

Session 1: Montesquieu and the Despotism Debate

Introduction

THE question of whether democracy can take root in the Middle East long predates either American involvement in the region or the modern language of democracy promotion. Its deeper history lies in an older Western argument about the political character of the “East”: whether societies from the Ottoman Empire to Persia and India were governed differently from Europe, whether those differences were rooted in institutions or in something more fundamental, and whether political liberty could emerge where it had historically been weak. The readings in this session recover that debate at its formative moment. They matter because the alternatives first posed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—between political structures that can be changed and cultures supposedly resistant to change—continue to shadow Western thinking about the Middle East.

Machiavelli supplied an early point of departure. He contrasted France, where hereditary nobles possessed independent standing and could constrain the crown, with the Ottoman Empire, where the ruler governed through servants dependent entirely upon him. The distinction was structural: political outcomes depended on whether autonomous centers of power existed between ruler and subject. **Montesquieu** transformed this observation into a comprehensive theory of government. Liberty, in his account, required the division and restraint of power; despotism existed where power was concentrated and fear replaced law, honor, and independent social authority. His argument became enormously consequential because the same Montesquieu who portrayed Asia as the natural home of despotism profoundly influenced the American constitutional belief that liberty depended upon checks, balances, intermediary bodies, and institutional restraints.

But Montesquieu went further than institutional analysis. He sometimes presented the contrast between Europe and Asia as nearly civilizational. Geography and climate helped explain, he argued, why liberty could expand and contract in Europe but scarcely arise in Asia at all. Here lay the germ of a proposition with a very long afterlife: political freedom might not be universally attainable under comparable conditions because some

societies had been formed by historical, geographical, religious, or social circumstances fundamentally unfavorable to it.

Almost immediately, however, this thesis encountered an empirical counterattack. **Marsigli**, drawing upon unusually intimate knowledge of Ottoman institutions, described a sultan constrained by military, religious, administrative, and provincial bodies; even pashas exercised authority within systems of consultation and resistance. **Voltaire** likewise rejected the picture of Ottoman subjects as propertyless slaves, pointing to inheritance, law, and custom. **Linguet** attacked Montesquieu more radically, questioning whether supposedly moderate European governments protected ordinary people any better than Asian monarchies. **Anquetil-Duperron** made the argument systematic: the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India possessed written and customary laws, property rights, religious restraints, and institutions binding rulers as well as subjects. What travelers identified as the essence of Oriental government, he argued, often represented abuses of authority rather than its normal or lawful operation. Despotism was not a civilization; it was an abuse of power that could occur anywhere.

Volney then brought the argument back toward Montesquieu. Traveling through the Ottoman provinces, he saw arbitrary government, insecure property, oppressive taxation, administrative violence, and religious authority as mutually reinforcing causes of stagnation and weakness. The disagreement was therefore never simply between those who admired the East and those who condemned it. It concerned causation. Were tyranny and political weakness intrinsic to Eastern or Islamic civilization? Were they products of particular institutions? Were European observers confusing recurrent abuses with immutable political structures? And if institutions were responsible, could institutions be reformed?

Those questions eventually became American questions. Again and again, American policy toward the Middle East has confronted a choice between two broad assumptions. One holds that authoritarianism reflects deep features of history, religion, social organization, or political culture, so that attempts to implant liberal democracy are likely to fail and may instead produce disorder. The other holds that Middle Eastern peoples are no exception to the human desire for accountable government, and that authoritarianism persists because institutions, incentives, and distributions of power have sustained it—not because the region is inherently incapable

of political liberty. Between them lies the recurrent temptation to prefer stable autocracy to uncertain political change.

This is why the eighteenth-century despotism debate remains more than an antiquarian controversy. It established the categories through which later Western observers would ask what kinds of political life were possible in the Middle East. American policymakers would inherit those categories, sometimes knowingly and often without knowing their provenance. The names would change—despotism became authoritarianism, “Oriental character” became political culture, intermediary bodies became civil society, and liberty became democratization—but the underlying argument persisted. Before asking whether the United States should promote democracy in the Middle East, accommodate autocracy, or abandon the question altogether, one must first confront the older and more fundamental issue posed by these readings: what exactly explains the persistence of authoritarian rule, and therefore what, if anything, can change it?

Explanatory notes to the readings appear from page 56.

Background: Machiavelli



Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) was a Florentine diplomat, political thinker, and historian whose writings helped inaugurate the modern study of politics as a field governed by its own logic rather than by moral or theological prescription. A senior official of the Florentine Republic, he drew on diplomatic experience and close observation of the Italian wars to analyze how rulers acquire, preserve, and lose power. In *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*,

Machiavelli treated political life as unstable, conflict-ridden, and shaped by necessity, ambition, fear, and fortune. He admired republican institutions and civic virtue, yet insisted that effective rulers must sometimes employ deception, coercion, and cruelty when circumstances demand it. His enduring importance lies less in a simple defense of ruthlessness than in his determination to describe politics as it actually operates, stripping away comforting assumptions about how rulers ought to behave.



The Prince (1513, excerpt)

The kingdoms known to history have been governed in two ways: either by a prince and his servants, who, as ministers by his grace and permission, assist in governing the realm; or by a prince and by barons, who hold their positions not by favour of the ruler but by antiquity of blood. Such barons have states and subjects of their own, who recognize them as their lords, and are naturally attached to them. In those states which are governed by a prince and his servants, the prince possesses more authority, because there is no one in the state regarded as a superior other than himself, and if others are obeyed it is merely as ministers and officials of the prince, and no one regards them with any special affection.

Examples of these two kinds of government in our own time are those of the Turk and the King of France. All the Turkish monarchy is governed by one ruler, the others are his servants, and dividing his kingdom into

“sangiacates,” he sends to them various administrators, and changes or recalls them at his pleasure. But the King of France is surrounded by a large number of ancient nobles, recognized as such by their subjects, and loved by them; they have their prerogatives, of which the king cannot deprive them without danger to himself. Whoever now considers these two states will see that it would be difficult to acquire the state of the Turk; but having conquered it, it would be very easy to hold it. In many respects, on the other hand, it would be easier to conquer the kingdom of France, but there would be great difficulty in holding it.

The causes of the difficulty of occupying the Turkish kingdom are, that the invader could not be invited by princes of that kingdom, nor hope to facilitate his enterprise by the rebellion of those near the ruler’s person, as will be evident from reasons given above. Because, being all slaves, and dependent, it will be more difficult to corrupt them, and even if they were corrupted, little effect could be hoped for, as they would not be able to carry the people with them for the reasons mentioned. Therefore, whoever assaults the Turk must be prepared to meet his united forces, and must rely more on his own strength than on the disorders of others; but having once conquered him, and beaten him in battle so that he can no longer raise armies, nothing else is to be feared except the family of the prince, and if this be extinguished, there is no longer any one to be feared, others having no credit with the people; and as the victor before the victory could place no hope in them, so he need not fear them afterwards.

The contrary is the case in kingdoms governed like that of France, because it is easy to enter them by winning over some baron of the kingdom, there being always malcontents, and those desiring innovations. These can, for the reasons stated, open the way to you and facilitate victory; but afterwards, if you wish to keep possession, infinite difficulties arise, both from those who have aided you and from those you have oppressed. Nor is it sufficient to suppress the family of the prince, for there remain those nobles who will take the lead in new revolutions, and being neither able to content them nor exterminate them, you will lose the state whenever an occasion arises.

Montesquieu



Montesquieu (1689–1755), born Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, was a French political thinker, jurist, and man of letters whose work helped define the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and profoundly influenced modern constitutional thought. Trained in law and for a time president of the Bordeaux Parlement, he combined comparative history, political analysis, and social observation in works such as *Persian Letters* (1721), *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans*

and *Their Decline* (1734), and above all *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Montesquieu sought to explain how laws and political institutions were shaped by the character of regimes, social customs, religion, geography, climate, and historical circumstance. He famously distinguished republics, monarchies, and despotisms according to their animating principles—virtue, honor, and fear—and argued that political liberty depended on restraints upon concentrated power, especially through intermediary institutions and a separation or balancing of governmental functions. His analysis of “Oriental despotism,” particularly in relation to the Ottoman and Persian empires, became one of the most influential and controversial elements of his political thought.

