Ibid.*, 316. The English translation “the mind of the peoples” misses the obvious allusion in the French original, *esprit de peuple*, to the German notion of *Volksgeist*.

12. Foucault sketches a genealogy of modern economics in his 1978–79 lecture courses at the Collège de France, published as *Security, Territory, Population* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). In *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), he develops the notions of, respectively, discipline and biopolitics, in particular in the context of sciences like criminology and criminal psychiatry; and in medicine, psychology and other disciplines dealing with human sexuality.

13. For a more detailed discussion, see Michiel Leezenberg, “Foucault, Philology, and Nationalism: Towards a Genealogy of the Modern Language Sciences,” forthcoming.

14. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (New York: Praeger, 1961); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), esp. chap. 10.

Eastern and Ottoman history. Thus, Erik Jan Zürcher writes about nationalism and other European ideas as being “introduced into” the Ottoman empire; James Gelvin sees nationalism as an idea originating in Europe and traversing the globe, and specifically reaching the Ottoman empire “with the spread of the modern world economy and state system”; and Sükrü Hanioglu speaks of the “charms” and the “dissemination” of revolutionary and nationalist ideas in the empire as resulting primarily from the French revolution and the French occupation of Egypt.¹⁵

Recently, the view that non-Western (and in particular Ottoman) nationalisms are the product of Western influences has also received support from a rather different quarter, namely, postcolonial studies as developed by authors like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Thus, Stathis Gourgouris and Marc Nichanian have argued that the nationalism that developed among Ottoman subject peoples like the modern Greeks and the Armenians amounts to a form of “internalized orientalism” or to the “interiorization of an orientalist gaze,” as it reproduces the “colonizing gesture” of Western philology and ethnography. This argument rests on two rather bold claims: first, the claim that the practice of modern philology and the ideal of *Bildung* are not only nationalist but actually colonial projects and, second, the claim that non-Western nationalisms are primarily if not exclusively the internalization of these Western European projects. Gourgouris’s case for the first claim centers on a famous quote from Wilhelm von Humboldt: “Our study of Greek history is a matter quite different from the history of other peoples. For us, the Greeks step out of the circle of history. . . . In the Greeks alone we find the ideal of that which we ourselves should like to be and produce.”¹⁶ Here, Von Humboldt turns the ancient Greeks into an extra- or suprahistorical and “almost godlike” ideal for what the modern Germans would like to be and create; thus, his classicist educational ideal of *Bildung*, which aims at the development of German national character, involves not just the appropriation but the emulation or sublimation of ancient Greek culture. Echoing both Jacques Lacan and Homi Bhabha, Gourgouris characterizes this emulation as a “mimicry” of the Greeks that is “auto-scopic” in that it aims at not the subjugation of a colonial other but the cultivation of a national self. As such, he continues, Von Humboldt’s *Bildung* is “no less than an

15. Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: Tauris, 1993), 28–29; James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 199; Sükrü Hanioglu, *A History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 46.

16. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Geschichte des Verfalls und Unterganges der griechischen Freistaaten*, Werke (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 2:92, quoted in Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 123; Gourgouris reproduces the mistranslation of “dem [Studium] der Geschichte anderer Völker” as “our other historical studies.”

explicit and programmatic *colonization of the ideal*.¹⁷ Next, he argues that modern Greek nationalism, in its turn, reproduces, emulates, or mimics this German nationalist colonization of the ancient Greek ideal.

Marc Nichanian elaborates these condensed and rather cryptic remarks with his argument that nineteenth-century romantic nationalist philology can only be understood in relation to orientalism;¹⁸ its constitution of a national self as “native,” he claims, amounts to an act of “self-colonization.”¹⁹ Whereas Leerssen cautiously calls attention to the roles of nationalist philology in structuring and spreading nationalist ideas, however, Nichanian rather more boldly asserts that what he calls the “philological nation” was the product of nationalist-*cum*-orientalist philology. While Gourgouris sees the educational ideal of *Bildung* as an act of colonization, Nichanian analyzes the self-constitution of the modern Armenians as an “ethnographic” or “philological” nation as an act of self-colonization: he sees it as involving merely the internalization of Western European, and specifically German, concepts and ideals—ideals that he sees as “colonizing.” For him, modern Armenian nationalism merely reproduces the allegedly hegemonic categories of German romantic-nationalist philology by internalizing its “orientalist gaze.”²⁰

The problem with such characterizations is not so much that they wind up virtually identifying orientalism with modern philology, and nation building with colonization (an identification that is as suggestive as it is bold); rather, it is the reproduction of a long-standing opposition between Western knowledge or ideology (and more specifically, German romantic-nationalist philology) as hegemonic and non-Western peoples as the mere passive recipients of such alien ideas. To the extent that such accounts pose a confrontation between hegemonic Western power and subaltern premodern or traditional non-Western peoples or societies, they actually risk reproducing the very romantic-nationalist imagery of primordial and authentic non-Western traditions destroyed or deformed by the Western power they set out to analyze. Put differently, they neglect or downplay all local agency and local dynamics in favor of a generic confrontation with, and diffusion of, allegedly hegemonic Western ideas and ideologies; moreover, they tend to assume that these ideas are hegemonic rather than explore or explain how they gained that status. Thus, in emphasizing the importance of Western intellec-

17. Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 123–24.

