Diagnosing the State: Medical Metaphors in Ottoman Political Writing

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Abstract

This paper will trace the transformation of how Ottoman scribes, statesmen and bureaucrats imagined the body politic from the 16th century to 19th by focusing on the metaphors derived from medicine and human body. As others have shown, the 16th and 17th century Ottoman political writing demonstrates the clear influence of Galenic medicine and Aristotelian-Avicenna metaphysics in conceptualizing state and society. During the 18th century, however, we see the adoption of Khaldunian conception of society as an organic unity with a determined lifetime which implies a shift of emphasis from spatiality to temporality of the polity. From early Tanzimat onwards, we see sporadic use of modern medical concepts, diseases and germs in explaining problems of Ottoman politics and society. Our argument is that instead of a sudden shift from Galenic vocabulary to a modern medical one through the impact of the West, Ottoman political imagery gradually transformed over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in response to the administrative challenges. By narrating this transformation, we also reflect on how looking at metaphors can contribute to our understanding of conceptual transformation and particularly the concept of “state” in our case.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, conceptual history, body politic, Galenic medicine, sick man of Europe

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1. Introduction

The trope “the sick man of Europe” has been ridiculed for its inherent Orientalism, such as when Edward Said wrote that:

(...) at no time did the convergence between latent Orientalist doctrine and manifest Orientalist experience occur more dramatically than when, as a result of World War I, Asiatic Turkey was being surveyed by Britain and France for its dismemberment. There, laid out on an operating table for surgery, was the Sick Man of Europe, revealed in all his weakness, characteristics, and topographical outline.¹

This was obviously a move conceived and legitimized in exactly the kind of discourse that Said labels Orientalist, but at the same time, it is undeniable that the Ottomans themselves saw their empire as sick. In fact, many Ottomans believed it was dying. This presents a problem parallel to what we encounter with the “decline paradigm”, particularly in early modern Ottoman historiography: recent scholarship has seriously challenged “decline”-oriented interpretations, but the fact remains that it was Ottoman authors who first created and reproduced this narrative starting in the seventeenth century.²

This is why it should come as no surprise that when Tsar Nicholas I of Russia called the Ottoman Empire “the sick man of Europe”, contemporary Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals saw it as quite an accurate metaphor.³ Since Ottoman writers had already been framing the empire’s predicaments in medical terms for centuries, they simply picked up the expression without challenge or qualifications.⁴ Starting with the early seventeenth century political crisis, Ottoman political writers had frequently conceptualized what they perceived to be Ottoman “decline” through metaphors derived from medical knowledge, such as sickness, imbalance and senility. Initially, Galenic medicine provided Ottoman authors with a vocabulary with which to

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³ Never mind the caveats about the origins of the phrase, it soon became a social fact of nineteenth century international politics, see Harold Temperley, *England and the Near East* (London: Longmans, Greens and Co., 1936), 272.
talk about the body politic and its health, but this was gradually replaced with a vocabulary drawn from Ibn Khaldun’s theory of the lifecycle of polities. Later, the developments in the understanding of the origins and spread of disease in the nineteenth century produced a novel set of metaphors regarding state and society. To borrow from Protagoras, we could say “man” was the measure in a very real sense, and served first as a simile and then as a metaphor for the polity. The Ottoman political imaginary transformed along with the transformation of the Ottoman elite’s understanding of cosmology and the human body on the one hand, and with the reforming state on the other, with schemata shared across multiple fields. Furthermore, in its general outlines, the shift in the political imaginary — both in spatial and temporal terms — was quite comparable to conceptual shifts in various European contexts.

Tracing how metaphors change over time, instead of looking directly at the concepts of state or society, is an innovative approach to conceptual history, which, we believe, can lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of conceptual change and the relationship between political imagery and scientific knowledge. There has been a lot of interest in the history of the concept of the state in early modern Ottoman history, particularly drawing on the parallels with the history of the concept in European languages. We contribute to this ongoing debate by shifting our focus to the metaphors that accompany the concept rather than the concept itself. Following the conceptual metaphor theory that gained increasing currency in cognitive psychology and humanities after the publication of Lakoff and Johnson’s classic work, we advocate taking metaphors more seriously in conceptual historical analysis and reflect on the more intricate relations between conceptual formation and metaphors. Koselleck observed how all temporal


7 Combining and correlating history of metaphors and concepts has been proposed and discussed by conceptual historians before. See particularly Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, “Emotional Translations: Conceptual History Beyond Language” History and Theory 55:1 (2016): 46-65 and Hans Erich Bödeker, Begriffsgeschichte, Diskursgeschichte, Metapherngeschichte (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002).
concepts are based on spatial metaphors, but the fact is, all key political concepts are part of complex semantic fields that are highly metaphorical: justice as a scale, the polity as a body, society as a flock, politics as a pastoral act etc. Taking a cue from the intervention of philosophers like Maurice Merlau-Ponty, who argued the body to be the primary site of knowing the world and the subsequent turn towards embodiment in neuropsychology, we argue that metaphors derived from the human body are particularly worthy of attention.

The basis of the conceptual change here is that once a metaphorical equivalence is established between the human body and the polity, then it becomes easy to draw upon other related metaphors and concepts in one field to speak about and conceptualise the other. While Lakoff and Johnson have argued that we “live by metaphors”, using supposed universals of human life to make meaning of our existence and surroundings, we observe that many of the metaphors of Ottoman politics were derived from a specific scientific culture whose origins the Ottomans shared with Europeans, Arabs and the Persianate world. Metaphors may be logically universal, but the knowledge that they draw upon and are embedded in are specific to their context of use. Since this knowledge changes over time and across cultures/languages, the meaning of the metaphor also changes. This is to underline the historicity and context-boundness of political metaphors. How one conceives of the inner workings and dynamics of the human body is therefore bound to influence the metaphors derived from such knowledge. In this case, it was Galen’s humoral medicine, shared between Ottoman and European philosophical traditions, later Khaldunian theory, a particularly Middle Eastern source, and eventually the nineteenth century knowledge about infectious diseases, etiology and quarantine measures.

