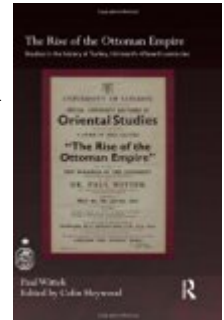


Paul Wittek. *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies in the History of Turkey, 13th-15th Centuries.* Edited by Colin Heywood. Royal Asiatic Society Books. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. xxiii + 194 pp. \$150.00, cloth; paperback forthcoming, ISBN 978-0-7007-1500-8.



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It is the mystery which attends on all beginnings, when men are doing things because they are convenient and do not attach conscious significance to them, still less consider what the distant outcome of their acts may be. ---F. M. Powicke, King Henry III and the Lord Edward

This book is a monument to two great scholars, one whom I have had the honor to succeed in two university posts, the other in whose shadow I have cowered for half a century.

In 1939 the Luzac firm published a thin book clad in grey boards entitled *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, based upon three lectures delivered at the University of London. The author, Dr. Paul Wittek, who was once of Vienna, later of Istanbul, and in 1939 a resident of Brussels, returned to England as a refugee in 1940. For a time Wittek was interned at Huyton (near Liverpool) along with numerous Jews (including my father), as well as some Nazis; the number of intellectuals resident behind the eight-foot barbed wire led to the camp's being called "Huyton University." After

the war Wittek became the first professor of Turkish at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where his teaching and inspiration remain the stuff of which dreams are made. This volume reprints, with slight corrections, *The Rise* as well as translations of a number of Wittek articles and talks enlarging and restating the themes of his London lectures; it is a grand addition to the materials with which we teach. In addition to a politic and careful preface by Professor Evrim Binbaş, who rings the changes of recent discussions, the golden thread linking the works together is a series of learned, suggestive, and appreciative commentaries by Professor Colin Heywood, who has selflessly dedicated himself to improving our understanding and honoring of Wittek and his tradition. The book is, then, also a mitzvah.

There is no question of the stature of Paul Wittek, who stands as the Colossus of Rhodes above the minnows who swim around his feet. Many years ago I wrote that where Wittek reaped, I could only glean, and I hold to that admission.[1] Some years ago, his student and successor, Profes-

sor V. L. Ménage, recounted his experience in Wittek's London seminars, which lasted into the night until the waiters at Schmidt's restaurant began stacking the chairs with great gusto.[2] The quality of Wittek's learning appeared early in his (now) widely unread dismantling of the fifteenth-century Ottoman genealogies; this, and his critical readings of modern scholars (Franz Babinger, Friedrich Giese), established his reputation as a force with which to contend.[3] His honesty shines forth from a remark, also by Professor Ménage, that if Wittek were seeking a word, one had to lead him to discover it himself; accepting a direct suggestion was intellectual theft. His high standards appear in his response to Professor Denis Sinor's query whether there was anybody whose Turkish was up to Wittek's standards: "Kraelitz – ist aber tot." His insistence on student performance we learn from Lewis Thomas's story that on his entrance interview, Wittek pointed to a shelf of Ottoman texts and stated, "You will digest those the way the worm digests the apple." Finally, when the director of the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul ordered in April 1933 that henceforth all employees would greet each other with the Hitler salute, Wittek's courageous response was that while he would not raise his right arm, he could raise his right leg.

Professor Heywood's introductions, following his long series of biographical and analytical essays on Wittek and his work, are masterful and wide-ranging. The attentive reader will receive a tour d'horizon of an intellectual world now lost, an inspiring view of the context of Viennese high culture after the *Kladderadatsch* of Habsburg hopes and empire, and a careful recapitulation of issues in the founding generation of modern historiography on the Ottomans. Not for the first time are we deeply in Professor Heywood's debt, and with these wise choices and sympathetic essays he confirms his premier position in early Ottoman studies.

As the translator of two of the pieces for teaching purposes, I congratulate Professor Heywood for turning colloquial Californian into elegant English. Oliver Welsh composed the excellent translation of "De la défaite," whose language, redolent of multiple connotations, demands patience, good judgment, and virtue. The publication of all these works within one cover will enlarge the audience of those who, with little French and less German, will now better understand the emotional, intellectual, and evidentiary bases of Wittek's judgments and his strong expressions of them. Three quarters of a century after their publication, these works of Professor Wittek remain the gift (to some, *das Gift*) that just keeps on giving.