18. Marc Nichanian, *Le deuil de la philologie*, vol. 2 of *Entre l'art et le témoignage* (Geneva: Métis, 2007), 102, available in English as *Mourning Philology: Art and Religion at the Margins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian and Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), esp. chaps. 2–3.

19. *Ibid.*, 107.

20. *Ibid.*, 110.

tual and ideological influences, both conventional histories and postcolonial accounts risk overlooking the role of local early modern traditions of philological learning as a possible antecedent for language-based self-identification.

III. COSMOPOLITAN AND VERNACULAR IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

One intriguing example (or rather, set of examples) of such early modern learning can be found in the Ottoman empire. Relatively little attention has been paid to early modern Ottoman philological traditions; moreover, whatever studies exist tend to focus on works written in the cosmopolitan languages of learning, like Arabic and Ottoman Turkish.²¹ Yet, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries one may observe a significant shift in these traditions toward the use of local vernaculars. In itself, such a shift, or vernacularization, is specific neither to the Ottoman empire nor to modernity or early modernity; two similar episodes of vernacularization have been identified around the year 1000CE, in India and in Europe.²² Pollock describes the Latin and Sanskrit cosmopolitan orders, and the “vernacular millennium” that he claims emerged from it, in great detail; but there are other such orders, not all of which have received the attention they deserve. First, there is of course the well-known and well-studied francophone “Republic of Letters” of early modern Europe, which is linked to the relative decline of Latin as a supraregional language of learning and precedes the emergence of more nationalized public spheres. Second, there are the orders centering on such classical non-Western languages of learning as classical Arabic and Wenyan or classical Chinese; koine Greek, as the language of the Orthodox Church and the Byzantine empire, might also qualify. Third, there is an even less well studied cosmopolitan constellation surrounding the classical Persian-language poetic tradition—initiated by Firdowsī and including such luminaries as Nizāmī, Jāmī, Rumī, Hafez, and many others—that is of particular relevance to the Ottoman case. Originating on the Persian plateau, this tradition came to dominate all parts of the Islamic world where Arabic was not the spoken language of at least a substantial part of the population; for centuries, this cultural sphere extended all the way from the Balkans to Central and South Asia. Following Marshall Hodgson, we may best qualify it as “Per-

21. Among recent studies, see in particular Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), and “The Rise of ‘Deep Reading’ in Ottoman Scholarly Culture,” in Pollock et al., *World Philology*, 201–24; for an older study, see Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988).

22. Sheldon Pollock, “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” *Public Culture* 12 (2000): 591–625; see also Sheldon Pollock’s breathtaking *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

sianate.²³ It involved either classical Persian as the written, and in some cases spoken, language of courts and polite letters; or vernacular languages that displayed a considerable Persian influence; or both. Linguistically informed studies of this cosmopolitan tradition (as of the others mentioned above) are few and far between; at present we simply lack overviews that do justice to this cultural sphere as a coherent linguistic and literary whole, which nonetheless displays great regional variation and development and has numerous local vernacular offshoots.²⁴ Recently, Hamid Dabashi has described this cosmopolitan and, as he calls it, humanist order in more detail; but he narrowly focuses on Persian-language literary production, at the expense of Persian-inspired vernacular literatures like those in Pashto, Kurdish, and Baluchi, erroneously asserting that the latter only knew oral traditions.²⁵ To some extent, the Persianate influence overlapped with the Arabic one; but whereas Arabic was, and remained, the primary if not sole language of religious learning, Persian became the dominant language of literary expression, government, and mysticism. The Persian, or Persianate, cosmopolitan order also included the Ottoman empire. Initially, the Turkic elites in Anatolia wrote their official correspondence as well as their poetry in Persian, but by the sixteenth century Ottoman Turkish had largely replaced Persian as the language of the Ottoman bureaucracy and emerged as a language of refined courtly poetry in its own right. Despite this shift, however, Turkish never wholly sidelined Persian as a language of learned letters, and, in any case, official and literary uses of Turkish were and remained replete with Persian (and, of course, Arabic) loan words and loan constructions.

The vernacularization that occurred in the early modern Ottoman empire is distinct from that in the Latin and Sanskrit cosmopolitan orders in that it took place in a cosmopolitan setting that was itself systematically multilingual, involving Ottoman Turkish as well as Arabic and Persian as written languages, not to mention the classical written languages of Christian minorities like the Greeks and the Armenians. From the late seventeenth century on, local vernaculars increasingly started to be used for literate purposes that had until then remained the reserve of these classical and cosmopolitan languages. Here I can present only a bird's-eye view of this rich and complex process.²⁶

23. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, vol. 2 of *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 293.

24. For a summary overview, see Bert Fagner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität, und Sprachkontakt* (Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 1999).

25. Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), esp. 331n.

26. Obviously, the story of Ottoman vernacularizations deserves a far more detailed treatment than is possible within the confines of an article. For a more elaborate account, see Michiel Leezenberg, "From Coffee House to Nation State: The Rise of National Languages in the Ottoman Empire," forthcoming.