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10 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.
For our analysis, we focus on a variety of political writings produced by Ottoman scribes, bureaucrats, and men of letters who tended to the affairs of the polity using a common language which transformed over time.13 We engage with a variety of genres and texts from treatises and chronicles to official communications and eventually newspaper articles written by a variety of authors who were part of the Ottoman administrative system one way or another. As a general rule, these men holding different positions in the Ottoman government were educated in the ādāb tradition, an encyclopedic corpus which included a wide range of topics from personal ethics, health and self-care to administration and politics.14 As learned men coming from different literary backgrounds, Ottoman administrative cadres could and would draw on a wide variety of sources to articulate the problems of the polity and offer solutions. The actual makeup of Ottoman administrative personnel would change significantly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. However, through institutional continuity and a shared interest in history, the writings of these figures constitute a surprisingly self-reflective and continuous corpus through the tumultuous centuries of the Empire. Even in the nineteenth century, Ottoman bureaucrats relied heavily on canonical works of the Ottoman literary tradition while they quickly adapted to modern scientific knowledge. Infectious diseases were a major concern for the modernizing state which had introduced mass conscription and a surprising number of the Tanzimat bureaucrats had therefore trained as medical doctors.15 Thus, the changes in the political use of medical metaphors went hand in hand with changes in medical science and conceptions of nature. Using the analogy of a medical doctor consulting a patient was a common way for statesmen to claim authority over the health of the polity.

In this article we trace how the Galenic medical vocabulary that was used to discuss politics gradually left its place to a biomedical discourse in the nineteenth century. All along, a key concern was the health of the polity. We start with how Galenic political discourse was used in Ottoman letters. We then turn our attention to the Khaldunian turn in Ottoman letters in the eighteenth century, showing how the fusion of Galenic and cyclical political metaphorical thinking in Ottoman discourse transformed the way that Ottoman political authors envisioned the body politic.

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15 See Aylin Koçunyan, Negotiating the Ottoman Constitution 1839-1876 (Paris: Peeters, 2018), 305.
We observe that, where the Galenic concepts have a spatial setup based on a homology between the human body and the polity, with the Khaldunian turn the emphasis shifts to temporality and the life cycle of the polity. With the latter, the body politic acquires a true metaphorical quality, as an organic entity that moves through time and history, with an early period of growth and virility followed by corruption, decline and eventual death. Finally, we show how in the nineteenth century, concomitantly to the dissemination of new scientific understandings of the causes and spread of disease, Galenism virtually disappeared from the center of political writing\textsuperscript{16}, and replaced by an etiological vocabulary that was used to conduct politics and propose cures for the ailments of the Ottoman Empire.

2. Humoralism in Early Modern Ottoman Political Writing

Early modern Ottoman political writing integrated various traditions and genres including but not limited to juristic (fiqh), mystical (sufi) and scribal genres (ādāb) which were not mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{17} In its formative period over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the scribal literature produced by the Ottoman officials drew mainly on Persian court literature. This tradition made ample use of Aristotelian philosophical texts that had been translated into Arabic at the turn of the second millennium CE. This was a particularly rich intellectual tradition where many authors were aware of key concepts of ancient Greek philosophy, as these were picked up and appropriated by such Persian and Arabic authors as al-Farābī (872-950), Averroës (1126-1198), and Avicenna (980-1037), Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274; henceforth Tusi) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 1502).\textsuperscript{18} Particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries Ottoman scribes from various backgrounds produced both works on general ethics and political advice literature (Fürstenspiegel) which made extensive use of the Persian literature.

This philosophical tradition also integrated Hippocrates’ writings on medicine, where the microcosm of the human being was made up of the same elements as the macrocosm. Hippocrates proposed that the whole world was made up of the four elements fire, water, air, and earth, and

\textsuperscript{16} It appears to have a continued life in folk medicine, see Sylvia Wing Önder, \textit{We Have No Microbes Here: Healing Practices in a Turkish Black Sea Village} (Durham, NC: Carolina University Press, 2007)

\textsuperscript{17} Hüseyin Yılmaz, \textit{Caliphate Redefined. The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), Introduction.

that these had corresponding humors within the body; *blood, phlegm, bile* and *black bile*. The basis on which the four elements and the four humors corresponded was that both sets were characterized by their two properties of moist/dry and hot/cold. Some five centuries later, Greek anatomical philosopher Claudius Galenus (129-216 CE), hereafter Galen, developed this theory further. Subsequently, Galen became eponymous with the medical tradition that integrates this theory and proposes regimens to alleviate or cure the ailments that come from an imbalance in the ratio between the various humors. This approach to medicine was hegemonic across medieval Europe and the Mediterranean world, gradually losing this hegemony over medical practice in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.\(^{19}\)

Galen’s basic conceptual setup was also used to discuss politics. In fact, the body politic was discussed in terms of the basic precepts of Galenic humor theory longer than this was maintained as a medical practice at the center of the Ottoman Empire. Galenic approach to body politic had become quite prevalent in medieval Islamic cultures once they replaced the earlier metaphors used by Arabic philosophers who likened the state to a body with the ruler as either the heart or the head and the other instruments of government as the limbs.\(^{20}\) Galenic metaphors became particularly popular with Tusi’s *Nasirean Ethics* in the fashion of Aristotelian\(^{21}\) ethics and it was adopted by later Persian, Mughal and Ottoman thinkers. As Hüseyin Yılmaz notes, ethical writers would refer to ethics as “spiritual medicine” (*tibb-i rūhāni*) which implied that “philosophers of ethics were spiritual doctors.”\(^{22}\)

While ethical treatises following the example of Tusi were in circulation in Anatolia already in the 15th century, major ethical works drawing on Galenic humorism and political manuals that applied those theories to explain the problems of Ottoman government and administration proliferated from the 1550s onward. This proliferation was due, first, to the growing institutionalization of Ottoman government and, secondly, to the widespread economic, social and political challenges the Empire faced after the reign of Süleyman the Lawgiver (d. 1566).\(^{23}\) One

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\(^{20}\) Ibid, 180-186.

