

## *An Environmental History of the Ottoman Arid Frontier, 1500–1700*

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In the first two hundred years of its history (c. 1300–1500), the Ottoman state was a temperate empire; it evolved within the relatively mild and moist climates of the Balkans and western Anatolia. The Ottoman temperate identity remained intact until the sixteenth century, when Selim I (r. 1512–1520) and Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566) expanded their imperial boundaries deep into the arid core of the Middle East. The Middle Eastern drylands south of the Taurus Mountains formed a challenging contrast to the better watered Ottoman heartland in the north. Much of the newly conquered territories lacked enough precipitation to support permanent settlement, rainfed agriculture, or forest growth. Instead, aridity favored an economy more dependent on irrigation agriculture and mobile pastoralism.

My book project studies Ottoman frontier expansion into the arid zone. It revolves around the interplay between aridity and society—what were the consequences of Ottoman state-building on arid landscapes? Conversely, how did arid conditions shape Ottoman state-building? My hypothesis, based on my research so far, is that the Ottomans did not seek to replicate their temperate economic model in their new arid provinces. Instead, they tailored their economic institutions to meet the challenges of an arid setting. More specifically, the Ottomans accommodated traditional subsistence strategies, honed locally for millennia, to dig deeper into the organic wealth of the arid zone while minimizing their financial risk. Economic and environmental accommodation, I tentatively argue, facilitated the establishment of a durable Ottoman presence in the arid frontier.

Ultimately, my project seeks to improve public understanding of climate change by placing aridity in a broader historical and global context. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that, under an intermediate greenhouse gas emissions scenario, the world by the end of the twenty-first century is very likely to become 2.1°C–3.5°C warmer than it was in 1850–1900. Rising temperatures, in turn, will fuel the severity and frequency of agricultural drought (deficit in soil moisture), with deleterious consequences on crops, livestock, and other species. Scientists have identified the problem of global warming with remarkable precision, but they alone cannot explain and solve it. Likewise, scientists have developed safe and effective vaccines against SARS-CoV-2, but they struggled to build vaccine confidence with a substantial portion of the world population. Solutions to the climate crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, require cultural expertise that humanities scholars can provide. Historians, in particular, can enlist their analytical tools—above all analogy, metaphor, and narrative—to promote understanding of global warming as a social and ethical problem that requires equitable and just solutions. In that vein, my study of the Ottoman arid frontier, I hope, will historicize the growing challenges of heatwaves and droughts and their social and ethical ramifications on people's access to food and water. What were the freedoms, rights, and responsibilities that the Ottoman state devised in a frontier plagued by water shortage? How did aridity and Ottoman law impact different ethnic, religious, and gender groups? What lessons can we draw from the Ottoman experience for the future of our warming planet? I hope my research will yield answers to these questions.