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman vernacularization occurred most visibly among the Christian subject populations in the western part of the empire, thus lending some initial plausibility to the claim of Western European origins. First, authors like Iosipos Moisioudax and Adamantios Korais pioneered the emancipation of vernacular modern Greek from the continuing predominance of classical koine Greek in education. Second, among the Ottoman Armenians, a spoken—and increasingly also a written and printed—supraregional “civil language” (called *k’aghak’akan* or *askharhorên*) emerged that was distinct both from the classical language (or *Hrabar*) that had been in written use since the fifth century CE and from locally spoken dialects. Third, the second half of the eighteenth century also saw the first attempts to write literary texts in Serbian and Bulgarian: thus, in his 1762 *Istoriya Slavyanobolgarskaya*, Paisii Hilendarski fulminated against increasing Greek efforts at linguistic assimilation in the Orthodox Church; and Sofronij Vracanski consciously wrote his memoirs in what he calls the “Slavo-Bulgarian” vernacular. Fourth, Romanian, or “Wallachian” as it was generally called (Greek *vlakhos*, Turkish *eflak*), emerged as a written language following the translation of the Bible into Romanian in 1688 and the pioneering literary and learned works by polymath Dimitrie Cantemir around 1700.²⁷ These vernacularizations among Christians living in various parts of the Ottoman empire appear to reflect local religious and possibly socioeconomic dynamics at least as much as any theological contact with Western European Catholics, Protestants, or Enlighteners, or mercantile contact with Western European merchants. While one might still attempt to attribute changes among Greeks, Serbs, and Romanians as shaped primarily by Western or Central European ideas, such outside influences are much harder to establish for the development of civil Armenian and vernacular Bulgarian.

One may observe early modern processes of vernacularization not only among Ottoman Christians but also among the Muslim peoples of the empire during this period. First, and perhaps surprisingly, even Ottoman Turkish, the language of administration, went through a vernacularization of sorts in that both in learned poetry and in bureaucratic prose one sees a deliberate movement toward linguistic simplification and toward a register of Turkish closer to the language spoken by the Istanbul population than to the highly learned and virtually incomprehensible language of the *küttab*, or scribes, that is, the literate Ottoman officials.²⁸ This particular vernaculari-

27. On Greek vernacularization, see Peter Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); on Armenian, see Marc Nichanian, *Agés et usages de la langue arménienne* (Paris: Éditions Entente, 1989); on Romanian, see Werner Bahner, *Das Sprach- und Geschichtsbewusstsein in der rumänischen Literatur von 1780–1880* (Berlin: Akademie, 1967).

28. See in particular Serif Mardin, “Some Notes on an Early Phase in the Modernization of Communication in Turkey,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3 (1961): 250–71.

zation seems exceptional in that it was primarily a top-down process driven by parts of the state apparatus. Second, in the empire's remote eastern provinces, Kurdish underwent a significant vernacularization from the late seventeenth century on.²⁹ Most important, in 1695, Ehmedê Xanî authored the first-ever *mathnavi* poem in Kurdish, the tale of the two ill-fated lovers Mem and Zîn, in an innovative and deliberate attempt to write learned poetry in the local vernacular "for the sake of the illiterate masses" (*ji boyî 'âmê*). Indeed, his main aim appears to be one involving learning: he wrote his poem, he says, famously, "so that the people will not say that the Kurds are without learning, principle, or foundation" (*da ko khelq-i nabêjîtin ko ekrad/bê ma'rifet in, bê esl û binyâd*).³⁰ Unlike Ottoman Turkish vernacularization, this shift to Kurdish appears to have taken place primarily in the smaller, rural *medreses* (madrasahs) rather than in the prominent urban centers of learning, which were closer to Ottoman official culture. Moreover, it shows few if any signs of patronage from local courts and thus appears to have been more of a bottom-up process.

Third, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries also witnessed the emergence of vernacular Persianate poetry among Muslims in Ottoman Bosnia and Albania.³¹ In the latter, the so-called *bejtexhinj*, or "bayt poets," such as Muçizade, Nezim Frakulla, and Hasan Zyko Kamberi, were very conscious of the novelty of composing learned literature in their native vernacular. Thus, Frakulla proudly asserts:

Divan kush pat folturë shqip?
Ajan e bëri Nezimi.
Bejan kush pat folturë shqip?
Insan e bëri Nezimi.

[Who made a divan speak in Albanian? It was Nezim who made it known.
Who made clarity speak in Albanian? It was Nezim who made it noble.³²]

Bejtexhi poetry was not the first-ever literate use of Albanian. Earlier, a number of Albanian works had been written by Catholic priests, but these had not reached the Or-

29. See Michiel Leezenberg, "Eli Teremaxî and the Vernacularization of Medrese Learning in Kurdistan," *Iranian Studies* 47 (2014): 713–33.

30. Ehmedê Xanî, *Mem û Zîn*, ed. J. Dost (Istanbul: Avesta Yayinlari, 2010), esp. 141.

31. On early Albanian literature, see Robert Elsie, "Albanian Literature in the Moslem Tradition: Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Albanian Writing in Arabic Script," *Oriens* 33 (1992): 287–306; on Bosnian Persianate poetry, see in particular Seifuddin Kemura and Vladimir Corovic, *Dichtungen bosnischer Moslems aus dem XVII., XVIII., und XIX. Jahrhundert* (Sarajevo, 1912).