\(^{21}\) One could as well call this tradition Avicennan since it bore the stamp of Avicenna’s appropriation of Greek concepts, and Avicenna had a lasting impact on Islamic learning up until the 19th century. We rather use Aristotelian here to emphasize the shared philosophical tradition in the early modern world, and thus challenge the arguments for difference which occasionally amount to essentialism.

\(^{22}\) Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 314n94.

\(^{23}\) See Rifa’at Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 2nd Edition* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Pal Fodor, “State and Society, Crisis and Reform,
of the canonical works of Ottoman moral philosophy, Kinalzade Ali’s Ahlak-i Alâî (The Supreme Ethics), was produced right around that time in 1564. Like his Persian influences, Kinalzade also saw government and justice as a problem of balance of elements:

Let us recount the conditions and pillars of justice, and what the just ruler needs to heed:

The first condition is that he keeps all the creatures in balance, for, in the social world, the creatures are like the four elements. Just as the disposition of a person is not healthy when the elements are not in balance and proportion, if the individual groups are not kept in balance, the disposition of the social world will not be in order. And the elements of the social body are four just like the elements of the human body.

Kinalzade goes on to describe the four estates of society comparing them to the four natural elements: the men of the pen to water, men of the sword to fire, merchants to air and peasants to earth. The crucial point here is that these parallels between the physical world, the social world and the human body appear to be working on two levels: first, the structure and logic of one is explicitly a simile for the logic and structure of others and second, they operate on the same logic which implies homology and isomorphism. That is, the four fold composition and the necessary balance of those elements is the primary logic by which both the microcosm/human body and the macrocosm/the physical universe operate, with the society following naturally as an intermediate level. Accordingly, Kinalzade’s book was organized into three chapters as was the case in previous works which followed Aristotelian ethics: care of the self (’ilm-i tedbîr-i nefs), household administration or economy (’ilm-i tedbîr-i menzil) and government of the city or politics (’ilm-i in 15th-17th Century Ottoman Mirror for Princes,” Acta Orientalia Scientiarum Hungaricae 40 (1986): 217-240 and Douglas Howard, “Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of ‘Decline’ of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” Journal of Asian History 22 (1988): 52-77
24 Kinalzade cites Devvani, Tusi and other Arabic and Persian philosophers as well as Aristotle throughout his work. As attested by hundreds of surviving manuscripts, Kinalzade’s work became an Ottoman classic of moral and political thought and it would be published in print in the mid-19th century.
tedbīr-i müdün). Considering the homological aspect, we would argue that at this point humoral analogy was a simile rather than a metaphor.

One key concept in this literature was regimen (tedbīr) which denoted the type of action that was required to restore balance to the body and to society. The ruler needed a proper regimen to give and restore balance to the polity in order to uphold “world order,” (nizām-ı ‘ālem), a particular concept used by the Ottomans for socio-political order. Like the four humors in the body, the four classes of the polity had to be kept in balance and at a particular ratio. Excess of one class, or deficiency of another, or intermixing between them would lead the polity into a crisis - it would, quite literally, make the polity ill. Hence, soon after Kınalızade, when the Ottoman scribes started complaining about the corrosion of social order in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century, they relied heavily on the doctrine of four classes to describe the default layout of Ottoman society, and to point out what was wrong with it, without necessarily invoking the humoral analogy. Two major symptoms they pointed to were the increasing mobility between the four classes and the excessive number of janissaries, the salaried soldiers.

Within this genre, aptly called the “decline literature”, it was Katip Çelebi’s treatise Düstūrü’l-Amel li-Islāhi’l-Khalel from 1653 which relied most on medical metaphors and analogies in explaining the causes of Ottoman “decline.” Although Marinos Sariyannis argues it was Katip Çelebi who associated the four estates with Galenic humors instead of the four natural elements for the first time in his memorandum from 1653, it is clear that the connection had already been made with Kınalızade in the late 16th century. While Kınalızade and those inspired by his works took the homology between four elements, four classes and four humors for granted, Katip Çelebi simply spelled it out. Beyond that, however, it was Katip Çelebi who relied most on the medical analogy and made it the running theme of his treatise.

For instance, Katip Çelebi emphasized the medical analogy by formulating the problems of the Empire as a disruption of the disposition of the state (inhirāf-ı mizāc-ı devlet) and seeking

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28 Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order”, 57.
29 Ibid, 63-64; Sariyannis, A History, Ch. 4-5, and Alp Eren Topal, “From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concepts of Reform 1600-1876” (PhD Dissertation, Bilkent University, 2017), 24-27.
31 See Sariyannis, A History, 26, 291; and Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 63-64.
the appropriate remedy. To attribute a disposition to the state is a clear indicator of the body metaphor and points to a certain degree of abstraction of the concept of the state. As noted above, there is an ongoing scholarly debate about the degree to which the Ottoman concept of state in the 17th century had gained autonomy and abstraction from the ruler and the dynasty as was the case in the contemporary European political vocabulary. Still, at least for Katip Çelebi, the distinction between the state and the ruler is clear since he draws an analogy between the intellect (nefs-i nāñana) which governs the body composed of humors and the sultan who governs the social body (hey’et-i ictimā’iyye-i beşeriyye) which he uses synonymously with the state (devlet). The extension of medical vocabulary beyond the humors suggests that, with Katip Çelebi, the humoral analogy had started gaining a metaphorical quality.

Vasileios Syros argues that the introduction and frequent use of the humoral analogy in both Islamic and Florentine political writing suggests a concern over conserving the harmony of society as opposed to the earlier medieval accounts, which prioritized hierarchy by positing the ruler as the head or the heart. While the changing metaphors are surely a sign of shift in the way the political organization was imagined, it would be a mistake to attribute this shift to an emphasis on a circular harmony instead of preserving hierarchy. Rather, we argue, such a differentiated conception of social organization should be attributed to the growing complexity and fluidity of the Ottoman society and politics as well as the increasing problems with governing and administering such a complex system, which led Ottoman bureaucrats to seek refuge in neat and clearly defined models and categories. The decline treatises of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century were a response to the dramatically shifting class structure of the empire manifest in the increasing access of actors from outside the system to the higher echelons of the state. Such a shift, coupled with the broader economic problems, brought with it a perceived need to reiterate the necessity of keeping people and groups where they belong and thus preserving social boundaries.

