In the present state of our knowledge, dealing with the Ottoman town consists primarily in pondering the very notion of “Ottoman town,” not only in terms of contents, but also of application: is there a unique type of town characteristic of the Ottoman Empire as a whole that could naturally be stamped as “Ottoman town”, or are there sufficiently marked differences between towns that would justify a distinction between different types throughout the empire? Which type would it then be most suitable to select as the Ottoman town and what would be the most appropriate geographical location for it?

There is apparently one generally accepted answer to this question to which most researchers tend to rally, at least implicitly: there exists a spontaneously established distinction between, on the one hand, Mashreq and Maghreb towns, whose kinship goes without saying and which are not Ottoman towns but “Arabic towns in the Ottoman era”—to use André Raymond’s words—and, on the other hand, the towns of “central” (relative to the capital) or better yet “nuclear,” provinces of the empire, which are the real Ottoman towns. In other words, the dividing line places Arabic provinces on one side, Anatolia and Rumelia (Asia Minor and the Balkans) on the other. This means that the discrimination is based on ethno-cultural grounds and that it opposes the cities of the Arabs to those of the Turks. This can only suit nationalists on both sides who, to this day, have picked up and developed the theme without moderation. One must add that scholars more or less external to these ideological preoccupations naturally tend to embrace and reinforce this distinction insofar as it corresponds to a similar division in academics that opposes Arabic and Turkish specialists and, more precisely, specialists of the Ottoman Empire: the empire

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purportedly had two kinds of towns, those pertaining to Arabic Studies and those pertaining to Turcology…

It is precisely this “evidence” that we must question first through an \textit{a priori} reasoning consisting in reviewing the various factors that may have influenced urban processes in the Ottoman Empire.

Beforehand, one must note a fact that raises a number of reflections: all these towns belong to one and the same empire. True, this empire, built “on three continents,” according to the accepted way of saying, stretches far enough latitudinally and longitudinally to offer great variety in natural conditions, and marked differences in climate and available construction material cannot but affect housing. There is a clear distinction between zones of stone architecture—Syria, southeastern Anatolia, and the Kayseri region—and zones of wooden architecture. Wood was the main material when in good supply, as in the traditional houses of Istanbul and the \textit{yalı} of the Bosporus, and when in short supply was used only for building the framework, which was then filled in with miscellaneous material.

At the same time, the sultans of Istanbul were not first in bringing political unity to these disparate regions: these had all been part of the Roman and Byzantine empires whose heritage at the time of the Ottomans’ arrival was more or less recent and vivacious in some regions or, on the contrary, buried under subsequent strata. In any case, the effect of this common filiation on the urban landscape of the Ottoman era is very concrete, not only because of the, sometimes spectacular, presence of antique and Byzantine monuments in most of these towns, but also because of subsisting traces in the topography of Roman road patterns (which have survived to this day). What is a well-known phenomenon in many Western towns, notably in northern Italy, attested as well in several cities of the Mashreq, thanks to Sauvaget’s work, is also found in Salonica, Nicaea, or Rhodes or, as P. Pinon demonstrated, in Izmir, in the ancient Turkish quarter around the agora or, to a lesser extent, in Bursa, in the citadel quarter.\footnote{Cf., among others, J. Sauvaget, “Le plan antique de Damas,” \textit{Syria} 26 no. 3–4 (1949): 314–358; G. Mansuelli, \textit{Urbanistica e architettura della Cisalpina romana} (Brussels, 1971); P. Pinon, “Les tissus urbains ottomans entre Orient et Occident,” in \textit{Proceedings of the 2nd International Meeting on Modern Ottoman Studies and the Turkish Republic}, Leiden, April 21–26, 1987, ed. E. Van Donzel (Leiden, 1989), 17.}

As for the Ottoman period itself, the towns of the empire share, as a whole, the fact that they belong to the same period, thereby gener-