OTTOMAN TRAVELS AND TRAVEL ACCOUNTS FROM AN EARLIER AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

The following pages bring together, as the ‘special issue’ of DIE WELT DES ISLAMS for the year 2000, a number of Ottoman travellers and travel accounts from the second half of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. However different their aims, motives, perspectives and narrative modes—these travellers all have in common a common experience of travelling in an age of unprecedented opportunities for the wayfarer in general, and the Ottoman voyager in particular. To be sure, for the subjects of the Ottoman Sultan this new globalizing world was a world which was none of their making. It was brought upon them from beyond their own realm of experience, a cosmos in which they could only try to accommodate themselves as best as their means allowed. But was the Ottoman traveller therefore merely a forsaken passenger in an alien universe, guided by forces outside his own control, utilizing a technology which was utterly outlandish to him? No doubt this new globe was equally a world he was eager to experience and understand, a world perhaps to emulate, at least to make use of. In order to be able to grasp the opportunities this new age held on offer, he would need to play by its new rules, success or failure in doing so being a question of cash, not culture. The availability, on many routes, of fast steam liners or luxurious railway carriages with appropriate means for travelling in style and in adequate social segregation, coupled with western-style lodgings on board ship as well as near the piers and railway stations, together with regular timetables, must have made travelling considerably more attractive to the Ottoman upper and middle classes. The telegraph, convincingly characterized as the ‘Victorian internet’, provided a fast means of communication over vast distances in a minimum of time, although it is not yet entirely clear to what extent it also served non-military and non-bureaucratic purposes throughout the area at this period. Eugene Rogan,
in his article entitled *Instant Communication: The Impact of the Telegraph in Ottoman Syria*. (in *The Syrian Land. Processes of Integration and Fragmentation. Bilād Al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century*. Ed. by Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schaebler. Stuttgart 1998), can show that within the radius of a single Ottoman province, that of Syria, the volume of dispatched and received cables rose by more than a third to c. 150,000 between 1889 and 1897, of which about a fifth were of a private nature. In addition, telegrams from the scenes of current public interest from all continents, published in the Ottoman periodical press, helped to up-date their readers’ knowledge about distant parts of the world and may also have contributed to stimulating curiosity in the affairs of foreign lands. The invention, and diffusion even among the Ottomans, of the photographic camera later in this period allowed the well equipped travellers to bring home, and back to life again, the highlights of their arduous journeys, sometimes a full photographic record of their exploits. Indeed, to publish one’s own travelogue in the columns of a renowned newspaper or as a book was to prove easier (and perhaps more rewarding too) than ever before due to the growing number of publishing houses and printing presses in Istanbul after the mid-nineteenth century keen to satisfy an increasingly literate, and more and more discriminate, consumer market. There may even have existed a specific kind of rivalry between Ottoman newspapers who, eager to increase their own readership, appear to have been outbidding each other for the travel accounts with the best chances of attracting attention.

The present volume is an attempt to highlight the significance of Ottoman travel accounts (together with their introductions) as individual, personal statements from an age which has too often been described merely in terms of its general, collective experience vis-à-vis the ‘modern’ or the ‘Western’ world. As an individual statement reflecting personal experience the travelogue can be set alongside other typical Ottoman textual forms from the nineteenth and early twentieth century which answer this overall description: the autobiography and the memorandum. Ottoman travel accounts, like the autobiography and the memorandum, are expressions, within Ottoman society, of the individual in a way and