32 Katip Çelebi, Siyaset Nazariyesi, 133-35.
33 Cf. Zemmin, “Janus Face of Kâtip Çelebi.”
34 Syros, “Galenic Medicine.”
35 See Abou-El-Haj, Formation of the Modern State.
3. Facing Mortality: Ibn Khaldun and Lifecycle of the State

As noted above, Katip Çelebi’s novelty does not lie in his adoption of humoralism in explaining the problems of Ottoman body politic; he was actually one of the last Ottoman intellectuals to give the humoral analogy serious thought and a central place in argument. His novelty rather lay in the introduction of Ibn Khaldun’s theory of state cycles as parallel to human life. Referring to Ibn Khaldun, Katip Çelebi argues that the state passes through stages of youth (sinn-i nümûv), maturity (sinn-i vuqûf) and decline (sinn-i inhibit) just like humans.⁶⁶ Although he recognizes that the Ottoman state had experienced an exceptionally long youth and maturity, he admits that decline is imminent and at this stage, the options are limited. It is this introduction of a temporal element to the analysis of the body politic that would gain increasing prevalence in Ottoman elite accounts of decline. While later writers would also cite the humoral analogy in passing, none would dedicate much thought to the implications of the analogy or give it meaningful space in argumentation.

Although there had been some reception of Ibn Khaldun through the writings of Katip Çelebi in the seventeenth century,⁶⁷ the extent to which his concepts and categories were taken up by Ottoman intellectual and political life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be termed a Khaldunian turn.⁶⁸ The Khaldunian turn becomes even more emphasized and accentuated with Mustafa Naima’s monumental chronicle of the Ottoman 17th century, completed around 1700.⁶⁹ Naima explicitly cites Ibn Khaldun as the greatest of historians and goes on to repeat the humoral analogy as well as the doctrine of three stages reminding his readers once again that just like one cannot treat a young child with the formula intended for an old man, each stage in the state’s lifecycle demands different political measures.⁷⁰ Borrowing directly from Katip Çelebi’s Düüstur, he argues that just like an old man’s body marked by an overabundance of phlegm, those states which have passed the age of maturity are marked by an overabundance of soldiers, requiring constant spitting out, in form of deployment on the battlefield (with its inevitable casualties) or culling of rolls.⁷¹ Naima drags the analogy every possible way, finally pointing out that past the

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⁶⁶ Katip Çelebi, Siyaset Nazariyesi, 137.
⁶⁹ See Lewis Thomas, A Study of Naima (New York: NYU Press, 1972)
⁷¹ Ibid, 23.
stage of maturity both men and states favor staying put and sedentary life (ḥadāret) to mobility (ṣefer). Following these expositions Naima starts summarizing the character of each of the five stages detailed by Ibn Khaldun, with the vocabulary of the Ottoman state, thus reinforcing the parallel between KhaIdun’s theory and the Ottoman experience first proposed by Katip Çelebi. Finalizing his introduction with lengthy prescriptions for what needs to be done for a state in the later stages of its life, Naima presents a neat amalgamation of KhaIdunian theory and Ottoman historical experience, combined through the metaphor of the human body.

Ottoman authors picked up KhaIdunian concepts and schemata and applied them with a degree of engagement and appropriation that allowed for the particularity of the problems in the Ottoman political world. They clearly saw the KhaIdunian narrative structure as well-suited for narrating Ottoman history. In 1725, Pirizade Mehmed Sahib Efendi, a one-time grand mufti, started translating Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddima into Ottoman Turkish. In 1730, he completed the first five chapters and submitted it to the sultan. After a passage in the work where Ibn Khaldun claims the lifetime of a state will not exceed 120 years in the best-case scenario, Pirizade intercedes with a marginalia and sardonically notes that Ottoman state has been around almost five hundred years. Hence, Pirizade both translates the KhaIdunian setup to Ottoman Turkish and questions its direct applicability to the Ottoman polity. The lifetime or life cycle of the Ottoman Empire had transcended the logic of KhaIdunian history writing by lasting five centuries. The longevity of the empire was unprecedented in Islamic history and this contributed to the notion of “Ottoman exceptionalism.” This exceptionalism is also evident in the frequently used definition for the Empire “ever-lasting state” (devlet-i ebediyyü’l-karār or devlet-i ebediyyü’l-devām) which has been attributed to the financial system of the empire based on the principle of balance. As long

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42 Ibid, 25. While use of sefer (mobility) instead of bedāvet (nomadism) could be considered meaningful, Naima and later authors seem to use the two concepts interchangeably.
46 Mehmet Genç, Osmanlı Imparatorluğu’nda Devlet ve Ekonomi (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2000), 33.
as the administration could keep income and expenses in balance and provide enough sustenance for the subjects, the ideal of the circle of justice would be preserved.\textsuperscript{47}

There is a tension in late-eighteenth-century Ottoman intellectual and political debates about the extent to which human agency can salvage or prolong the life of a polity that has reached the later stages, and successfully reverse its decline. While already visible with Katip Çelebi in the seventeenth century, this tension becomes even more emphasized as the problem of “decline” gains urgency. This debate also involved questions of free will and predestination, and was tied to theological and other philosophical matters.\textsuperscript{48} While it would be somewhat anachronistic to call it a matter of secularisation, we may tentatively claim that the Khaldunian turn in Ottoman letters also involved a shift in the emphasis to more worldly reasons of their then-current historical situation. In Ibn Khaldun’s \textit{Muqaddima}, history is understood through the cyclical nature of the growth, maturation and decline of dynastic polities. Attributing to the polity a defined lifetime or duration is logically tied to an organicist conception of the polity. While it was not entirely new, the particular kind of organic entity that the Ottoman polity came to be conceptualized as was different from the other metaphorical precursors. With the Khaldunian turn, the polity is no longer simply \textit{likened to} a body, the body metaphor becomes hegemonic in the political discourse of statecraft and, in the language of rhetoric; it goes from being a \textit{simile} to becoming a true \textit{metaphor}. The polity becomes thought of, spoken of and treated as \textit{a concrete living thing}. The defining characteristic of the Khaldunian turn in Ottoman letters and politics is the acquisition of metaphorical and temporal quality - the polity is a body that moves through history - where previously the spatial qualities had been given a stronger emphasis.