32. Quoted in Elsie, "Albanian Literature," 293; I have corrected his rendering of *bejan* as "clarity" rather than "elegance."

thodox and Muslim Albanian-speaking population in Ottoman territory. Thus, for all we know, the *bejtexhi* tradition is a purely local outgrowth. Likewise, Orthodox, and especially Catholic, Christians had written texts in Slavic dialects quite close to “Bosnian”; but these, too, appear to have remained unknown among Slavic-speaking Bosnian Muslims. Indeed, the different vernacular traditions that emerged in early modern times appear to have been segregated along denominational or sectarian lines and betray little if any sense of nationality as defined in primarily or exclusively linguistic terms. Later Albanian authors, and even some contemporaries, have criticized the *bejtexhi* poets for employing too many Persian, Arabic, and Turkish loanwords. As a result, this tradition remains relatively unknown among both Albanian readers and foreign scholars, because of its religious background, elitist outlook, and complex and seemingly old-fashioned language. According to Elsie, most of the surviving manuscripts of this tradition are in fact still in private hands; in other words, it may well be that a considerable part of this corpus still awaits publication, if not discovery.³³

On the whole, this Ottoman vernacularization centered on works of learning as much as on literary texts, but often the two genres overlap or even coincide. Thus, Xanî also wrote several Kurdish-language works in rhymed verse expressly designed for beginning Kurdish-speaking *medrese* pupils, like the *Nûbihara piçûkan*, an Arabic-Kurdish glossary, and the *Eqîdeya Êmanê*, a small catechism. The vernacularization of Kurdish also involved prose works of learning, like Elî Teremaxî’s *Tesrîfa Kurmanji* and Yûnus Khalqatîni’s *Terkîb û zurûf*, both presumably dating from the eighteenth century, which deal with, respectively, the morphology (*sarf*) and syntax (*nahw*) of Arabic. Likewise, Hilendarski’s history straddles the boundaries between what in the nineteenth century would become the more strictly compartmentalized genres of belles lettres and scholarly historiography. These and other authors stress the novelty and importance of writing learned texts in one’s own vernacular. Thus, importantly, this vernacularization involved not only new literate uses of vernacular languages but also new linguistic ideologies that presented vernaculars as eloquent, expressive, and worthy of high literature. Below, I will further argue that they may likewise be accompanied or followed by innovations in linguistic structure, primarily through the regimentation and codification of languages in written grammars.³⁴

One should not assume that this early modern vernacularization was specific or unique to the Ottoman empire: one may witness similar processes in other, and to

33. *Ibid.*, 292–93.

34. Pollock (“Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” 612) briefly mentions the changing language-ideological correlation between language and community and the linkage between vernacular language and political power but does not otherwise address questions of linguistic ideology.

all appearances unrelated, parts of the world, notably Central and Eastern Europe and the Indian subcontinent, involving languages like German, Russian, and Urdu. Although German obviously had a longer history as a written language, exemplified most famously by Luther's Bible translation, one has to wait until the 1750s for the emancipation of German as a language of high literature, learning, and government. Until well into the eighteenth century, rulers like Frederick the Great wrote and corresponded primarily in French; philosophers like Leibniz and Christian Wolff wrote most if not all of their works in French or Latin rather than German; and institutions like the Prussian Academy of Sciences, established in 1700, conducted their sessions in French. It was only in the second half of the century that pioneers of German as a language of high literature, like Goethe and Schiller, and of German as a language of learning, notably Kant and Herder, emerged. The culmination of this process was undoubtedly the publication of several grammars of vernacular German, notably by Friedrich Adelung in 1781 and 1793, and especially Jakob Grimm's 1819 *Deutsche Grammatik*, a codification of spoken German of a scope and scale hitherto unknown.

Likewise, the eighteenth century witnessed the vernacularization of Russian. Until then, the local written tradition basically consisted of Old Church Slavic with a varying admixture of spoken Slavic dialects. But from the 1720s on, poets like Antiokh Cantemir and Vasily Trediakovsky began to use Russian for literary purposes, and in 1755 Mikhail Lomonosov published the first grammar of Russian.³⁵ During the same period, we also witness a distinct phase of vernacularization involving the Urdu language (during this time also called "Hindustani" or, perhaps confusingly for present-day readers, "Hindi") in the Indian subcontinent. Under the Delhi sultanate and the Mughal dynasty, Persian had long been the court language, but in the eighteenth century, Urdu emerged as a language of learning and literature common to Hindus and Muslims. The subsequent century witnessed further efforts at the standardization of this new official language, while the preceding century had seen what Pollock has called the "death of Sanskrit," that is, the disappearance of Sanskrit as a living language of creative literary and other composition.³⁶

35. On the emergence of German as a language of learning as well as letters, see Eric A. Blackall's classic, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language, 1700–1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), esp. chap. 2; on the rise of Russian, see W. Gareth Jones, "Russia's Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment," in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. W. Leatherbarrow and D. Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73–94.

36. On this vernacularization, see especially Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 5. Cf. Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (2001): 392–426.

The most significant exception to this widespread pattern of vernacularization seems to be China, which had witnessed relatively minor efforts in romance writing in the vernacular as distinct from the classical Chinese or Wenyan that had long been used as the language of learning. It was not until much later, in the early twentieth century, that the spoken dialect of Beijing rose to the status of a written standard for a modern national Chinese language, thanks primarily to the efforts of literary authors like Lu Xun. Yet, the eighteenth century did witness significant developments: during the early Qing dynasty, a new, “critical” school of Confucianist scholarship emerged, which tried to reconstruct the original texts of the so-called Confucian classics that had been at the core of the Chinese educational curriculum for centuries. In doing so, these scholars simultaneously construed something like a purified Chinese tradition in the face of the Manchu rulers, who were widely perceived as alien invaders.³⁷