Persian Letters is an epistolary novel composed as a series of fictional letters exchanged chiefly by two Persian travelers, Usbek and Rica, during their stay in France, and by correspondents they have left behind in Persia. The shifting viewpoints allow Montesquieu to alternate between observations on French society, politics, religion, and manners and the unfolding drama of Usbek’s household and harem in Isfahan. Because there is no single continuous narrator, the book proceeds through contrast, irony, and juxtaposition: European customs are made strange by foreign observers, while Persian institutions are themselves exposed to scrutiny through the letters from home.

The Spirit of the Laws profoundly shaped Western constitutional thought by arguing that liberty depended not simply on good rulers but on institutions that divided and restrained political power. Montesquieu's analysis of the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial functions, and of the need for intermediate bodies and checks on authority, became especially influential in Britain and the American colonies. The American Founders—above all Madison, Hamilton, and others involved in framing and defending the Constitution—drew heavily on Montesquieu when designing a federal system of separated powers, checks and balances, and institutional safeguards against tyranny.



Persian Letters (1721, selected letters)



LETTER 103

Usbek to Ibben, in Smyrna

The most powerful states of Europe are those belonging to the emperor, and to the kings of France, Spain, and England. Italy, and a large part of

Germany, are divided into an infinite number of small states, ruled by princes who are, in reality, martyrs to sovereignty. Our glorious sultans have more wives than most of those princes have subjects. The princes of Italy, who are not very united, are the most to be pitied: their states are as open as caravanserais, to which they are forced to welcome all comers; out of necessity, then, they attach themselves to princes that are powerful, and offer them a share of their fears, rather than their friendship.

Most European governments are monarchical, or rather bear that label; for I do not know whether such governments have ever actually existed: at any rate, it is impossible that they should last long; such states are unstable, and invariably degenerate into despotism or republicanism. Power can never be shared equally between the people and the prince; the balance is too difficult to maintain, power necessarily always diminishing on the one side while increasing on the other; as a rule, however, the advantage is to the prince, who heads the armies.

The European kings, therefore, enjoy great power, and one can say that they exercise it as they choose; but they do not exercise it as broadly as do our sultans; first, because they do not want to offend against the customs and religion of their subject peoples; and secondly, it is not in their best interests to take it to such extremes.

Nothing brings princes so close to the condition of their subjects as does this immense power they hold over them, for nothing makes them more vulnerable to the reversals and caprices of destiny.

The practice of some rulers of putting to death, for the slightest offence, all those who displease them reverses the proportion which should exist between the offence and the penalty, a proportion that gives a state its soul, an empire its harmony; Christian princes, who scrupulously preserve this proportion, hold an infinite advantage over our sultans.

A Persian who, through imprudence or ill luck, has fallen out of favour with the sultan, is certain to die: the smallest slip, or the slightest whim, will render this inevitable. But had he made an attempt on his sovereign's life, or intended to deliver up his fortresses to the enemy, he would also forfeit his life; consequently he incurs no greater risk in the second situation than in the first.

Therefore, in the slightest disgrace, realizing death is certain and that no further action can be taken against him, he is naturally impelled to trouble the state and conspire against the sovereignty; it is his sole remaining resource.

European noblemen are in a different situation: for them disgrace deprives them of nothing but goodwill and favour; they retire from court, and expect only to enjoy a peaceful life and the advantages of their birth. As they are rarely put to death except for the crime of high treason, they are wary of committing this, when they weigh what they have to lose against how little they would gain; consequently, one sees here few rebellions, and few princes who die a violent death.

If our princes in Persia, with the limitless power they enjoy, did not take so many precautions to safeguard their own life, they would not live a day; nor, if they did not keep a vast number of troops in their pay to tyrannize over their subjects, would their empire last a month.

It is a mere four or five centuries ago that a king of France, contrary to the custom of the times, created a guard to protect his person against some assassins that an insignificant Asian prince had sent to kill him; until then the kings had lived peacefully among their subjects, like fathers among their children.

Far from being empowered, as are our sultans, to order a subject put to death if they so desire, the kings of France have, by contrast, a permanent right to pardon criminals; it is enough that a man be fortunate enough to look upon the august features of his prince, to cease to be unworthy of life. These monarchs are like the sun, they bestow warmth and life everywhere.

Paris, the 8th of the Moon of Rebiab 2 1717

LETTER 100

Usbek to the same

To return to the topic of my last letter, here, more or less, is what quite a sensible European said to me the other day:

“The worst strategy oriental princes could adopt is to hide themselves away, as is their wont. Their intention is to make themselves more respected, but they inspire respect for royalty, rather than for the king, and attach the

minds of their subjects to a particular throne, rather than to a particular person.

“For the common people, this invisible power governing them always remains the same. Even if ten kings, whom they knew only by name, were to be slaughtered one after another, they would experience no difference; it would be as if they had been governed by a succession of ghosts.

“If the abhorrent parricide of our great King Henri IV had committed his act against a king of the Indies, the criminal, possessor of the Royal Seal and of an immense treasure apparently amassed for his benefit, would calmly have taken up the reins of government, without a single person thinking of protesting on behalf of his king, or his king’s family, or his king’s children.

“People find it astonishing that they so rarely see any changes in the government of an oriental prince. Why should that be the case, unless because that government is tyrannical and appalling?

“Changes can be made only by the prince, or by the people; but princes are very careful not to make any changes, because, since they wield such immense power, they already have everything possible; if they were to change anything, it would only be to their own detriment.

“As for their subjects, if one of them were to resolve on some scheme, he could not implement it against the state: he would have to be capable of instantly neutralizing a formidable and unique power; he has neither time nor means; but he need only go to the source of that power; all he requires is an arm, and an instant.

“The murderer ascends the throne as the monarch falls from it and expires at his feet.

“A malcontent in Europe thinks of setting up a secret correspondence; of going over to the enemy; of capturing a fortress; of stirring up vain grievances among the people. A malcontent in Asia goes straight to the prince, surprises, strikes, and overcomes; he obliterates the very idea of that person; at one moment he is slave, then master, and the next moment usurper, then lawful ruler.

“Unhappy the king who has only one head! he seems to unite all his power upon it, simply to signal to the first opportunist where to find that power entire and undivided.”

Paris, the 17th of the Moon of Rebiab 2 1717

LETTER 18

Usbek to his friend Rustan, in Ispahan

We spent only one week at Tokat: after thirty-five days of travel, we have now arrived in Smyrna. Between Tokat and Smyrna we did not see a single city worth describing. I was astonished at the weakness of the Ottoman Empire: its sick body is sustained not by a gentle and moderate regime, but by violent remedies which persistently weaken it, leaving it exhausted.

The pashas, who have to buy their positions, are financially ruined when they arrive in the provinces, which they then lay waste like conquered lands. An arrogant militia does exactly as it pleases; fortifications are demolished, cities deserted, farmland despoiled, and land cultivation and commerce completely abandoned.

This harsh regime operates with complete impunity; the Christians, who work the land, and the Jews, who levy the taxes, are subjected to endless persecution.

There is no security in owning land; consequently, the urge to make the best use of it is greatly diminished; no legal title or physical possession can ever prevail against the caprice of those who govern.

Those barbarians have so totally abandoned the arts that they have even neglected the military art; while the nations of Europe constantly refine their military skills, they remain as ignorant as their forebears, and never think of adopting the new European inventions until these have been used against them a thousand times.

They have no experience on the sea, no skill in manoeuvres; it is said that a handful of Christians materializing out of a rock make the Ottomans tremble, and harass their empire.

Incapable of engaging in commerce, they can scarcely tolerate that Europeans—invariably industrious and enterprising—should do so; they believe they are granting them a favour by allowing these foreigners to enrich them.

In this whole vast country that I have crossed, I have found only Smyrna that can be considered a rich and powerful city; it is Europeans who make it such; had it been left to the Turks, it would be just like all the others.

Here, Rustan, you have an accurate picture of this empire which, in less than two centuries' time, will provide some conqueror with a theatre for his triumphs.

Smyrna, the 2nd of the Moon of Rammazan 1711

LETTER 125

Rhedì to Rica, in Paris

When I first arrived in Europe one of the subjects that most exercised my curiosity was the history and origin of republics. As you know, most Asians have not the faintest concept of this type of government, and their imagination has not even enabled them to grasp that any form other than despotism can exist upon the earth.