This has become an intuitive way of conceptualizing the polity, and it is difficult to “unthink” once the metaphor has become accepted. The assumption is commonplace in much political theorizing and philosophical writing on the polity, in European and Ottoman intellectual life alike. What was new after Katip Çelebi in Ottoman political writing was also that these writers argue that the present condition had to be understood in terms of a history of “how we got here.” It was at once a turn to history that was not merely a matter of “lessons from history”, but of what is akin to a “patient history” or what would in contemporary medicine be called \textit{epicrisis} or medical

\textsuperscript{47} For a brilliant account of the concept of “circle of justice” see Linda Darling, A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization (New York: Routledge, 2013)

report. Hence, in the account of the mid-18th century jurist and freelance historian Şemdanizade, he hails history as the science to salvation and the historian himself is ascribed the duty of the physician:

Among the benefits of the science of history is the attainment of eternal happiness. The inquiry into narrations is also a path to perfection and a cause of inspiration and salvation. It gives strength to one’s mind and comforts him in times of stress, protects him from grief, melancholy and indignation and swaying too much. The body of the state (vücûd-i devlet) is comparable to the human body (vücûd-i insâni) with the sultan being the spirit, vizier the intellect, mufti the reason, stomach the treasury, ulema the blood, soldiers the phlegm, merchants bile, and the subjects black bile. Just as a human needs a physician and a surgeon to preserve his health, whenever an ailment strikes the body of the state, one needs the historian who is also a physician of sorts, so that he can educate the sultan and the deputies in matters pertaining to statecraft.49

Şemdanizade’s equation of humors and social classes is a summary repetition of Katip Çelebi and Naima, and does not figure prominently in his analysis besides being a lip service to previous accounts. However, it is still significant. First, it reinforces the image of the body politic as an organic unity (regardless of which class is comparable to what element); and, second, by introducing the “historian” as the physician, it joins the line of eighteenth-century Ottoman thinkers who increasingly turned to history to “diagnose” the Ottoman body politic.50 By the late eighteenth century, many of the reports on the condition of the polity would start with citing a uniform narrative of how the Ottoman polity declined in the past century or so.

The Khaldunian setup presents the polity as an organic entity, with its own life cycle and need for medical attention and occasionally intervention to maintain its health. Where the medieval Ottoman and European medical philosophy seems to have been intertwined, and as we shall go on to see they become so again, this is perhaps where we see the greatest divergence, where there is a specifically Ottoman, Eastern Mediterranean, or Islamic conceptualization of the body politic in Khaldunian terms. It would be problematic to put this in terms of a simple modern-premodern

49 Şem’dânizâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi, Müri’t-Tevârih (Istanbul: Ma’arif Nezâreti, 1338 [1919]), 5-6.
50 Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 78.
binary, but we may be justified in seeing it in the context of global early modernity, where it is a
different way of dealing with the increasing social complexity of the period.

A prime example of Khaldunian cyclical reasoning on politics is a reform treatise from the
1790s by one Tatarcık Abdullah Molla, who presents a comprehensive concept of restoration
which rests on Khaldunian concepts of *haḍarīyyet* (sedentary/urban life) and *bedeviyyet*
(nomadism). The memorandum has separate chapters for each issue of reform including the land
forces, naval forces, the religious institution, devaluation of money and the scribal service and
each chapter follows the same pattern: a description of how it was in the glorious age of Sultan
Suleiman, an elaborate analysis of how it came to decay and fall behind that of the adversaries,
and detailed suggestions regarding rehabilitation. The central motive of the text is the dichotomy
between sedentary and nomadic forms of habitation which he uses to explain the causes of
weakness and decline. As is the case with practically every other author at the time who benefitted
from Khaldun’s work, Abdullah Molla does not mention or cite Ibn Khaldun, but the concepts are
unmistakably appropriated from him. Under a separate subchapter titled “On the Good and Benefit
of Movement and Travel for his Excellency around the Domains of the Caliphate” Abdullah Molla
narrates how after a nomadic and mobile way of life, which allowed for dynamism and vigor in
battle, the Ottomans settled in cities, started building big structures, indulged themselves in luxury
and gradually lost their penchant for war making. Accordingly, to regain that dynamism and
readiness for war, the Sultan should lead the army personally into battle, the statesmen should
refrain from staying in one place for long and move around the domains, excessive spending and
imported luxury products shall be avoided. Abdullah Molla relates every other issue to this: finance
is in ruins due to excessive spending and overpopulation of Istanbul, and military is weak due to
urbanization and soldiers staying in barracks too long. Returning to the habits of nomadism (*tavr-
* bedeviyyet) once again will cut the costs and hence benefit the treasury. If regular drills are
implemented the troops will recover from the lethargy of *haḍarīyyet* and will gradually regain their
*bedevī* habits. This will lead to “a brilliant condition like a revival” (*teceddüd mi̇s̱illü başka ḥālāt
ve revnaq*), “reinforcement of the order of the state” (*te’yīd-i niẓām-i devlet*) and “strengthening

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52 Ibid., 281-83.
of the essence of the dynasty” (te’kīd-i esās-i saḥlanat), all phrases used frequently by Abdullah Molla.

As such Abdullah Efendi frames Ottoman reform attempts within a solid Khaldunian framework. The order of the Ottoman state and society was disrupted due to laxity and lethargy caused by urbanism and the way to restoration necessitates adopting nomadic habits once again. Considering that the Ottomans were proud of their urban culture and its achievements, and detested nomadic tribes for the nuisance they caused the state, this line of thinking is indeed revolutionary. It points to a full conceptual reversal. However, it is also a logical conclusion of accepting the Khaldunian schema of dynastic cycles but rejecting its determinism.

