

Rudi Paul Lindner, *Explorations in Ottoman Prehistory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007)

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Awaited with anticipation for several years, Lindner's latest book is not the comprehensive history of Ottoman emergence from and interaction with Mongol Anatolia that its early announcement appeared to promise. Instead, this is a short book, tightly focused on the Ottomans' own movements and doings in the years preceding 1302, the famous and disputed battle of Bapheus, and on how these movements can be disinterred from sources written much later and for tendentious purposes. The tone, in contrast, is rambling and magisterial, convincing through its assurance and erudition. The book does not engage the contributions of the last two decades to the "gazi question" except indirectly, turning its attention to other puzzling issues in early Ottoman history and the way these are presented in the chronicles. It exhibits a variety of techniques for checking the chronicles' stories, such as climatology, the configuration of the terrain, numismatics, epigraphy, and archaeology. In many places a detailed map is really necessary to follow the argument, but no map was provided in the book.

An introductory chapter sets the stage, assessing the nature of thirteenth-century Anatolian society with its Byzantine, Seljuk, and Mongol components. Crucial in Lindner's view is the heightened nomad element brought in by

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the Mongol conquest, a culture presumed to be quite separate from that of the sedentary Seljuks. This chapter sets the historiographical stage as well, describing the main tendencies of the Persian, Greek, and Ottoman sources and the problems they pose for a clear understanding of Ottoman origins, and explaining Lindner's own tentative and anti-dogmatic approach. It also extends the hope of further investigations to appear in a comparative study of the origins of the *beyliks*.

In chapter one Lindner investigates the chronicle stories of Ottoman origins: the tribal descent from Kayı and the entry of Osman's grandfather into Anatolia. The chronicles present a potpourri of conflicting personal and tribal names, all possibly fictitious, but from these legends Lindner extracts the Ottomans' travels, events that all the chroniclers considered worth remembering. He agrees with Feridun Emecen (whom he does not cite) that the Ottomans' route into and around Anatolia paralleled that of the Khwarazmian refugees from the Mongol invasion. He provides the older historiography on these passages but sees their main importance as dramatizing the nomadic ancestry of the Ottomans rather than giving us their real genealogy.

The second chapter distills from travel literature the geographical and economic situation of Osman's ancestors' destination, the farming village of Söğüt, which lay in a rich valley on a major route between Anatolia's central plateau to the south and east and the western and northern lowlands, on the boundary between olive and grape/mulberry cultivation. Lindner also describes several medieval and early modern marches to and from the plateau to show the extent to which Söğüt controlled traffic through the region; clearly the area had more to offer than pasturage. He concludes that the territory itself impelled the Ottomans to become more than shepherds; there was a significant "pull factor" to their conquests, as the richer land and climate to the north "sang a siren song" (p. 53).

Lindner next inquires into the role of Karacahisar in early Ottoman history, since it plays such a large role in accounts of that history. Chapter three asks why it so outshone its near neighbor Eskişehir, which according to epigraphic and archaeological evidence was of negligible importance before the sixteenth century despite its location on the commercial route to the plateau. Karacahisar, by its location, did not dominate the commercial route but the road to Kütahya. The chronicle stories of its conquest—divergent though they are—all include competition between the Ottomans and the lords of Kütahya, often represented as Byzantines, which was impossible at that late date. They were actually the Germiyanids; this chapter reveals

the importance of the Ottoman–Germiyanid conflict, disguised by the chroniclers in order to downplay fighting among Muslims. The representation of the Germiyanids as the villains in other stories confirms their enmity and highlights Karacahisar’s position as a frontier outpost and bone of contention between the two *beyliks*.

Chapter four challenges the accepted notion of 1299 as the date when Osman became independent of the Seljuks and asks what actually happened at that date. The chronicle stories are confused, relating Osman’s—or perhaps Ertoğrul’s or Orhan’s—conquest of a varying list of towns near Söğüt in 1299, or 1287, or some other indeterminate year. Numismatic evidence, however, suggests that in 1299 Osman was (or at least nominally became) a client of the Ilkhanids, and he may therefore have made these conquests in their name. We know that Orhan was later listed in an Ilkhanid tax document, and Lindner alludes to evidence for Mongol influence as far west as Afyon, Kütahya, and Denizli. A new political relationship was surely established in 1299, but with the Mongols rather than the Seljuks; the chroniclers’ need to disguise this relationship from future generations sufficiently accounts for the confusions in their narratives.

In the last chapter, we finally reach the 1302 battle of Bapheus, related by the Byzantine chronicler Pachymeres. Lindner rejects efforts to reconcile this story with any of the battles in the Ottoman chronicles and asks why it is reported as occurring so much farther north. Instead of focusing on the battle itself, however, he calls attention to Pachymeres’s description of a great river flood in March 1302 that he places just before his narration of the battle. This observation leads Lindner to a consideration of the climate, terrain, and defenses of the Sakarya valley, and of the devastation upriver that the rains causing the flood would have wrought on the nomads’ sheep during lambing season, decimating the flocks. Osman’s sudden departure from the land below Söğüt thus becomes explicable, as does his subsequent concentration on the capture of villages and farmland.

Through these studies we learn that the early Ottomans were likely to have been nomads fleeing Central Asia in front of the Mongols; that their first capital of Söğüt was a key transition point between the mountains and the plains and a gateway to the richer lands below; that their first real conflict was with the Muslim Germiyanids; that unlike the Germiyanids they probably did not support the rebellion of Sülemish in 1298 and instead became Mongol clients; and that their nomadic economic base may have been wiped out in 1302, causing them to seek a new base in the farming country to the north and west. This is a promising start on an alternate narrative

of Ottoman beginnings that dispenses with the justifications of *gaza* and Seljuk designation that later chroniclers insist on. Lindner does not go there, however; he is not writing such a narrative.

Lindner presents his chapters as “case studies” rather than a connected story. His results are surrounded and obscured by a sea of distracting material from a variety of dates, much of which is presented only to be refuted or to reinforce a point already made. Some of the results, too, seem unworthy of the time and effort lavished upon them, since they often do not go very far beyond what is already known. The book reads easily, but when you put it down it is difficult to retain. It does not have a conclusion, and the “Afterword” draws methodological rather than substantive conclusions: respect for the sources, a search for the “stimuli” for Ottoman movements, the ability of prior history to provide guides to the behavior of subsequent historical personages.

These are good conclusions, perhaps even necessary, but the purpose of the book remains a bit mysterious. It is a charming read, serious but smooth, like a good brandy after dinner; it is not, however, a classroom text. The book is well-produced and expensive, yet it lacks the tools of maps and illustrations that would make it truly useful. It will doubtless go onto graduate student reading lists, but it is not a manual—or even a very clear exposition—of Lindner’s technique for reading the chronicles. It is a step toward greater clarity regarding early Ottoman history, yet it seems in a way unfinished, preliminary. It works well as an advertisement for the announced history of the *beyliks*, and we can entertain the hope that such a history would not be as long delayed as this book, which the author tells us was begun in the early 1990s. It does highlight the value of source material other than the chronicles, especially epigraphy and terrain study, and it should motivate scholars of the period to examine late Seljuk and early *beylik* inscriptions more closely or to visit the sites of recorded events on foot or on horseback. The book ends with a question mark as we are invited to follow Osman’s career to out-of-the-way places; the author, as a good teacher, seeks finally to stimulate others to still greater achievements in his chosen field of labor.