This book is the third volume of The Cambridge History of Turkey. It covers the history of the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the 17th century to the proclamation of the Tanzimat and is structured thematically. In the introduction Suraiya Faroqhi outlines the backdrop of recent research against which the present book was compiled and explains the emphasis on some topics as well as some “gaps” in the volume. The first section, “Ecology of the Ottoman lands” by Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth, examines some of the physical reasons for the mutating patterns of settlement and rural production and points out a major difference between Europe and the Ottoman Empire (where from the 17th century onwards the main settlements moved from the plains to the mountains and later, in the 19th century, they returned to the plains). Questioning the paradigm of “the Ottoman decline”, Christoph Neumann gives his interpretation of the Ottoman political developments in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, viewed as a process of transformations including different, sometimes conflicting, tendencies. The author focuses on the evolution in the composition of the Ottoman elites and on key issues such as centralization and decentralization, Ottoman political thought and reforms.

Part II, “An Empire in transition”, starts with a section, by Carter Vaughn Findley, dedicated to the changes in the imperial political culture in the period 1603-1838, to the abuses in governance and the philosophical reflection on them, to the rise of competing elite households within the patrimonial state-as-household and to the return towards centralism. In the section on Ottoman warfare and diplomacy Virginia Aksan examines, from a comparative perspective, the Ottoman military system and the changing techniques of warfare, the concepts, tools and strategies of Ottoman diplomacy, in their development throughout the period, as well as the political and social effects of the continuous military defeats as incentives to reform the Empire. In the final section of this part Linda Darling presents a detailed overview and analysis of Ottoman public finances from the late 16th to the early 19th century. She examines the changes in the fiscal system and their practical functioning paying special attention to the role of central control over public finances.
Part III of the book deals with the centre-periphery relations in the 17th and 18th centuries. On the basis of an analysis of traditional historiography and recent research, Dina Rizk Khoury suggests a new approach to the issue of the relations between the central state and the provincial elites, emphasizing the complex composition of the provincial power-holders (administrative elites, military power-holders, ılnıye and ulama, ăyan) and on the variations, from one Ottoman province to another, in their roles and in their connections with the centre. Fikret Adanır and Bruce Masters follow the ascendency of semi-autonomous provincial forces to socio-political pre-eminence in the Balkans and Anatolia and in the Arab provinces by the end of the 18th century. They draw attention to the importance of the consideration of pre-Ottoman leadership groups as well as of the existing different forms of self-rule, of the monetarization and commercialization of economy and everyday life, of limits imposed by geography, of wars, rebellions and international conflicts while examining the specificities in the composition and the evolution in the functioning and in the relations with the centre of the local elites.

Part IV of the volume is dedicated to different social, religious and political groups in the Empire. Madeline C. Zilfi examines first the status, hierarchies, career paths and relationship with the palace of 17th- and 18th-century Ottoman ulama. In the following section she confronts the Eastern and Western representations of Muslim women in the early modern era with findings in recent research on their experiences as social beings (property rights and practices, economic activities, family life, marriage and divorce, elite occupations). Minna Rozen examines the changes in the structure of Jewish society, in the economic occupations and in the family life of the Ottoman Jews as well as in their relations with the state and with the ambient society during the 17th and 18th centuries. She underlines the tendency towards introversion, acquiescence and satisfaction of the status quo and concludes that in this period the integration of the Jewish community within the Ottoman order reached its height. In the section dedicated to the Christians, Bruce Masters focuses on the struggle over the centralization of church authority. The Christian elites in the capital succeeded in extending their hegemony over their co-religionists in the provinces (with the definitive establishment of the millets). But this struggle sparked the growth of ethnic consciousness and the grievances of the local elites and of the Christian laity in the provinces re-emerged in the 19th century as Romantic nationalisms.