While there emerged in seventeenth-century English a concept of improvement that then started to become used as a yardstick of history, this was by no means universally used across Europe.53 Frederick II had a very comparable perspective on the lifecycle of the state. While, in Anti-Machiavelli, he would propose fundamental differences between Machiavelli’s time and his era, making the former’s observations obsolete, the philosopher king would still suggest “The history of states… could be likened to a biological life cycle, in which change was confined within an eternally self-repeating sequence.”54 Ottoman authors, too, would recognize a shift in the affairs of the world while maintaining the cyclical view. For instance, Ahmed Resmi Efendi, who was incidentally an ambassador to Frederick II’s court would note in 1760s that since the last decades of the Hijri millennium (950 AH) there was an observable lack, all over the world, of new dynasties emerging which he attributes to a decline in state power.55

Through the metaphor of the Ottoman polity as a concrete organic whole with a finite lifetime, understanding the then-present predicaments of the state increasingly depended upon understanding how far along its life cycle the polity had come. Solutions to the contemporary predicaments thus depended on a proper understanding of the polity’s history. While we are not generally in favor of treating Ibn Khaldun as a social scientist avant la lettre, more scholarship is needed comparing those who participated in the Khaldunian turn to various developments in the Scottish Enlightenment, and perhaps also looking at possible circulations of texts and

54 Christoph Clark, Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich (Princeton University Press, 2019), 95-96.
intellectuals. When Ottoman statesmen of the eighteenth century started using Khaldunian categories to understand their own predicaments and those of the polity they were tasked to administer, they turned to history in terms of “how did we get here?” as a way of answering the question of “what to do now?” For what may somewhat flippantly be called “Khaldunians”, history is a question of “where in the lifecycle of the polity are we? And how can we best heal the ailments of the polity?”. Note that Ottoman intellectuals Naima (1655–1716) and Pirizade (1674–1749) are broadly contemporaries of the French physiocrats, and that the statesmen who used these concepts to conduct politics were contemporaries of European political economists such as Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Thomas Malthus (1766–1834). This is not to argue that these intellectuals in Scotland, France, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire were necessarily doing the same, but they were concerned with how knowledge produced by scholars and intellectuals could be used to improve the governance and organization of the polity. They were also arguing that material abundance led to moral corruption and a deterioration of the polity, that is the question of decline and its management. Furthermore, with the introduction and use of a Khaldunian framework, Ottoman historiography gained a conceptual schema that was later used to narrate history in a Romantic narrative, not as progress, but as cyclical rejuvenation of an organic entity.

Through the crisis brought on by the Greek Revolt of 1821, the Khaldunian reasoning seems to have acquired an immediacy that would directly shape Ottoman policy. This rebellion took place as a consequence of centralization policies of Mahmud II and particularly the violent crackdown on the increasing autonomy of the governor Tepedelenli Ali Paşa of Ioannina in 1820. Our reason for pointing this out is that Ottoman statesmen and political thinkers did not consider it a “national” uprising as such, but as a matter of disloyalty among subjects. This rebellion was understood in Khaldunian terms, and solutions were also proposed using a Khaldunian vocabulary. It was argued that the Ottoman state was at the final stage of the Khaldunian cycle whereby the afflictions of sedentary lifestyle had reached their zenith. In addition to haḍariyyet (settled habitation) and bedeviyyet, a key concept of the Khaldunian setup adopted by the Ottoman

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58 Frederick F. Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 64.
bureaucrats was ‘asabiyyet (the Ottoman spelling of ‘aṣabiya), which conventionally is translated as group cohesion or solidarity.

In 1821, Ottoman documents, some written by Mahmud II himself, explained the success of the Greek rebels by claiming that they had superior ‘aṣabiyyet. The problem with the Ottomans, these documents claimed, was that they had been too deeply affected by hadaret. According to the ruler at the time, Sultan Mahmud II, the Ottomans had acquired bad habits over the past eighty to one hundred years because they had been suffering from lethargy. Moreover, “these traits that had become bad habits would leave the body only at death”. What was needed was rejuvenation through the purging of the corrupting influences of civilization, and the key to a healthy body politic was movement. In late March 1821, the Imperial Council suggested that the sultan adopt bedeviyet. Within days, most Muslims were called on to abandon all luxury, arm themselves, and acquire horses. The government requisitioned weapons, and all of Ottoman officialdom and all male Muslim inhabitants of Istanbul were soon bearing arms. Conversely, the Greek Orthodox population in villages and urban centers that were considered prone to rebellion were disarmed. Unsurprisingly, having the Muslim population of Istanbul and its environs ride around on horses and bearing arms did little to stop the Greek rebellion. Instead, this development prepared the ground for violence against unarmed Greek Orthodox subjects far away from the rebellion, thus reinforcing and politicizing the boundary between Greek Orthodox and Muslim subjects of the Sultan. The policy was soon abandoned, yet the concern with decline and rejuvenation would continue to occupy the Ottoman elite well into the late 19th century.

4. Blood and Diseases: Tanzimat and Biomedical Vocabulary

Even after the serious restructuring of the Empire through the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), Ottoman bureaucrats were concerned with decline and the “historical continuity” in the problems that ailed the Ottoman state. One particularly illustrative example of this is how Ziya Paşa (1825-1880) presented a brief narrative of the Empire in the form of a detailed patient history:

60 Ilicak “A radical rethinking of empire”, 113.
61 Ibid., 122.
62 Ibid., 130.
...this State emerged around 730 [AH; ca 1330 CE] in Bithynia and up until 1000 it blossomed and grew. At that point, while it was still a virile young man, it has been afflicted with insanity [...] Once it lost its strength, the execution of Sharia has faltered as well. Sharia being the substance of its life, this weakening led to a corruption in the nature of its national morals, which is comparable to the blood in a body. And after that, its military strength dissolved and in a manner of speaking, this upset its stomach. With the blows from oppressors, it contracted yellow fever and occasionally its situation got worse. Although its pain was temporarily relieved with the treatment from the Köprülü viziers [ca 1650-1700], the Persian campaigns of Ahmed III and Mahmu I upset it again and the stomach problem deepened. Upon this sickness, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca [1774] has opened a wound in its heart and it fell bed-ridden. Mahmu II [d. 1838] ran to its aid yet [...] as the sapling from Kaynarca bore fruit 40 years later the Greek revolt led to a carbuncle in the bosom of the state whereas Egypt’s autonomy has paralyzed one of its arms. The Europeans gave up hope on its life and began to draw maps to dissect it accordingly [...] But, of all the ailments, the military weakness, that is the upset stomach, was the most painful and when Mahmu II succeeded in abolishing the Janissaries, the patient opened its eyes. [...] Still, the Treaty of Adrianople worsened the wound in the heart and its recovery was interrupted and the Sultan grew tired. At that instant, Reşid Paşa once again ran to its aid and instituted Tanzimat...63