The first fruit of Heywood's labors is the reissue of *The Rise*. Here once again we find the Strong Wittek Thesis, the "motive force of the Ottoman state," "their dominant idea, the *raison d'être* of their state," zeal for the holy war as the one-cylinder engine driving Ottoman history until the Ottoman-Habsburg alliance of 1914: "By this alliance both the empires of Austria and Turkey broke with their most essential traditions and thus showed that they had outlived themselves" (p. 35).[4] Here once again we have the reliance on two contentious texts, the first from the *Iskendername* of Ahmedi, the second an inscription from 1337, recently studied by Professor Heywood at some length; and for the fundamental question of the utility of such lapidary prose we are reminded of a pioneer study by Professor Richard Ettinghausen, which suggests that context and intent are as important in explicating the historical place of these inscriptions as is the denotation of the rough surface.[5]

The Rise also contains Wittek's erroneous assault (pp. 40-41) on Fuad Köprülü's treatment of the prestige of the Kayı tribe among the followers of the early Ottomans. At one point I considered this a slip on Wittek's part; elsewhere I shall treat it as purposeful. Wittek's lectures in London (and

also in Paris) are ripostes to the views of his former Turkish friend, who took a more expansive and complex view of the factors affecting and drawing forth the expansion of the Ottoman *beylik* in his own Paris lectures, delivered just a few years before and now available in a definitive translation by Dr. Gary Leiser, who has done more than any other scholar to bring the flowering of twentieth-century Turcology to Anglophone students.[6]

It is important to have Wittek's expanded lectures available again, for their direct expression, confidence, and pithy style appeal to students. Some passages in *The Rise* are pretty much direct translations of bits of his Paris lectures, as I discovered when translating the latter from the French. It would have been a pleasure to listen in on the conversations over translation and connotation he had with Peter Charanis (whom he had met in Brussels while the Byzantinist Charanis was studying the medieval Greek short chronicles [also used by Wittek] with Henri Gregoire), Joan Hussey (who had just completed her London dissertation on Byzantine intellectual history), and the Bulgarian physicist Elizabeth Kara-Mikhailova, ten years older than the others, who was completing radium studies at the Cavendish Laboratory before an enforced return to Sofia (their connection, perhaps forged in Istanbul, remains to be elucidated). Wittek thanked these three for their assistance in rendering his English into more acceptable form.

This is, however, far from all. The second part of Professor Heywood's offering consists of a series of articles, originally published in French and German, that fill in more of the background and throw light on some of the shadows. They are in part edifying, in part inspirational, and in part distressing. First of these is "Two Chapters in the History of Rum," based upon lectures Wittek delivered in Paris in succession to the lectures that Köprülü delivered on the same foundation and expanded into his book on Ottoman origins. Here

Wittek expounded on the earlier, Seljuk, history of Anatolia and wrote at greater length on the Ottoman magnetism for ghazis elsewhere in the peninsula, bringing a series of texts to bear; he was already familiar with a larger family of ghazi inscriptions from his contribution to Professor Rudolf Riefstahl's volume on Anatolian architecture. The article provides Wittek's fullest treatment of the movement of frontier zones from the southeast to the northwest (and because it is a contemporary work, students will enjoy comparing it with Owen Lattimore's conception of Inner Asian frontiers). I have found the article exceptionally useful in the classroom and others will as well, now that it is generally available. From it one can see Wittek picking and choosing what would have the greatest rhetorical effect in *The Rise*.

Inspirational is Wittek's 1938 article, "The Sultan of Rum." Here, in a work far more deeply and broadly documented than any of the other works in the volume, he discusses the use of "Rum" as a cultural and cosmopolitan rubric for the full diorama of Anatolian history. The result is a tour de force in the service of an attitude less nationalistic and more inclusive than that adopted early on in Ankara; it is a paeon not only to a greater peninsular past but also, I suspect, to a longed-for Habsburg legacy as well.[7] Professor Heywood points out (pp. 73-74) that the "Rum" gambit was already a forlorn hope, which renders the work as piquant as it is brilliant. My father often spoke of the nostalgia and regret shared by the numerous Viennese refugees at Huyton; Wittek, I think, would have joined with them. There has rarely been as much wide-ranging scholarship deployed in the service of a lost cause. Many will pass by the article as a philological scenic detour, but it is far more than that, and the vista is a grand outlook over a road available, attractive, and not taken.

Distressing, on the other hand, are two 1936 conference papers delivered at Leiden, "Byzan-

tine-Seljuk Relations,” and “The Warriors for the Faith in the Ottoman State.” Granted that these were destined to be general treatments for a wide audience, the breadth of their generalizations, the loose vocabulary, and the extraordinary images will jostle the conscience of those who still have faith in the Strong Wittek Thesis. What are we to make of the Bram Stoker quality in “the neighboring emirates became steadily drained of blood and were absorbed from necessity by the Ottoman state” (p. 132)? *Blut und Boden* indeed. Whatever else this is, it provides a lesson in humility and beckons the reader to read Friedrich Meinecke’s *The German Catastrophe* and memorize the first chapter, which deals, corrosively, with the stark language and anthropomorphized ideologies of the “terrible simplifiers” among interwar devotees of historical “necessity.”[8]