The first governments in the world were monarchies; it was only by chance, and by the passage of time, that republics were born.

After Greece was engulfed by a flood it was repopulated by new inhabitants; almost all these immigrants came from Egypt or from the nearest Asian countries, which were governed by kings, and consequently the people from there were governed in the same way. But the tyranny of those princes becoming too burdensome, the people shook off their yoke, and there then arose, out of the debris of many monarchies, those republics that brought such glory to Greece, the only civilized country among so many barbarians.

Love of liberty and abhorrence of kings kept Greece independent for centuries, and spread republican government far and wide. The cities of Greece found allies in Asia Minor; they sent people there to form colonies that were as free as themselves, and which provided protection against the

incursions of the kings of Persia. That is not all: Greece populated Italy, Italy populated Spain, and possibly Gaul. We know that the great Hesperis, so celebrated by classical writers, was initially Greece, which its neighbours saw as a haven of felicity; however, the Greeks themselves, not finding this happy land on their own soil, sought it in Italy; those in Italy sought it in Spain, while those in Spain turned to Baetica, or Portugal: so that all these regions bore this name, for classical writers. Those Greek colonists brought with them a spirit of freedom nurtured in that pleasant land. Consequently, in those distant times monarchies were rare in Italy, Spain, and Gaul. As we shall soon see, the peoples of the north, and of Germany, were no less free, and if we find traces of monarchy there it is because they had chosen as king a head of the army or of a republic.

This was all taking place in Europe, for Asia and Africa have always been oppressed by despotism; the only exceptions are the cities in Asia Minor I mentioned earlier, and the republic of Carthage in Africa.

The world was divided between two powerful republics: that of Rome, and that of Carthage; nothing is so well known as the beginning of the Roman republic, and nothing so lost in obscurity as the origin of the Carthaginian one. Nothing whatever is known about the succession of African princes after Dido, or how they lost their power. The prodigious expansion of the Roman republic would have been of great benefit to the world, if it had not been for that unjust inequality between the Roman citizens and the vanquished peoples, if the governors of the provinces had been granted less authority, if the hallowed laws passed to prevent their tyranny had been observed, and if the governors had not used the very moneys that they had wrongfully amassed to subvert those laws.

It seems as if liberty is made for the spirit of the peoples of Europe, and servitude for that of the peoples of Asia. In vain did the Romans offer the Cappadocians this precious treasure: the cowardly nation refused it, and welcomed servitude with the same alacrity that other peoples show in welcoming freedom.

Caesar crushed the Roman republic and subjected it to arbitrary power.

For many long years Europe suffered under a brutal military government, and Roman clemency changed into cruel oppression.

Meanwhile, countless unknown peoples emerged from the north, and spread like raging rivers across the Roman provinces; finding it just as easy to make conquests as to practise their piracy, they divided up those lands and turned them into kingdoms. These were free peoples, and so strictly did they limit the authority of their kings that the latter were in fact no more than leaders or generals. These kingdoms, therefore, although created by force, never felt the yoke of the conqueror. When Asian peoples like the Turks and the Tartars made conquests, they, being themselves subject to the will of one man, thought only of giving him new subjects, and of establishing his inexorable authority by military force; but when northern people, who in their own country were free, took possession of a Roman province they did not give their leaders great power. Some of these peoples, such as the Vandals in Africa and the Goths in Spain, would even depose their king the moment he no longer suited them; and in other cases the authority of the monarch would be limited in a thousand different ways: his power would be shared among a large number of lords, whose agreement was required before a war could be undertaken; war booty was divided between leaders and soldiers; no taxes to benefit the king were permitted, and all laws were passed in national assemblies. Such were the fundamental principles of all those states which were created from the ruins of the Roman Empire.

Venice, the 20th of the Moon of Rhegeb 1719

LETTER 78

Usbek to Rhedi, in Venice

Since coming to Europe, my dear Rhedi, I have seen a great many governments; it's not like in Asia, where the rules of politics are everywhere the same.

I have often asked myself which of all types of government conforms the most closely to the dictates of reason. It seems to me that the most perfect government is that which fulfils its purpose at the lowest cost, and therefore, that the government which controls men in the manner most appropriate to their proclivities and desires is the most perfect.

If, under a tolerant government, the people are as obedient as they are under a harsh government, then the former is preferable, since it conforms better to reason, whereas harshness is alien to it.

You can be certain, Rhedi, that in any state the degree of severity of a punishment does not make people observe the law any better. In countries where punishments are moderate, these are feared exactly as they are in countries where penalties are tyrannical and horrifying.

Whether the government be tolerant or harsh, punishment is always meted out by degrees; a lesser or greater punishment is inflicted for a lesser or greater crime. The imagination adapts itself automatically to the customs of the country one inhabits; a week in prison or a small fine weigh as heavily on the mind of a European raised in a moderate society, as the loss of an arm intimidates an Oriental. People associate a certain level of fear with a certain level of punishment, and everyone feels it in his own way; despair at the idea of disgrace will oppress a Frenchman sentenced to a penalty that would not deprive a Turk of a quarter of an hour's sleep.

Furthermore I have not noticed that order, justice, and equity are better observed in Turkey, in Persia, or under the Mogul than in the republics of Holland and of Venice, or even in England; I do not see that less crimes are committed there, and that men, intimidated by the severity of the punishments, are more subservient to the law.

On the contrary, I observe a source of injustice and oppression in these same states.

I think that the prince himself, the very embodiment of the law, is less in control there than anywhere else.

I see that during periods of harshness, there are always rebellious stirrings where nobody is in control; and when once despotic power has been flouted, no one is left with sufficient authority to restore it.

I believe that despair, born of hopelessness, sanctions disorder and renders it greater.

I believe that in such states trivial uprisings do not ever occur, and that there is never any interval between grievance and rebellion.

I believe that events of great significance do not necessarily spring from great causes; on the contrary, the smallest incident may provoke a great

revolution, often as unforeseen by those who are its agents as it is by those who are its victims.

When the Turkish emperor Osman was deposed, not one of those who committed this act had planned it beforehand; they were only appealing, as supplicants, for justice regarding some grievance; a voice—never since identified—happened to arise from the crowd, calling the name of Mustapha, and suddenly, Mustapha was emperor.

Paris, the 2nd of the Moon of Rebiab 1 1715



The Spirit of the Laws (1748, excerpts)



On the principle of despotic government

Just as there must be virtue in a republic and honor in a monarchy, there must be FEAR in a despotic government. Virtue is not at all necessary to it and honor would be dangerous.

The prince's immense power passes intact to those to whom he entrusts it. People capable of much self-esteem would be in a position to cause revolutions. Therefore, fear must beat down everyone's courage and extinguish even the slightest feeling of ambition.

A moderate government can, as much as it wants and without peril, relax its springs. It maintains itself by its laws and even by its force. But when in despotic government the prince ceases for a moment to raise his arm, when he cannot instantly destroy those in the highest places, all is lost, for when the spring of the government, which is fear, no longer exists, the people no longer have a protector.

Apparently it was in this sense that the cadis claimed that the Grand Signior was not obliged to keep his word or his oath if by doing so he limited his authority.

The people must be judged by the laws, and the important men by the prince's fancy; the head of the lowest subject must be safe, and the pasha's head always exposed. One cannot speak of these monstrous governments without shuddering. The Sophi of Persia, deposed in our time by Myrrweis, saw his government perish before it was conquered because he had not spilled enough blood.

History tells us that Domitian's horrible cruelties so frightened the governors that the people revived somewhat during his reign. In the same way, a flood, destroying everything on one bank, leaves stretches of land on the other where meadows can be seen in the distance.

The difference in obedience between moderate governments and despotic governments

In despotic states the nature of the government requires extreme obedience, and the prince's will, once known, should produce its effect as infallibly as does one ball thrown against another.

No tempering, modification, accommodation, terms, alternatives, negotiations, remonstrances, nothing as good or better can be proposed. Man is a creature that obeys a creature that wants.

He can no more express his fears about a future event than he can blame his lack of success on the caprice of fortune. There, men's portion, like beasts', is instinct, obedience, and chastisement.

It is useless to counter with natural feelings, respect for a father, tenderness for one's children and women, laws of honor, or the state of one's health; one has received the order and that is enough.