Thus, this early modern wave of vernacularizations points to an important gap in Pollock’s argument. Pollock argues that what he calls the “vernacular millennium” began almost simultaneously in southern Asia and Western Europe around the year 1000 CE and developed with striking parallels over the following five centuries.³⁸ In India, a cosmopolitan order based on Sanskrit was reshaped by new “local ways of making culture” in vernacular languages like Kannada, Telugu, and Marathi; in Europe, the boundaries of cosmopolitan Latinity were reshaped by the conscious decision of local authors to start using vernacular Romance languages like French, Italian, and Castilian Spanish for literary purposes. In passing, Pollock states that vernacularization in Eastern Europe occurred only much later; surprisingly, he does not at all discuss the Ottoman empire. Further, he claims that “in Europe, vernacularization accompanied the production of the nation state”;³⁹ but this claim leaves an enormous and unexplained gap between the “vernacular age,” the first manifestations of which start around 1000 CE, and the nineteenth-century emergence of the nation-state—a gap that could span anywhere between three and eight centuries. Prima facie, the suggestion that there is some link between vernacularization and political nationalism seems rather plausible; but as it stands, Pollock’s claim is at best incomplete, and requires us to come up with further causal factors—or to postulate another phase of vernacularization in the early modern age. And indeed, exactly such a second wave

37. On these protonational implications of early Qing scholarship, see in particular Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), and see “Early Modern or Late Imperial? The Crisis of Classical Philology in Eighteenth-Century China,” in Pollock et al., *World Philology*, 225–44.

38. Pollock, “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History,” 607.

39. *Ibid.*, 592, 610.

of vernacularization occurred in the eighteenth century, not only in the Ottoman empire but also in other parts of the world. Although these vernacularizations, as far as we can tell, occurred independently of each other, they gradually converged and started mutually reinforcing each other; moreover, they all paved the way for the creation of the new language-based national identities that in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century would turn into territorial political movements.

IV. VERNACULAR GRAMMARS AND THE GOVERNMENTALIZATION OF LANGUAGE

The early modern Ottoman vernacularization involved the emancipation of vernacular languages as media of learning and letters, but it was also accompanied, or followed, by another qualitatively novel, and equally if not more significant, phenomenon that simultaneously turned these languages into objects of both knowledge and governmental concern. Languages became objects of knowledge insofar as local authors started writing, and in some cases printing, vernacular grammars; they became objects of governmental concern insofar as the idea spread that pupils should study the grammar of their native tongue alongside, or instead of, the familiar classical or sacred languages. Hence, one may describe this latter process as amounting to not just the “grammaticalization” or “standardization” but in fact the “governmentalization” of language.⁴⁰ Although in some cases, the processes of vernacularization and linguistic governmentalization virtually coincided, it seems useful to keep them analytically separate. One should not, however, identify this governmentalization with an increase in state power: initially, it occurred primarily in peripheral centers of learning that were relatively remote from the central state authorities. It was not until the final decade of the nineteenth century that the Russian and Ottoman empires started formulating, let alone implementing, anything like language policies.

Although only some of these novel works of vernacular grammar were printed, many of them gained a wider circulation in manuscript form; and regardless of their actual spread, they clearly reflect a growing metalinguistic belief in the importance of learning in one’s native tongue. They also reflect an important language-ideological change, crucial to the emancipation of these vernaculars with respect to classical norms. Prior to these authors, it was generally believed that vernacular tongues either did not have a grammar at all; or if they did, it was not worth studying. Apparently,

40. The term *governmentalization* is due, of course, to Foucault; but he does not discuss it in connection with language. See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *Power*, vol. 3 of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (Harmondsworth, 2002), 201–22.

nobody felt the need to study the grammar of a language one already spoke, and written grammar existed only for classical languages of learning, perhaps precisely because and insofar as they were not spoken languages, as with Arabic, koine Greek, and Old Church Slavic. In a very real sense, not even an official language like Ottoman Turkish had a grammar, insofar as there were no strict norms or rules as to when and in which circumstances Persian or Arabic expressions and constructions should be used, as opposed to Turkish ones. Hence, in many of the earliest works of vernacular grammar, one regularly encounters the emphatic assertion that the vernacular under scrutiny does have grammatical rules and the equally passionate plea for pupils to study these rules.

As an example, I will briefly discuss a number of vernacular grammars and vocabularies from the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ottoman empire.⁴¹ One of the earliest vernacular grammars to be written and to appear in print in Ottoman lands was Dimitri Eustatievici's *Gramatica Rumanneasca*, published in 1757 in his native town of Brasov.⁴² This work was dedicated to Constantine Mavrocordatos, the Phanariot ruler of Moldavia, who was bent on countering the widespread illiteracy among his subjects (including the clergymen) by making available books printed in the local vernacular. This increased availability of religious learning in the Romance vernacular would eventually lead to the eclipse of both Old Church Slavonic and koine Greek as local liturgical languages. In the 1780s, Dimitrios Katartzis (d. 1807) wrote the first local grammar of spoken Greek, or as he calls it, Romaic, in which he argued that every language has by nature an unwritten or a written grammar: "Romaic, being a living language, has an unwritten grammar by nature, even though nobody has written it before."⁴³ Since the—hitherto unwritten—grammar of Romaic is different from that of Hellenic or ancient Greek, he adds, they are two distinct languages, rather than two stages of the same language; this linguistic ideology differs significantly from that of most later Greek nationalists, who are adamant in their claims that ancient Greek and modern Romaic, and even distinct regional variants like Pontic, are all varieties of a single Greek language. Katartzis not only defends the worthiness of vernacular modern Greek against the classical norm, he also defends the rights of other vernaculars,

41. Again, for a fuller discussion, see Leezenberg, "From Coffee House to Nation State," esp. pt. 2, "The Governmentalization of Language."