This description of the then-present condition of the Ottoman Empire, written by an Ottoman intellectual in 1868, closely mirrors what Said was criticizing in the first text we quoted in this paper - the Ottoman Empire being a sick man whose neighbors were ready to dissect and divide the spoils. Ziya Paşa’s account is both self-consciously metaphorical, and reflects a mixture of different medical discourses and metaphors: youth and senility of the Khaldunian setup as well as the surgical discourse in one narrative, reflecting the growing engagement of Ottoman bureaucrats with medicine and public health in the age of reform.

The Ottoman capital was, from the very emergence of modern medicine, part of the networks that transmitted and sustained this type of knowledge. Late Ottoman doctors and public

health officials were well-connected with their European counterparts, including the Pasteur Institute in Paris. As new medical knowledge and practices became available in the early nineteenth century, Ottoman statesmen first used this to maintain the health of soldiers in their newly established conscript army. Since disease was often as lethal for soldiery as battle, the state soon started building institutions for training army doctors in medicine. The Imperial Medical School (Tıphane-i Âmire) and the School for Surgery (Cerrahhane-i Ma’mûre)” in Istanbul in 1827 were among the earliest such efforts.\(^{64}\) This concern for the military later transformed into a policy field of public health. In 1837-38, a “Sanitary Board (Meclis-i Umur-i Sıhhiye) was authorized to deal with epidemics and enforce quarantine measures. The Sanitary Board established disinfection stations in the empire’s municipalities and was otherwise instrumental in combating the cholera epidemics spreading from Asia during the 19th century.”\(^{65}\) Thus, by the nineteenth century, with public health and sanitation becoming a major policy issue, the relationship between medical knowledge and political metaphors became more intricate and immediate. As Khaled Fahmy demonstrated in the case of Egypt, the development of medical knowledge and practices were closely tied to such issues as security, Islamic law and governance as manifested in the gradual adoption of forensic medicine.\(^{66}\)

The eighteenth-century shift from Galenic medicine to Khaldunian cyclicism signals a move away from an understanding of the state and/or society as a balance-of-elements to a relatively organic one with an emphasis on historical trajectories. The seventeenth-century complaints regarding the class structure were displaced by complaints about lethargy, weakness and loss of aşabiyya in the body politic. While an organicized concept of the Ottoman body politic emerged with the Khaldunian turn in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Galenic setup slowly faded away. We find almost no contributions using a Galenic metaphor as a framework for understanding the Ottoman state following Şemdanizade’s work in the 1760s. Instead, there is a gradually increasing use of what may be termed a biomedical vocabulary. For instance, early-nineteenth-century bureaucrat and intellectual Keçecizade İzzet Molla cites only ulema, statesmen-scribes and the corps as the three components of the state in his reform treatise


\(^{65}\) Ibid., 361.

\(^{66}\) Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (University of California Press, 2018).
from 1827. He does not bring in other classes making up the society such as the merchants or farmers. Scholarly reflection on state seems to have focused exclusively on the state as the governing body instead of the state as the social whole. This is further reinforced by Keçecizade’s comment: “All the laws of a state are connected to each other. The health and proportion of the body is incumbent upon the salvation of all the parts, although existence of problems in one or two parts should not make it utterly useless.”

Later, in a memorandum from 1840s Sadık Rifat Paşa incorporates infrastructure into the body of the state as a manifestation of the emerging discourse on economic development when he compares the road network to blood veins:

In sum, this issue of roads is like the veins in the human body; when they run smoothly it leads to preservation of health whereas coagulation and congestion leads to sickness. In the same fashion, opening of the roads will lead to increased prosperity and expansion of trade whereas their closure will prevent that.

In the meantime, state-centric historical works continued to make use of the Khaldunian schema, transforming it in the process. Mustafa Nuri Paşa’s survey of Ottoman history, Netâyicî’l-Vuqû’ât proposes the Khaldunian cycle as a repeating pattern in the life of a state and divides his historical work into century length chapters, whereas Ahmed Cevdet Paşa relies extensively on the Khaldunian framework to explain Ottoman decline and reform in his seminal history from 1850s. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa’s appropriation is particularly interesting in that he uses it to justify the novelties brought on by Tanzimat reforms while sticking to a schematic frame of Kaldun:

… the gravest danger to the state and a fatal ailment to the social body of the nation [beden-i hey’et-i müctemi’-ya millet] is during the transformation from one stage to another, and if due attention and care is not paid during recuperation, the illness will relapse and destroy

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68 Ibid., 81.
69 Sadık Rıfat Paşa, Müntehabât-ı Âsâr Vol. 9 (İstanbul: Tatyos Divitciyan, 1290 [1873-74]), 76.
the already weakened body. And so it is with the states: if the transition from the former stage to the inevitable new stage is not carefully mediated and a new regime is abruptly introduced thus shaking the already weakened body of the state, recovery will be impossible.71

Like any other “conservative reformer” of the nineteenth century, Cevdet recognizes the inevitability of transformation yet tries to control the pace of change and maintain the integrity of the “social and political body” by resorting to medical metaphors. Around the same time, Namık Kemal, one of the most famous and influential of the 19th century Ottoman men of letters, explicitly rejects Khaldunian determinism when dealing with the Ottoman Empire as the sick man. In an 1868 article titled “The Sick Man,” he accepts the premise that the polity was ill, yet he argues that its ailments can be cured:

So, shall we give up hope on the life of our patient considering these chronic diseases? No, the state is a person, but it is an abstract person; it certainly does not have a naturally set lifespan like Ibn Khaldun said… That “Sick Man” would recover his health, regain its strength and even continue to live on until the end of the world, provided it acts in accordance with nature.72