In Persia, when the king has condemned someone, no one may speak to him further about it or ask for a pardon. If he were drunken or mad, the decree would have to be carried out just the same; if it were not, he would be inconsistent, and the law cannot be inconsistent. This has always been their way of thinking: as the order given by Ahasuerus to exterminate the Jews could not be revoked, it was decided to give them permission to defend themselves.

There is, however, one thing with which one can sometimes counter the prince's will: that is religion. One will forsake one's father, even kill him, if the prince orders it, but one will not drink wine if the prince wants it and orders it. The laws of religion are part of a higher precept, because they apply to the prince as well as to the subjects. But it is not the same for natural right; the prince is not assumed to be a man.

In monarchical and moderate states, power is limited by that which is its spring; I mean honor, which reigns like a monarch over the prince and the people. One will not cite the laws of religion to a courtier: he would feel it was ridiculous; instead one will incessantly cite the laws of honor. This results in necessary modifications of obedience; honor is naturally subject to eccentricities, and obedience will follow them all.

Though the way of obeying is different in these two governments, the power is nevertheless the same. In whatever direction the monarch turns, he prevails by tipping the balance and he is obeyed. The whole difference is that, in the monarchy, the prince is enlightened and the ministers are infinitely more skillful and experienced in public affairs than they are in the despotic state.

How the laws are relative to the principle of despotic government

Despotic government has fear as its principle; and not many laws are needed for timid, ignorant, beaten-down people.

Everything should turn on two or three ideas; therefore, there must be no new ones. When you instruct a beast you take great care not to let him

change masters, training, or gait; you stamp his brain with two or three impulses and no more.

When the prince is enclosed, he cannot end his stay among sensual pleasures without distressing all those who keep him there. They cannot allow his person and his power to pass into other hands. Therefore, he rarely wages war in person and scarcely dares have it waged by his lieutenants.

Such a prince, accustomed to meeting no resistance in his palace, becomes insulted at that offered him by armed men; he is, therefore, usually moved by anger or vengeance. Besides, he cannot have an idea of true glory. Therefore, wars have to be waged there in all their natural fury, and the right of nations has to be less extensive than elsewhere.

Such a prince has so many faults that one must fear exposing his natural foolishness to the light of day. He is hidden, and one remains in ignorance of his condition. Fortunately, men in these countries are such that they need only a name to govern them.

Charles XII, meeting some resistance in the senate of Sweden while he was at Bender, wrote that he would send one of his boots to command it. The boot would have governed like a despotic king.

If the prince is taken prisoner, he is supposed dead, and another ascends the throne. The treaties made by the prisoner are null; his successor would not ratify them. Indeed, as he is the laws, the state, and the prince, and as from the moment he is no longer the prince, he is nothing, if he were not considered dead, the state would be destroyed.

One of the things that led the Turks to decide to make their separate peace with Peter I was that the Muscovites told the vizir that in Sweden another king had been put on the throne.

The preservation of the state is only the preservation of the prince, or rather of the palace in which he is enclosed. Nothing which does not directly menace the palace or the capital makes an impression on ignorant, arrogant, and biased minds; and, as for the sequence of events, they cannot follow it, foresee it, or even think about it. Politics with its springs and laws should

here be very limited, and political government is as simple as civil government.

Everything comes down to reconciling political and civil government with domestic government, the officers of the state with those of the seraglio.

Such a state will be in the best situation when it is able to consider itself as alone in the world, when it is surrounded by deserts and separated from the peoples it calls barbarians. It will be good for the despotism, unable to count on the militia, to destroy a part of itself.

While the principle of despotic government is fear, its end is tranquillity; but this is not a peace, it is the silence of the towns that the enemy is ready to occupy.

Since force is not in the state but in the army that has founded it, that army must be preserved in order to defend the state; however, it is dangerous to the prince. How then is the security of the state to be reconciled with the security of the person?

I beg you to observe with what industry the Muscovite government seeks to escape the despotism which weighs on the government even more than it does on the peoples. Great bodies of troops have been disbanded; penalties for crimes have been lessened; tribunals have been established; some men have begun to be versed in the laws; the peoples have been instructed. But there are particular causes that will perhaps return it to the misfortune it had wanted to flee.

In these states, religion has more influence than in any other; it is a fear added to fear. In Mohammedan empires the peoples derive from religion a part of the astonishing respect they have for their prince.

It is religion that slightly corrects the Turkish constitution. Those subjects who are not attached to the glory and greatness of the state by honor are attached to it by force and by religious principle.

Of all despotic governments, none is more oppressive to itself than the one whose prince declares himself owner of all the land and heir to all his subjects. This always results in abandoning the cultivation of the land and, if the prince is a merchant, in ruining every kind of industry.

In these states, nothing is repaired, nothing improved. Houses are built only for a lifetime; one digs no ditches, plants no trees; one draws all from the land, and returns nothing to it; all is fallow, all is deserted.

Do you think that laws that take away ownership of land and inheritance of goods will diminish the avarice and cupidity of the important men? No: such laws will excite their cupidity and avarice. The important men will be led to take a thousand oppressive measures because they will not consider anything their own but the gold or silver that they can steal or hide.

In order that all not be lost, it is well to moderate the greediness of the prince by some custom. Thus, in Turkey, the prince is usually satisfied to take 3 per cent from the inheritances of the people. But, as the Grand Signior gives most of the land to his militia and disposes of it according to his fancy, as he seizes all the inheritances of the officers of the empire, as, when a man dies without male children, the Grand Signior becomes the owner and the daughters have only the usufruct, it happens that most of the goods of the state are held in precarium.

According to a law of Bantam, the king takes the inheritance, including the wife, the children, and the house. In order to elude the most cruel provision of this law, one is obliged to marry children at the age of eight, nine, or ten, and sometimes even younger, so that they do not remain an unfortunate part of the father's inheritance.

In states where there are no fundamental laws, the inheritance of the empire cannot be fixed. The prince elects from within his family or from outside it the one who is to wear the crown. It would be vain to establish inheritance by the eldest; the prince could always choose another. The successor is declared either by the prince himself, by his ministers, or by a civil war. Thus, this state has one more reason for dissolution than a monarchy.

As each prince of the royal family is equally entitled to be elected, it happens that the one who ascends to the throne immediately has his brothers strangled, as in Turkey; or blinded, as in Persia; or driven mad, as with the Moguls; and, if these precautions are not taken, as in Morocco, each time the throne is vacated a horrible civil war follows.

According to the constitutions of Muscovy, the czar can choose whomever he wants as his successor, either from within his family or from outside it. The establishment of such a succession causes a thousand revolutions and renders the throne as unsteady as the succession is arbitrary. As one of the most important things for the people to know is the order of succession, the best one is that which is most obvious, such as birth and a certain order of birth. Such a provision checks intrigues and stifles ambition; the spirit of a weak prince is no longer captive, and the dying are not made to speak.

When a fundamental law establishes the order of succession, one prince alone is the successor, and his brothers have no real or apparent right to contend for the crown. One can neither presume nor bring to bear a particular will of the father. It is, therefore, no more a question of checking the king's brother or of killing him than it is of checking or killing any other subject at all.

But in despotic states, where the prince's brothers are equally his slaves and his rivals, prudence requires that they be imprisoned, especially in Mohammedan countries, where the religion regards victory or success as a judgment of god, so that no one is sovereign there by right, but only in fact.

In states where the princes of the blood see that they will be enclosed or put to death if they do not ascend to the throne, ambition is excited much more than among ourselves, where princes of the blood enjoy a condition which, though not as satisfying to ambition, is perhaps more satisfying to moderate desires.

In despotic states princes have always abused marriage. They usually take several wives, especially in that part of the world, Asia, where despotism is, so to speak, naturalized. They have so many children that they can scarcely have any affection for them, nor can the children have any for their brothers.

The reigning family resembles the state; it is too weak, and its leader is too strong; it seems extensive, and it amounts to nothing. Artaxerxes had all his children murdered for having plotted against him. It is not credible that fifty children would conspire against their father, and still less that they would conspire because he had refused to yield his concubine to his eldest son. It is simpler to believe that this was some intrigue in those seraglios of the East, those places where artifice, wickedness, and deceit reign in silence

and are covered by the darkness of night, where an old prince who becomes more imbecilic every day is the first prisoner of the palace.