42. Dimitrie Eustatievici, *Gramatica rumaneasca*, ed. N. A. Ursu (Bucharest: Științifică, 1969).

43. Dimitrios Katartzis, "Grammatikè tès romaïkios glòssas," in *Ta evriskomena*, ed. K. Dimaras (Athens: Hermis, 1970), esp. 317, and quoted in Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece*, 94.

recommending that Wallachian-speaking (i.e., Romanian-speaking) children should likewise be educated in their native tongue. Slightly later, in 1835, one also finds the first grammar of Bulgarian, by Neofit Rilski.⁴⁴ None of these works betray any familiarity with modern Western European philology; I will return to this point below.

One finds similar patterns among Ottoman Muslim population groups. Another local vernacular grammar that has long gone unpublished is Eli Teremaxi's *Tesrifa Kurmancî* (Kurdish morphology), probably dating from the mid-eighteenth century.⁴⁵ As noted, it is primarily an introductory work of Arabic grammar, or more specifically morphology (*sarf*); but its second part consists of brief descriptions of Persian as well as Kurmanji (northern) Kurdish *sarf*; as Teremaxi writes in his introduction, "for the people of the Kurds it is also necessary that they know about the science of *sarf* in the Kurdish language."⁴⁶ It is easy to overlook the importance and influence of this short work. Not only is it the oldest prose text in Kurmanji Kurdish and in all likelihood the first-ever grammar of that language, but it also appears to have circulated quite widely, despite never having been printed locally. Although a manuscript copy of Teremaxi's work had been deposited in the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1858, it would not appear in a printed edition until 1971; this edition, however, appeared in Baghdad rather than in the northern parts of Kurdistan, where Kurdish was virtually completely forbidden at the time. Only in 1997 did a Latin transcription of the Baghdad edition appear in Stockholm. To my surprise, however, all the local former *medrese* pupils I interviewed claimed to know this work and in fact, to have learned it by heart as one of the first stages in their *medrese* studies; their claims are confirmed by several memoirs about Northern Kurdish *medrese* life.⁴⁷ Insofar as they were actively used in educational networks, texts like the *Tesrifa Kurmancî* also had a unifying or standardizing effect on locally spoken vernaculars: they could help to create a normative sense of a correct form of language among the literate strata of the population. Teremaxi shows himself well aware of this normative effect of grammar, commenting that *sarf* is a "balance" (*mizên*) necessary for "correct expression" (*kelamê rast*).⁴⁸

Among Muslim Ottoman Albanians, one similarly finds didactic works, like rhymed Turkish-Albanian vocabularies, emerging alongside Persianate poetry, apparently

44. Neofit Rilski, *Bulgarska Gramatika*, repr., ed. C. I. Parvev (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984).

45. Zeynelabidin Zinar, ed., *Sserfa Kurmancî* (Stockholm: Pencinar, 1997).

46. "boyî tayifa Ekradan ra ji lazim e ku bi zimanê Kurmancî ew ji 'ilmê serfê bizanin" (ibid., 14).

47. For a more detailed account of Teremaxi's work and its cultural-historical significance, see Leezenberg, "Eli Teremaxi and the Vernacularization of Medrese Learning."

48. Zinar, *Sserfa Kurmancî*, 13.

mostly in rural *medreses*. It is not until the late nineteenth century that the first grammar of Albanian would be written by an Ottoman subject, namely, Sami Frashëri.⁴⁹ The first grammar of Ottoman Turkish written by local authors, however, did not appear until 1851; but this grammar, written by Ahmad Cevdet and Fuad Pasha, clearly filled a great need. Until the 1890s, it was reprinted no less than nineteen times; an abbreviated edition authored by Ahmad Cevdet alone met with an equal success.⁵⁰ Some later students argue that it was “inspired” by the works of Western orientalist, notably Davids’s 1841 Turkish grammar; others, however, have denied any such Western influence and emphasize that this grammar remains bound by traditional grammatical categories as employed in the study of Arabic.⁵¹ In the nineteenth century, Armenian grammars likewise proliferated, also, but not exclusively, originating in circles of Western missionaries. Although the first full-fledged grammar of vernacular Armenian would not appear until the 1866 publication of Aydenian’s *Critical Grammar*, Hovhannes Holov had already paid attention to the structure of the civil language between classical Hrabar (*Haygica*) and spoken colloquial Armenian (*Vulgaris*) in his 1675 Latin-language Armenian grammar.⁵²

With the development of modern historical-comparative grammar and the establishment of professionalized universities and language academies in the post-Ottoman successor states, these works increasingly came to be seen as outdated or amateurish. Hence, these early modern sources of learning have become “homeless texts,” as Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has called them: their importance, he argues, is systematically downplayed by both Western orientalist and local modernist nationalist narratives.⁵³ Focusing on Persian-language texts written in early modern Mughal India, he argues that these “have fallen victim to the fissure of Indian and Iranian nationalism.”⁵⁴ These works, moreover, also have a neglected importance for the origins of modern Western orientalism: “in its formative phase, European students of the Orient, rather than

49. Ettore Rossi, “Un inedito lessico rimato turco-albanese composto a Scutari nel 1835,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 26 (1951): 114–23.