Where writers had previously described the problems of the Ottoman polity in terms of ailments driven specifically by the imbalance of the humors, the nineteenth century increasingly saw the use of diseases. Rather than bile, blood and phlegm, the key to the health of the body politic increasingly lay in metaphors drawn from modern medicine. This is not to say that the authors themselves had a good grasp of then-contemporary medical science, but that they drew upon their lay understandings of it and appropriated its vocabulary and framework for giving meaning to the ailments of the state and the body politic. Although Kemal seems to resist a deterministic account of the life of the body politic, he still seems to have subscribed to a naturalized idea of it coupled with a strong faith in the application of proper scientific formulae. And although there was growing disagreement among Ottoman intellectuals and politicians with regard to the proper treatment and

72 Namık Kemal, “Hasta Adam.”
medicine, they still seem to have shared a common holistic and temporal concept of the body politic which demonstrates a certain continuity with the eighteenth century conceptual set up.

This kind of organic concept of the body politic gains a new dimension with what the Ottomans perceived to be the problem of alien elements, that is the issue of Western influence. Increasingly, moral corruption and invasion of alien ideas were also expressed in biomedical terms. For instance, Hersekli Arif Hikmet, writing in the 1880s, draws an analogy between contagious diseases and moral corruption of Ottoman society:

Often times, weakness turns into strength and a people torn apart by defeat will once again come together in one center and restore its glory as long as the desire for revenge and retaliation remains in its body. But, the invasion of foreign ideas (efkär-i ecnebiyye) does not come about by force. Instead it penetrates the body from a weak point and spreads like a contagious disease breaks down a body gradually, killing it eventually.73

He even accuses Mustafa Reşid Paşa, often hailed as the chief architect of Tanzimat, of figuratively introducing syphilis (by initiating Westernization) to the Ottoman state, a very powerful metaphor for Ottoman society where sexually transmitted diseases were seen as a manifestation of foreign presence:

See that Reşid Paşa of the time, the physician
Who, in order to raise himself up in status
He caused syphilis [Frengi] to befall
On this healthy yet fragile body of the state74

This also plays on the double entendre of Frengi carrying connotation of the Frenk - at that point an anachronistic concept for Catholic Europeans - with the Frenk being semantically connected with the disease.75 Paradoxically, the infection of foreign influence was conceptualized using a

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73 Hersekli Arif Hikmet, Makaleler, edited by Rüdvan Özdiņ (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2018), 264.
74 Hersekli, Makaleler, 377.
75 Einar Wigen, Turkey and the Concept of Europe (Saarbrücken: VDM verlag, 2010), 30.
biomedical vocabulary that was part and parcel of the very same processes that were being criticized.

5. Conclusion

The Ottoman polity may have been called the “state of eternal duration” (*devlet-i ebed-müddet*), but in the late eighteenth century, Ottoman statesmen became concerned that it may perhaps not be as eternal as its byname claimed. They concerned themselves, like Hobbes and Rousseau, with the health of the body politic in medical terms. French philosopher Michel Foucault traces the origins of what he calls “psychiatric power” - which is to him both a medical and political, or rather biopolitical, power - back to the concept of crisis. It is at the moment of crisis when doctors have to intervene to prevent a patient from dying, and as we have argued in this paper, Ottoman authors couched their advice and interventions into political matters in medical terms and set themselves up as arbiters of proper courses of action for an Ottoman polity in decline and a state of imbalance (to use an emic expression) or crisis (to speak in etic terms and anachronistically). The medical vocabulary that they drew upon for their metaphors was also tied up with the role they appropriated for themselves in consulting the sultan on the matter of curing and preserving the longevity of his other body. It should be clear that this also involved a power contest over appropriate courses of action between people competing for position and privilege.

The transformation that Ottoman political discourse went through in the nineteenth century has gained renewed attention as a field of inquiry in the past few years. In this article we contribute to these discussions by turning our attention to a vocabulary that has been generally overlooked, namely the use of medical metaphors in political language. Moreover, we point out that there is a certain continuity in this transformation. What we see is not a matter of a set of stable traditional concepts being abruptly replaced by modern ones in the course of “Westernization” in the 19th century. Rather, there is a continuous and self-reflective vocabulary of metaphors used to talk about the state over the course of three centuries, so far as our paper is concerned. Working inductively with Ottoman texts we suggest that this is a process that has several stages that overlap in layers, with the Khaldunian turn of the late eighteenth century being the first stage and the Tanzimat bureaucrats and intellectuals doing the work during the second.

Furthermore, the transformation from Galenism to biomedicine is intertwined with a change of perspective and the objectification of nature. Broadly speaking, the human body was seen as a microcosm composed of the elements of the macrocosm following Hippocrates, and generalized into a plan where the three levels of the macrocosm, the body politic and the human body were seen as homologous. Hence, the key to health was balance between the various elements, and harmony was sought both within human bodies and within the polity so that they were in line with the forces of the macrocosm. In the same way that biomedicine takes the human body to be an object of medical intervention, this biomedical political discourse increasingly takes the body politic to likewise be an object of political intervention. Fast-forwarding to the 1920s, the supposedly technocratic Kemalist discourse that presents lawyers as ‘doctors of politics’ does have a relatively long pre-history.77 Indeed, these Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen understood themselves as technocrats before the fact - as medical specialists intervening in the diseased body politic and trying to first re-establish a balance between the humors, and later to secure the state from contagion, indigestion, heart attacks and bleeding to death. Inherent in this is what Foucault calls “at once a joust of nature against the disease, of the doctor with regard to this struggle of nature against the disease, and of the doctor with other doctors. They were all present, each confronting the others, each making his own prediction about when the crisis must occur, what its nature would be, and what would be the outcome.”78 Biomedicalized political knowledge, or perhaps rather politicized biomedical knowledge, thus became one tool by which political contestations were fought out in the late Ottoman Empire. This is the flip side of what Ole Jacob Sending deals with in his Politics of Expertise, where different professions compete to have their expert knowledge be the dominant in a particular policy field within international organizations.79

77 Einar Wigen, State of Translation. Turkey in Interlingual Relations (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 2018), 140.