After all we have just said, it seems that human nature would rise up incessantly against despotic government. But, despite men's love of liberty, despite their hatred of violence, most peoples are subjected to this type of government. This is easy to understand. In order to form a moderate government, one must combine powers, regulate them, temper them, make them act; one must give one power a ballast, so to speak, to put it in a position to resist another; this is a masterpiece of legislation that chance rarely produces and prudence is rarely allowed to produce. By contrast, a despotic government leaps to view, so to speak; it is uniform throughout; as only passions are needed to establish it, everyone is good enough for that.

On the simplicity of criminal laws in the various governments

It is constantly said that justice should be rendered everywhere as it is in Turkey. Can it be that the most ignorant of all peoples have seen clearly the one thing in the world that it is most important for men to know?

If you examine the formalities of justice in relation to the difficulties a citizen endures to have his goods returned to him or to obtain satisfaction for some insult, you will doubtless find the formalities too many; if you consider them in their relation to the liberty and security of the citizens, you will often find them too few, and you will see that the penalties, expenses, delays, and even the dangers of justice are the price each citizen pays for his liberty.

In Turkey, where one pays very little attention to the fortune, life, or honor of the subjects, all disputes are speedily concluded in one way or another. The manner of ending them is not important, provided that they are ended. The pasha is no sooner informed than he has the pleaders bastinadoed according to his fancy and sends them back home.

And, for one to have the passions of pleaders would be quite dangerous there; these passions presuppose an ardent desire to see justice done, a hatred, an active spirit, and a steadfastness in pursuit of justice. All this should be avoided in a government where there must be no feeling other than fear and where everything leads abruptly and unforeseeably to

revolutions. Each man should know that the magistrate must not hear of him and that he owes his safety only to his nothingness.

But in moderate states where the head of even the lowest citizen is esteemed, his honor and goods are removed from him only after long examination; he is deprived of his life only when the homeland itself attacks it; and when the homeland attacks his life, it gives him every possible means of defending it.

Thus, when a man makes himself more absolute, his first thought is to simplify the laws. In these states he begins by being struck more by particular drawbacks than by the liberty of the subjects, with which he is not concerned.

One can see that there must be at least as many formalities in republics as in monarchies. In both governments, formalities increase in proportion to the importance given to the honor, fortune, life, and liberty of the citizens.

Men are all equal in republican government; they are equal in despotic government; in the former, it is because they are everything; in the latter, it is because they are nothing.

On laws relative to the nature of the despotic state

A result of the nature of despotic power is that the one man who exercises it has it likewise exercised by another. A man whose five senses constantly tell him that he is everything and that others are nothing is naturally lazy, ignorant, and voluptuous. Therefore, he abandons the public business. But, if he entrusted this business to many people, there would be disputes among them; there would be intrigues to be the first slave; the prince would be obliged to return to administration. Therefore it is simpler for him to abandon them to a vizir who will instantly have the same power as he. In this state, the establishment of a vizir is a fundamental law.

It is said that a certain pope, upon his election, overcome with his inadequacy, at first made infinite difficulties. Finally, he agreed to turn all matters of business over to his nephew. He was awestruck and said, "I would never have believed that it could be so easy." It is the same for the princes of the East. When, from that prison where eunuchs have weakened their hearts and spirits and have often left them ignorant even of their

estate, these princes are withdrawn to be put on the throne, they are stunned at first; but when they have appointed a vizir, when in their seraglio they have given themselves up to the most brutal passions, when in the midst of a downtrodden court they have followed their most foolish caprices, they would never have believed that it could be so easy.

The more extensive the empire, the larger the seraglio, and the more, consequently, the prince is drunk with pleasures. Thus, in these states, the more peoples the prince has to govern, the less he thinks about government; the greater the matters of business, the less deliberation they are given.

On the climate of Asia

Accounts tell us that the north of Asia, that vast continent extending from about the fortieth parallel to the pole and from the border of Muscovy to the Eastern Ocean, has a very cold climate; that this immense terrain is divided from west to east by a chain of mountains that puts Siberia to the north and Greater Tartary to the south; that the climate of Siberia is so cold that, although the Russians have settlements along the Irtysh, they cultivate nothing there; that nothing grows in this country but a few small fir trees and shrubs; that the natives of the country are divided into destitute tribes like those of Canada; that the reason for this cold is, on the one hand, the elevation of the terrain, and on the other, that as one goes from south to north the mountains level out and the north wind blows everywhere unobstructed; and that, when this wind that makes Novaya Zemlya uninhabitable blows in Siberia, it makes it a wasteland. In Europe, on the other hand, the mountains of Norway and Lapland are admirable bulwarks shielding the countries of the north from this wind; that thus in Stockholm, which is at about 59 degrees latitude, the terrain can produce fruits, grains, and plants; and that around Abo, which is at 61 degrees north, just as at the 63rd and 64th degree, there are silver mines and the terrain is quite fertile.

We see further in the accounts that Greater Tartary, which is to the south of Siberia, is also very cold; that the country is not cultivated; that only pastures for herds are found there; that as in Iceland some bushes but not trees grow there; that close to China and the Moguls there are some countries where a kind of millet grows, but where neither wheat nor rice can ripen; that there are scarcely any spots in Chinese Tartary, at the 43rd, 44th, and 45th parallel, where it does not freeze seven or eight months a year; so that it is as cold as Iceland although it should be warmer than the

south of France; that there are no towns, except four or five near the Eastern Ocean and some that the Chinese have built close to China for political reasons; that in the remainder of Greater Tartary there are only a few located in the Boucharies, Turkistan, and Charizme; that the reason for this extreme cold is found in the nature of the terrain, which is nitrous, full of saltpeter, and sandy, as well as in its elevation. Father Verbiest had found that a certain spot eighty leagues north of the Great Wall, toward the source of the Kavamhura, that rose three thousand geometric feet above the coast of the ocean near Peking; that this elevation is the cause for the fact that, although almost all the great rivers of Asia have their source in the countryside, it nevertheless lacks water, so it can be inhabited only near the rivers and lakes.

These facts stated, I reason thus: Asia has no temperate zone, properly so called, and the places situated in a very cold climate there are immediately adjacent to those that are in a very warm climate, that is, Turkey, Persia, the Mogul Empire, China, Korea, and Japan.

In Europe, on the other hand, the temperate zone is very broad, although the climates within it are very different from each other, as there is no relation between the climate of Spain and Italy and that of Norway and Sweden. But as the climate there grows colder gradually as one goes from south to north approximately in proportion to the latitude of each country, it happens that there each country is very like its neighbor, that there is not a notable difference between them, and that, as I have just said, the temperate zone is very broad.

From this, it follows that in Asia the strong and weak nations face each other; the brave and active warrior peoples are immediately adjacent to effeminate, lazy and timid peoples; therefore, one must be the conquered and the other the conqueror. In Europe, on the other hand, strong nations face the strong; those that are adjacent have almost the same amount of courage. This is the major reason for the weakness of Asia and the strength of Europe, for the liberty of Europe and the servitude of Asia: a cause that I think has never before been observed. This is why liberty never increases in Asia, whereas in Europe it increases or decreases according to the circumstances.

Although the Muscovite nobility was reduced to servitude by one of its princes, one will always see there marks of impatience that the southern

climates do not produce. Did we not see aristocratic government established there briefly? Although another kingdom in the north has lost its laws, one can trust to the climate that it has not lost them irrevocably.

Counter-Point: Marsigli



Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (1658–1730)

was a Bolognese soldier, naturalist, diplomat, and polymath whose career combined military service with unusually systematic observation of the lands and peoples of southeastern Europe. Serving the Habsburgs in their wars against the Ottoman Empire, he was captured by the Ottomans in 1683 and spent months in captivity, an experience that deepened an already serious interest in Ottoman institutions, military organization,

geography, and society. He later participated in campaigns along the Danube and in the negotiations and frontier surveys following the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), acquiring a level of practical Ottoman expertise rare among European writers of his generation. His *Stato militare dell'Imperio Ottomanno* drew on firsthand observation, interviews, documents, maps, and decades of accumulated knowledge, and sought to explain the empire not simply as an exotic or despotic polity but as a functioning military and administrative system. Marsigli's work is therefore valuable both as an early exercise in empirical Ottoman studies and as the product of a European observer who knew the empire through war, captivity, diplomacy, and sustained investigation.