50. Ahmed Cevdet Pasha/Fuat Pasha, *Kavâ'id-i osmaniyye*, ed. Nevzat Özkan (Ankara: Türk dil kurumu yayinlari, 2000). A German translation, by H. Kellgren, was published as *Grammatik der osmanischen Sprache* (Helsingfors, 1855).

51. See, respectively, David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876–1908* (London: Cass, 1977), 57, 59; and Mardin, “Some Notes on an Early Phase,” 264.

52. “Tertia vero, qua est mixta ab . . . Haygica & Vulgari, & propterea est partim regularis, & partim irregularis, eaque utuntur Praedicatores, & Oratores, dicitur *k'aghak'akan*, id est Civilis”: Ioannes Agop [Hovhannes Holov], *Puritas haygica sev grammatica armenica* (Rome, 1675), 2.

53. Mohamad Tavakoli Targhi, “Early Persianate Modernity,” in Pollock, *Forms of Knowledge*, 257–87.

54. *Ibid.*, 263–64.

initiating original and scientific studies, relied heavily on the research findings of native scholars.”⁵⁵ If correct, this claim implies that modern Western orientalism is rather more deeply indebted to early modern non-Western learned traditions than is usually acknowledged. Here, however, I am concerned less with the orientalist appropriation and obliteration of local learned texts than with their origin and status in the early modern Ottoman empire. Not all of these works, it should be noted, are “homeless” in Tavakoli-Targhi’s sense. Some of their authors, like Vuk Karadžić and Neofit Rilski, are commemorated and celebrated as heroes of national awakening, but many others have largely been forgotten.

The preceding discussion suggests that these works can hardly if at all be dismissed as calques of Western European models. In Western Europe, the writing—and printing—of grammars of vernacular languages in those vernaculars themselves was a relatively rare phenomenon prior to the eighteenth century. Apart from descriptions of Latin, classical Greek, and Hebrew, most of the first printed grammars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries concerned already vernacularized languages like Spanish, French, and Italian or South American languages like Inca, Zapotec, and Mixtec.⁵⁶ From roughly the mid-eighteenth century, one may see a proliferation of vernacular grammars in Western and Central Europe as well. The most famous specimen—indeed, according to many, the archetype—of such grammars is undoubtedly Jakob Grimm’s *Deutsche Grammatik* (1819), which dovetails with the near-simultaneous (and, in fact, slightly earlier) work of Slavic scholars like Vuk Karadžić and Jernej Kopitar, both of whom exchanged letters with Grimm. For other languages in Southeastern Europe and the Ottoman empire, however, no such Grimm connection can be shown until relatively late in the nineteenth century, if at all. For example, the pioneers of Bulgarian, like Sofroni and Rilski, grew up in an orthodox intellectual environment and give no indication whatsoever of any contact with Austrian or German philologists. Likewise, Eustatievici’s grammar appears to have been shaped by its author’s education at the academy of Kiev rather than by contact with Austro-Hungarian (let alone Western European) traditions of learning.⁵⁷ This lack of romantic nationalist connections is even more apparent in the case of the Ottoman Armenians and Muslim

55. *Ibid.*, 271.

56. See John Howland Rowe, “Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Grammars,” in *Studies in the History of Linguistics: Traditions and Paradigms*, ed. D. Hymes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974): 361–79, esp. 372–73.

57. See Thede Kahl and Michael Metzeltin, “Die Herausbildung der Wortklassenterminologie in den Balkansprachen,” *Balkanismus heute/Balkanisms Today/Balkanizmy segodnja*, ed. Thede Kahl et al. (Münster: LIT, 2012), 81–109.

population groups: German romantic influences, and references to Herder, become visible only toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus far, studies of these and other authors have generally proceeded from the tacit assumption that anything nationalist in their writings must be the result of Western European, and more specifically French or German, intellectual influences; but in fact, one may doubt the predominance of such German romantic connections even in the case of modern Slavic philology. To my knowledge, Jernej Kopitar was the first Slavic nationalist author to refer to Herder. In his 1810 pamphlet “Patriotische Gedanken eines Slawen” he approvingly mentions the latter’s views on the Slavic nation. But Herder at best figures indirectly, through Kopitar’s influence, in Vuk Karadžić’s pioneering Serbian grammar, the *Pismenica Serbskoga jezika*, the first edition of which antedated Grimm’s grammar by half a decade. Karadžić was born and raised in the Ottoman empire and temporarily fled to Austria in 1805; it was only later in life that he established contact with Slavic pioneers like Kopitar and with German scholars like Jakob Grimm and Leopold von Ranke.⁵⁸ Rather, Karadžić’s linguistic concepts and ideologies are indebted, partly through Kopitar, to earlier works like Friedrich Adelung’s 1781 and 1793 German grammars, to Peter Pallas’s 1787 comparative dictionary of world languages, published in Petersburg, and, perhaps most important, to Avram Mrazović’s 1794 Slaveno-Serbian grammar.⁵⁹

Thus, the early modern Ottoman vernacularization-*cum*-governmentalization was shaped neither by German romantic nationalism nor by modern Western European philology (whether or not orientalist); rather, the grammatical vocabulary employed in these works hails from the Arabic linguistic tradition (and, one should add, the Persianate literary tradition), in the case of vernaculars spoken by Muslims, and from Byzantine scholarship on koine Greek and Old Church Slavonic, in the case of Christian peoples. Since it did not involve any qualitatively novel conceptions of either vocabulary or grammar, this vernacularization hardly qualifies as a “scientific revolution” in Thomas Kuhn’s sense or as an epistemic mutation or rupture in Michel Foucault’s sense. Yet, because of its novel mediums of expression, its novel objects of study, and its novel linguistic ideologies, one may well characterize this development as revolutionary: it set in motion the cultural and eventual political transformation of the pluralistic Ottoman empire into a new constellation of homogenized and purified nation-states.