The last two lectures were also delivered in Paris in March, 1938, “From the Defeat at Ankara to the Conquest of Constantinople: A Half Century of Ottoman History.” Here are both adventure and romance, the near-death, rebirth, and resurrection of the imperial enterprise. As Professor Heywood reminds us, Professor Colin Imber has subjected the argument to withering criticism.[9] This does not vitiate the great value of the work as an example of an imaginative exercise in historical reconstruction. We are also reminded that the “persona,” to use Heywood’s view, of Mehmed II and the attempt to live in the minds of his advisors and antecedents reflect Wittek’s view of the brilliant revival after 1402 and the atmosphere of 1453 in light of the brooding presence of the other events of March, 1938, when Hitler entered Vienna to the welcoming cheers of hundreds of thousands. Professor Imber is certainly on the mark, and one might consider this work an attempt to create real heroes as echoes of Vienna’s suicide rang in the background.

It is Mehmed who is the topic of the last two offerings, one written in 1933, the other twenty years later. They feature both Wittek’s character-

istic rhetoric and (in hitherto unpublished manuscript notes to the 1933 article) his fastidious attention to documentation. In this they remind both Professor Heywood and this reviewer of the greatest dramatic creation to emerge from another, and a more intimate, member of the (Stefan) George-Kreis, Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz. His *Friedrich der Zweite*, published in 1927 (with a swastika on the cover) came under severe criticism from the establishment not because of the swastika but because of the emotional, millenarian prose, which appeared to his senior colleagues to present unproven fantasies. Kantorowicz responded with a massive second volume of documentation, which appeared in 1931 with the reprint of the first volume. Some years ago I suggested that Franz Babinger’s biography of Mehmed II was to have been the Ottoman version of Kantorowicz’s classic, and in his superb article on Babinger Professor Heywood makes a much better argument.[10] Wittek was, however, much better at measuring rhetoric against evidence, even though he occasionally violated the Talmudic dictum to speak no louder than the text.

Even though I suggested earlier in this review that some view the Strong Wittek Thesis as having poisoned the well, I do not think there is any doubt that his work, his teaching, and the force of his presence nursed an enormous amount of productive work and even inspired some of those who later turned against the Strong formulation. One of the American SOAS students in the later 1940s suggested to me that Wittek’s own views had moderated, and there is certainly considerable evidence in the later articles of an attitude less romantic, more attuned to the rhythms of mid-century English medieval studies, at least less Victorian Stubbs and more Edwardian Maitland. [11] Professor Heywood has performed a great service to us all and performed it magnificently. This superb book guarantees that “old man [Wittek], he just keeps rolling along.”

Notes

[1]. Rudi Paul Lindner, "Stimulus and Justification in Early Ottoman History," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982): 221.

[2]. V. L. Ménage, "The English Capitulation of 1580: A Review Article," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1980): 381 n.2.

[3]. "Der Stammbaum der Osmanen," *Der Islam* 14 (1925): 94-100. His severe criticisms of Friedrich Giese's edition of Aşıkpaşazade are in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 34 (1931), cols. 698-707. Wittek's scathing review of Babinger's *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* is in *Der Islam* 20 (1932): 197-207.

[4]. There is a Weak Wittek Thesis, which dilutes the sole motivating force of zeal and adds other ingredients. For a refutation see Colin Imber, "What Does Ghazi Really Mean?" in *The Balance of Truth: Essays in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Lewis*, ed. Çigdem Balım-Harding and Colin Imber (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 165-178.

[5]. Colin Heywood, "The 1337 Bursa Inscription and Its Interpreters," *Turcica* 36 (2004): 215-230; Richard Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 297-317; Lindner, "Stimulus and Justification," 211, 218.

[6]. Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Gary Leiser (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

[7]. Wittek's nostalgia and, perhaps, regret appear already in the remarks of John Wansbrough, "Paul Wittek," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 42 (1979): 137-139.

[8]. Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, trans. Sidney B. Fay (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950 [German original published in 1946]). Sidney B. Fay was one of the great scholars of the Kriegsschuldfrage and wrote a study of the origins of World War I that remained

in print for over forty years; he was just the right person to translate this work.

[9]. Colin Imber, *Studies in Ottoman History and Law* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1996), 291-304.

[10]. Colin Heywood, "Mehmed II and the Historians," *Turcica* 40 (2008): 295-346.

[11]. For the great English constitutional historian's reliance on a certain rhetoric, see Robert Brentano, "The Sound of Stubbs," *Journal of British Studies* 6 (1967): 1-14; of Frederic William Maitland, the great historian of law, Brentano wrote in *Speculum* 63 (1988): "For Maitland history was, above all else perhaps, an intense examination of words and language, their structure and definition, changes within them, and an analysis of connection between word and thought, and word and act" (152).

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