Stato militare dell'Imperio Ottomanno (1732, excerpt)

Examination of the Authority of the Sultan, the Vizier, and the Pashas

All our historians loudly proclaim the despotic sovereignty of the Sultan. But how far it is from being such as they report it! Perhaps it was exercised in that way until the reign of Soliman, surnamed the Great, who, in the judgment of the Turks, is the last ruler to have reigned with justice and glory....

The militia that is near the person of the Grand Signor, and is called Capiculy, authorized by the laws of his predecessors and by his own laws, has the power to put the Sultan in prison, to cause him to be killed, and to give him as successor one of his brothers or one of his children. It can establish such laws as it pleases in order to protect the lives of the princes of the blood from the attacks of so many sultans who think only of establishing themselves on the throne by having the throats cut of all those who have the first right to it. When the whole body of this militia of Constantinople is united under the orders of the Ulama, which, as I have said, gives weight to this undertaking by the force of the laws, the Sultan, this great despotic monarch, passes from the throne to the bottom of a dungeon, if he and his vizier are not strangled....

That is the miserable sovereignty of the Sultan, which a number of external ceremonies make appear so great and so happy. One does not dare risk looking him in the face; one kisses the ground before him, and speaks to him only while deeply bowed; one runs at full speed if one finds oneself in a place through which he is to pass, so as not to expose oneself to the sight that the Turks call divine. An infinity of reverences and prayers are made in the public prayers, and acclamations during ceremonies; and despite all this, at the very same time, people often think either of deposing him or of having him killed.

After seeing what the sovereignty of the Sultan is, it will be easy to judge in what that of the pashas of the empire can consist. They themselves have only a false brilliance, which they procure by the horse-tails raised before them at the end of a lance; by superb standards, military music, the great number of pages and other domestics richly dressed; and by equally brilliant outward signs they appear, in the eyes of those who do not know their condition, far greater than they are. In fact, their gravity, joined to that pride which they derive from the Greeks and which they have associated with the nature of the Turks, imposes upon foreigners. But the old subjects of the empire, who know the smallness of their power, which this grand display makes appear immense, because they have themselves served them, know well how to reduce it, and to regard them with another eye. If the authority of the Sultan is so strongly subordinated to that which the civil and military bodies have arrogated to themselves, it is easy to judge what that of the pashas of the provinces and kingdoms of the Ottoman Empire must be. It must be observed that they are provided with a government very distant from the capital of the empire, and that they command the militia

and subjects whom difference of religion excludes from every office. In addition, they are obliged to meet immense expenses, and at the same time cannot in any manner touch the public revenues. On the contrary, they must make up the expense necessary for this apparent pomp, and for the maintenance of their seraglio, which must answer to their dignity. Finally, they have many presents to make every year to the ministers of the Porte and to the favorites, not counting what they must set aside to protect themselves from the disgraces to which they are daily exposed. The Divan is no slight curb upon the pashas; they must hold it publicly in their palace at least once a week, and give free access to all Turkish, Christian, and Jewish subjects who wish to come there.

The Divan is the council of justice. It is composed for the most part of military officers of every rank, both infantry and cavalry; of the chief officers of justice; of those of the finances; and sometimes even of elders who have held office.

Soldiers who have some business there are supported first by their own officers, and then by the entire military corps when needed. Turkish subjects are supported by the judges or by the elders, very zealous defenders of the country. The officers of the finances, called Tefterdars, watch exactly over their maintenance, and are inexorable over the least alteration that might be made in it. The pasha has a deliberative voice, and all goes well when he agrees with the Divan; but if, on the contrary, there is disagreement caused by his particular passions, everyone keeps silence except the corps of Janissaries. They protest immediately against the resolution of the Divan and refuse to obey it, particularly if the pasha's residence is a fortress town where their officer holds the keys of the gates; and they at once give notice of it to the Aga who is in Constantinople. The others who are not satisfied with this resolution dissemble the first time, and even the second; but at the third, they present a petition to the Sultan, in which they detail everything that the pasha has done wrong. All those who join in drawing it up put their seal to it; and if among them there is one of the elders of the country who has more credit at the Porte than the others, the pasha runs the risk of being deposed from his government and transferred to another less considerable one, or even of being strangled, if, by misfortune, he has the reputation of being rich. The pasha cannot, by his own authority, take any resolution, however little important, that concerns the state; he must wait until the whole Divan has consented to it by signing it and affixing its seal....

From all that I have just said, one can judge that the pashas of the Ottoman Empire have only a fine appearance, sustained by an affected pomp, and that at bottom they have only a very restricted authority. Their offices and their lives depend on a petition furnished with seals; and this petition has infinitely more credit at the Porte when, as I have said, it is drawn up by the rich. These latter are very rare in time of a long war, such as that of Vienna. During that war, the elders who had amassed large sums were decapitated by order of the fiscal authority; and, moreover, burdened with subsidies for the continuation of the war, they did not have time to save the least thing, as they do in time of peace, when they intrigue in every manner.

One sees from everything I have just recounted whether the Ottoman Empire deserves the name of monarchy and aristocracy, or rather of democracy.

Counter-point: Voltaire



Voltaire (1694–1778), the pen name of François-Marie Arouet, was the most celebrated polemicist of the French Enlightenment: a dramatist, historian, philosopher, and tireless critic of religious intolerance, clerical power, and arbitrary authority. He was less a systematic thinker than a formidable public intellectual, using history, satire, correspondence, and controversy to expose superstition and defend civil liberty, toleration, and the rule of reason. His admiration for English institutions and for enlightened monarchy coexisted with deep skepticism about popular government.

In works ranging from the *Philosophical Letters* and *Candide* to the *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, he helped displace providential history with a comparative, secular account of civilizations, extending European historical vision well beyond Greece, Rome, and Christianity.

Voltaire exerted a significant influence on the intellectual world of revolutionary America, where his attacks on religious intolerance, clerical privilege, and arbitrary government found a ready audience among educated colonists and the generation of the Founders. His works circulated widely in libraries and private collections, and figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams read him closely, even when they rejected his more sweeping irreverence. Voltaire did not provide Americans with a political blueprint, but he helped furnish the Enlightenment vocabulary in which they defended freedom of conscience, religious toleration, rational inquiry, and resistance to inherited authority. His importance in America lay less in direct institutional influence than in helping create the intellectual climate in which republican independence and the separation of church and state could be conceived as parts of a broader emancipation from Old World orthodoxies.



Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations (1756, excerpts)

I believe it necessary here to combat a prejudice: that the Turkish government is a government as absurd as it appears despotic; that the peoples are all slaves of the sultan, that they possess nothing of their own, that their lives and their property belong to their master. Such an administration would have destroyed itself. Some travelers have written that all lands belonged to the sultan because he gives them to timariots for life, as formerly our kings of France gave benefices to military men. These travelers ought to have considered that there are laws governing inheritances in Turkey, just as everywhere else. The Koran, which is both civil and religious law, provides from its fourth chapter onward for the inheritance of men and women, and the law of tradition and custom supplies what the Koran does not say.

It is true that the movable property of deceased pashas belongs to the sultan, and that he assigns a portion to the family. But this was a custom established in Europe at the time when fiefs were not hereditary; and long afterward bishops themselves inherited the movable property of subordinate ecclesiastics, while the popes exercised this right over cardinals and over all holders of benefices who died in the residence of the supreme pontiff.

Not only are all Turks free, but among them there is no distinction of nobility. They recognize no superiority except that of office.

Their manners are at once fierce, haughty, and effeminate; they derive their harshness from the Scythians, their ancestors, and their softness from Greece and Asia. Their pride is extreme. They are conquerors and ignorant: that is why they despise every nation.

The Ottoman Empire is not a monarchical government tempered by gentle manners, as France and Spain are today; still less does it resemble Germany, which in the course of time has become a republic of princes and cities under a supreme chief who bears the title of emperor. It has nothing in common with Poland, where the cultivators are slaves and the nobles are kings; and in its constitution it is as remote from England as it is in geographical distance. But one must not imagine that it is an arbitrary government in every respect, in which the law permits the whims of a

single man to slaughter multitudes at will, like wild beasts kept in a park for his amusement.

Our prejudices lead us to imagine that a *chiaoux* may go, an imperial rescript in his hand, and demand on behalf of the sultan all the money of the heads of families in a town, and all their daughters for his master's use. There are undoubtedly horrible abuses in Turkish administration; but in general these abuses are far less disastrous to the people than to those who themselves share in the government; it is upon them that the severity of despotism falls.