58. Vuk Karadžić, *Pismenica serbskoga jezika* (Vienna, 1814), available in German as *Kleine serbische Grammatik*, trans. Jakob Grimm (Leipzig, 1824).

59. See Thomas Butler, “The Origins of the War for a Serbian Language and Orthography,” *Harvard Slavic Review* 5 (1970): 1–80, esp. 14–21.

V. CONCLUSION

If the above argument holds, the new language-based forms of collective self-identification that would ultimately develop into political nationalisms worldwide cannot in their entirety be reduced to European influences or, more specifically, to French revolutionary and German romantic ideas; some of their crucial antecedents, in particular the new values attached and attention given to local vernacular languages, appear to result from local dynamics as much as from foreign influences. Based on, and extending, Pollock's claims concerning processes of vernacularization in Europe and India around 1000 CE, one may therefore qualify the eighteenth century as an era of a much broader process of vernacularization, involving languages like German and Russian in Europe; Urdu in India; and a staggering diversity of "Christian" vernaculars like Modern Greek, Armenian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Romanian, and "Muslim" vernaculars like Turkish, Kurdish, and Albanian in the Ottoman empire. During this period, these vernaculars acquired a novel status as media of high literature, as objects of knowledge and government, and as bases for collective self-identification.

Generally, vernacular eras emerge from antecedent and broader cosmopolitan orders or epochs. What is distinct about the early modern vernacularization described above is that it appears to have heralded the virtually universal—and, to date, enduring—spread of vernacular orders, especially as institutionalized in the modern nation-state. Not even the English-dominated linguistic globalization of the present day has radically challenged the consecrated status of national languages in existing nation-states.⁶⁰ The continuities between these eighteenth-century vernacularizations and nineteenth-century nationalisms, as well as the primarily local dynamics they appear to reflect, also place the emergence of modern European philology and its relation to the rise of nationalism in a rather different light.

Finally, I have deliberately abstained from any speculation as to the possible causes of this early modern vernacular revolution and of the virtually synchronic, and subsequently converging, character of these different patterns of vernacularization. For various reasons, attempts to explain this simultaneous development in terms of a diffusion of Western ideas or of a world-historical synchrony seem unsatisfactory. Initially, the most promising or plausible line of explanation may seem to focus on European colonial expansion; but with the possible exception of India, large parts of which came under effective if indirect British control after the 1760s, none of these regions were under anything like Western European military or political—let alone intellectual—domination during the eighteenth century. Likewise, mercantile con-

60. *Pace Abram de Swaan, Words of the World: The Global Language System* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

tacts, although certainly important, were too unevenly spread among Ottoman regions and subject populations for them to have had a decisive and uniform ideological or cultural, and more specifically linguistic, effect: they primarily affected Greeks and Armenians in major coastal cities like Istanbul, Smyrna, and Salonica, and—initially at least—had little if any appreciable intellectual impact on other Ottoman population groups.

Intellectual-historical explanations of this eighteenth-century vernacularization face the fact that Ottoman developments show no significant influence from German Romanticism and in fact antedate its rise; nor was European orientalism developed to such an extent that it could possibly have shaped or even informed the vernacular grammars written in its wake. Although grammars of vernacular oriental languages like Turkish and Modern Greek had appeared in Western Europe in the mid-seventeenth century, the study of the East generally focused on the classical languages of religion and learning, like Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and later Sanskrit and classical Chinese. The first detailed linguistic studies of non-Western vernaculars appear to have emerged from among missionaries of rivaling Catholic orders in the eighteenth century; in the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries took the lead. In the Ottoman empire, however, these missionary efforts do not appear to have affected local literate practices until around 1850. With the partial exception of the Slavic linguistic pioneers (who, however, drew their inspiration from the Enlightenment and from Russia rather than from nineteenth-century German Romanticism), it is only in the second half of the century that the first Western philological influences become visible in Ottoman writings.

An initially more plausible approach would seek explanations in terms of local political, economic, or other causes; but such explanations leave unanswered the question why we find similar processes occurring simultaneously in other parts of the world. Thus, one might focus attention on the eighteenth-century decentralizing developments in the Ottoman empire that gave local rulers increased opportunities for patronage; but this decentralization and the ensuing patronage relations did not change uniformly across the empire, so one may doubt whether this will yield any single coherent explanation of the various vernacularizations occurring among the different Ottoman population groups, let alone elsewhere.

In short, the near-synchronic and subsequently dovetailing occurrence of these vernacularizations in different parts of the eighteenth-century world at present defies historical explanation; but its very simultaneity appears to warrant speaking of a genuine “vernacular revolution.” Undoubtedly, further comparative study of this revolution may clarify the role of the humanities in the shaping of modernity, in particular in the near-universal spread and institution of language-based national identities.

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