A secret sentence of a divan is enough to sacrifice the leading men on the slightest suspicions. There is no great legal body established in the country to make the laws respected and the person of the sovereign sacred. No barrier is erected by the constitution of the state against the injustices of the vizier. Thus there are few remedies for the subject when he is oppressed, and for the master when men conspire against him. The sovereign who passes for the most powerful ruler on earth is at the same time the least secure upon his throne. A single day of revolution is enough to cast him down. In this the Turks have imitated the customs of the Greek Empire which they destroyed.

They merely have greater respect for the Ottoman dynasty than the Greeks had for the families of their emperors. They depose a sultan, they cut his throat; but it is always in favor of a prince of the Ottoman house. The Greek Empire, on the contrary, had passed through assassination into twenty different families.

Fear of being deposed is a greater restraint upon the Turkish emperors than all the laws of the Koran. Absolute master within his seraglio, master of the lives of his officers by means of a *fetva* from the mufti, he is not master of the usages of the empire: he does not increase the taxes; he does not tamper with the coinage; his private treasury is separate from the public treasury.

The position of the sultan is sometimes the most idle on earth, and that of the grand vizier the most laborious: he is at once constable, chancellor, and chief justice. The reward for so many labors has often been exile or the bowstring.

The positions of the pashas have been no less dangerous, and down to our own day violent death has often been their fate. All this proves only harsh and ferocious manners, such as those that long prevailed in Christian Europe, when so many heads fell upon the scaffold: when La Brosse, the favorite of Saint Louis, was hanged; when the minister Laguerre died under torture in the reign of Charles the Fair; when the constable of France, Charles de la Cerda, was executed under King John without form of trial; when Enguerrand de Marigny was seen hanging from the gibbet of Montfaucon which he himself had caused to be erected; when the body of the first minister Montagu was carried to the same gibbet; when the grand master of the Templars and so many knights expired in the flames, and such cruelties were commonplace in monarchical states.

One would be greatly mistaken to think that these barbarities were the consequence of absolute power. No Christian prince was despotic, and the Grand Seigneur is no more so. Several sultans, it is true, bent all laws to their will—a Mehmed II, a Selim, a Suleiman.... Conquerors meet with little opposition among their subjects; but all our historians have greatly deceived us when they regarded the Ottoman Empire as a government whose essence is despotism.

Count Marsigli, better informed than all of them, expresses himself thus: “In all our histories we hear the sovereignty exercised so despotically by the sultan exalted; but how far they depart from the truth!” The Janissary militia, he says, which remains in Constantinople and is called the *capiculi*, possesses by its laws the power to imprison the sultan, to put him to death, and to give him a successor. He adds that the Grand Seigneur is often obliged to consult the political and military establishment in order to make war or peace.

The pashas are not absolute in their provinces, as we imagine; they depend upon their divan. The leading citizens have the right to complain of their conduct and to send memorials against them to the grand divan at Constantinople. Finally, Marsigli concludes by giving the Turkish government the name of a democracy.

It is in fact something of a democracy, in roughly the same form as that of Tunis and Algiers. These sultans, whom the people dare not look upon, and whom one approaches only with prostrations that seem almost acts of worship, thus possess only the outward appearance of despotism; they are

absolute only when they know how successfully to deploy that fury of arbitrary power which seems to have been born in all men. Louis XI, Henry VIII, Sixtus V, and other princes were as despotic as any sultan. If one could penetrate in this way into the secrets of the thrones of Asia, almost always unknown to foreigners, one would see that there is far less despotism on earth than is commonly supposed.

Our Europe has seen princes, themselves vassals of another prince who was not absolute, assume within their own states an authority more arbitrary than that of the emperors of Persia and India. Yet it would be a great error to suppose that the states of these princes are, by their constitution, despotic governments....

Rycaut, who lived for a long time in Turkey, attributes the enduring power of the Ottoman Empire to something supernatural. He cannot understand how this government, which so often depends upon the caprice of the Janissaries, can sustain itself against its own soldiers and against its enemies. But the Roman Empire lasted five hundred years at Rome and nearly fourteen centuries in the Levant amid military seditions; the occupants of the throne were overthrown, but the throne itself was not.

The Turks have for the Ottoman dynasty a veneration that serves them in place of a fundamental law: the empire is often wrested from the sultan, but, as we have observed, it never passes into a foreign house. The internal constitution therefore had nothing to fear, although the monarch and the viziers have so often had cause to tremble.

Up to the present this empire has not had to fear foreign invasions. The Persians have rarely penetrated the Turkish frontiers. On the contrary, you will see Sultan Murad IV take Baghdad by assault from the Persians in 1638, remain master of Mesopotamia, send troops on one side to the Great Mogul against Persia, and on the other threaten Venice. The Germans have never appeared at the gates of Constantinople as the Turks did at those of Vienna. The Russians became formidable to Turkey only from the time of Peter the Great.

Finally, force and plunder established the Ottoman Empire, and the divisions among Christians preserved it: there is nothing supernatural in that.

Counter-Point: Linguet



Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet (1736–1794) was a French lawyer, journalist, and political polemicist whose career embodied the combative underside of the Enlightenment. Trained in law and unusually hostile to the complacencies of philosophic orthodoxy, he attacked both established privilege and many of the era’s most celebrated reformers, including Montesquieu. In works such as *Du plus heureux gouvernement* (1774), Linguet rejected the standard European image of “Oriental despotism,” arguing that Asian absolute monarchies could in practice protect ordinary subjects more effectively than supposedly moderate European regimes, whose laws often entrenched aristocratic privilege. His writing combined erudition, paradox, and deliberate provocation, and he became notorious for defending positions that unsettled both philosophes and defenders of the ancien régime. After periods of exile and imprisonment—including confinement in the Bastille—he initially welcomed the Revolution but fell victim to its radicalization and was guillotined during the Terror in 1794.



Du plus heureux gouvernement (1774)

“I assume,” M. de Montesquieu says, “three definitions, or rather three facts: one, that the republican government is that in which the people as a body, or only a part of the people, has the sovereign power; the monarchical, that in which a single person governs, but by fixed and established laws; the despotic, that in which a single person, without law and without rule, draws everything along by his will and his caprices.”

Of these three definitions, upon which rests the entire mass of *The Spirit of the Laws*, there is not a single one that is—I do not say exact—but even tenable in any of its parts, when examined with the cold blood of reason and the eye of criticism.

First, a Republic is not a government where “only a part of the people” has sovereign power. If a portion of the people exclusively holds the right to command, it is no longer a Republic; it is a true Monarchy or Aristocracy. It matters not whether this sovereignty is exercised by one prince or by a hundred, by a King or by a Senate; what is certain is that there is a throne and there are subjects. Consequently, the Republic is destroyed.

Second, Monarchy is not a government where a single person rules by “fixed and established laws.” There is no monarchy when the ruler is constrained to follow fixed and established laws. The very essence of the Monarch is the right to make laws. If there is a power superior to him that has this right, he is commanded by that power; he is no longer sovereign. He is merely the magistrate representing the sovereign—he is an Archon, a Doge, a Gonfalonier—but he is not a Monarch.

M. de Montesquieu, having thus erred in assigning the limits of the first two species of administration, could not be more exact in the unlimited scope he supposes for the third. It is evident that he has confounded Monarchy with Despotism, and that he has made a permanent and fixed state of being out of an abuse which, by its nature, can only be temporary.

There is not, and it is impossible for there to be, any prince or sovereign who reigns “without rule and without law.” Why would subjects in such an empire obey one individual rather than another? Even in Algiers, where sits the throne whose possession is least secure to its holder—the Dey, seated upon a seat soiled with the blood of his predecessors and which will surely be soiled with his own, reigning by the sabre with which he was consecrated—yet respects forms and laws he cannot infringe. He gives audience to whoever demands it; if he dared to refuse, he would hasten his own catastrophe. There would be complaints—proof enough that he had violated a law, or at least a rule.

In Turkey, no one can be judged to death except by the Sovereign, and the Sovereign himself cannot execute his sentence without a *fetva* [fatwa] from the Mufti. If he is bold and powerful enough to order an execution without this formality, he is not rendering a judgment—he is committing an assassination.

Throughout Asia, the Quran and its decisions are a chain that the most imperious Sultans, Sophis, and Moguls dare not break. There is therefore nowhere, even in Asia, a government without rule and without law. It cannot exist. From the very principles of M. de Montesquieu, it would result not that Despotism is a terrible government, but that it is a chimera.

Nay, there is more: Montesquieu himself, the moment he gives his definition, eludes or rather destroys it. He says that this genre of government rests only on caprices, and yet he proposes to develop its “principles.” Nothing is more contradictory: to rank it among the characterized species of administration, to pretend to explain its laws, while simultaneously affirming that it is in its very nature to violate all laws—to want to fix its rules, while advancing that it would cease to be if it recognized any rule—to say it exists by its nature, to give methods to distinguish it, establish it, and support it; this is to play with the minds of readers and to slander the human race....

M. de Montesquieu writes: “It is necessary that the people be judged there [the Ottoman Empire] by the laws, and the grandees by the fantasy of the Prince; that the head of the lowest subject be in safety, and that of the Pashas [Bachas] always exposed.” After so formal an admission, one does not expect his conclusion. He immediately adds: “One cannot speak without shuddering of such a monstrous government.”

The first time I read this passage, I believed I had mistaken its meaning. I took the time to reread it, and to comprehend it; but when I was fully assured of the sense it contained, I threw the book down with indignation!

“What!” I cried, “you, a philosopher! You, a protector of humanity! You so shamefully abandon its rights? You, of whom a panegyrist said your work tended toward the happiness of men, you sacrifice them to the pleasure of flattering those who tyrannize them? You call an administration monstrous, precisely because I, an ordinary citizen, would live there in safety under the sacred protection of the laws!”

What revolts you is that this government chains, through fear, those greedy hands which, without this salutary scarecrow, would make no more account of my existence than you yourself appear to do! Counting my happiness and my tranquility as nothing, you hand me over, along with the rest of the human race, to the caprice of a few grandees, rather than abandon those

grandeess to the caprice of a single man who makes himself my protector against them?

And what does the nation care for the repose of these Pashas, for whom you show so much esteem? Are they not amply compensated for these perils they love by the honors and riches the nation prodigally heaps upon them? If the uncertainty in which they live becomes a burden to them; if they grow weary of depending on the caprices of a master, let them leave his service! Let them come and lose themselves among this vulgar mass which disappears from your eyes, and whom you are sorry to see sheltered from their outrages. Let them go seek in obscurity their satisfaction, independence, and happiness!....

In what you call a monarchy or an aristocracy, it is of absolute necessity that the heads of the grandeess be safe, and that the immense multitude, comprised under the name of “the people,” be the plaything of their caprices. In what appears to you a frightful despotism, it is entirely the opposite: the security of the latter is founded on the terror experienced by the former..... Of what were you thinking, when weighing a hundred million beings like yourself against some twenty Pashas, you did not fear to decide in favor of the latter, and to give infamous names to an administration that ensures the felicity of the former?...

One of the most inconceivable prejudices in which we wallow regarding Eastern peoples is that which persuades us that there is no recognized private property in those happy climates; that all goods without exception belong to the Prince; that citizens are simple usufructuaries... that the son does not inherit from the father, and a thousand other extravagances which appear to us here to be of an incontestable truth...

The author of *The Spirit of the Laws*, delivered up to his inconceivable prejudices, not only supposed these chimeras, but went so far as to attribute to them a certain cause and certain effects. He laid down as a principle that there was no property received in Asia, and he wanted to show why this strange right existed. He finds three reasons for it.

The first is that “since when a man dies without male children, the Grand Signior holds the property, and daughters have only the usufruct, it happens that the majority of goods are possessed in a precarious manner.”

This custom... is by no means as unjust as it appears at first, and it is far from being as fatal in its execution as M. de Montesquieu claims. First, the occasions to put it into practice must not be frequent. Celibacy is unknown in Asia. The children of servant-slaves are capable of succeeding just like those of spouse-slaves. The status of the mother does not affect the legitimacy of the son...

To this custom... Montesquieu joins two others. The first: "It is that the Grand Signior gives the majority of lands to his militia, and disposes of them at his fantasy." The second: "It is that he seizes all the successions of the officers of the empire." This is neither more just, nor more true.

The Grand Signior does give some lands to his militia: but these are military benefices, funds consecrated to this use since the conquest. They belong to the body of the militia; the Sultan does nothing but name the usufructuary, in the same manner that our Kings confer the title of abbey of which the clergy is the true proprietor. These are what are called *Timariots*.

In Europe, we distribute these benefices to those who pray for the State; in Turkey, they reserve them for the hands that fight for it. Each country has its customs... but the nomination of some old Janissaries to *Timariots* in the island of Cyprus or in Palestine is no more harmful to the property of landed estates in Turkey, than is in France the nomination of a Knight of Malta to a commandery of Provence or Languedoc.

Next, is it truly represented that the Grand Signior seizes the successions of *all* the officers of the empire? Travelers' accounts are full of traits that prove the contrary. The son of a man constituted in dignity does not inherit at Constantinople the office of his father, but no one contests his goods. The children of a deceased Pasha have no right to his "three queues" [military standard of rank], just as the children of an officer of the Order of Saint Louis do not pretend to be authorized to wear his cross when they have lost him. But the privation is limited to these personal honors which ought to be granted only to merit... The Aga who commands the castle of the Dardanelles leaves his private goods to his family as quietly, as securely, as the King's lieutenant at Dunkerque or Bayonne.

I see in Asia only two classes of men whose treasures are devolved to the prince at their death: the eunuchs particularly attached within the Seraglio

to the service of his person, or the criminals he has executed. In the first case, they are his slaves; he merely repossesses what is his. In the second case, he does not succeed, he *confiscates*. This is not an inheritance he gathers; it is a penalty he inflicts. And in both cases, however rich the deceased may be, it is not land that the Sultan acquires, but gold, jewels, horses, and furniture, and never landed estates.

Landed property remains in the hands of those who make it valuable. The opulent voluptuousness of the grantees dries up and devastates lands; the active industry of the small cultivates and fertilizes them. Thus, everything is in its place. Powerful men accumulate metals and diamonds—brilliant and fragile riches, like their dignities. The true treasures, solid riches, those which make the happiness and security of their masters, remain with the obscure men who owe them to their labor, and upon whom depend for their very lives those who despise them....

M. de Montesquieu writes, “In despotic government, power passes entirely into the hands of him to whom it is confided. The Vizier is the despot himself, and every individual officer is the Vizier. In monarchical government, power applies itself less immediately; the monarch, in giving it, tempers it. He makes such a distribution of his authority, that he never gives a part of it without retaining a greater portion.’

I am ashamed to say it, but I do not believe that inconsistency and blindness have ever been pushed further. Observe that M. de Montesquieu gives precisely here as the essential character of Monarchy what essentially belongs only to what he calls Despotism.

His European monarch makes officers whom he cannot unmake. He gives certain offices that carry with them the privilege of resisting him, of prevaricating without being judged or dismissed by him. The European king is therefore at every moment forced to divest himself of entire authority and abandon much more than he retains.

This is precisely what does *not* occur in Asia. It is there, and there alone, that the prince is always the master of the use made of his graces and confidence. Shepherd of a great flock, he never releases the dogs he employs to guard them without retaining in his hand the end of the chain with which he recalls them the moment they carry themselves beyond what he demands.

Finally, M. de Montesquieu adds: “In this government [despotism], authority cannot be balanced; that of the lowest magistrate is no more balanced than that of the despot. In moderate countries, the law is everywhere wise, it is everywhere known, and the smallest magistrates can follow it. But in despotism, where the law is only the will of the prince, even if the prince were wise, how could a magistrate follow a will he does not know? He must follow his own.”

Never has anyone accumulated in fewer words more paralogisms, and even inaccuracies.

In the governments of Asia, authority is more vigorously balanced than anywhere else. There is no magistrate who is absolute; I have already shown that the despot himself is not.

Every person who participates in power in these happy administrations forms a chain of which each link holds on one side and is held on the other. Every man in office enjoys great authority, but at the same time is subject to great subordination; so that there is none, from the prince to the lowest lieutenant of a *cadi*, who cannot do much, but against whom the sovereign power can do everything. This seems to me to be the masterpiece of politics, since it is at once the means of ensuring obedience and preventing the abuse of authority.

As for the rest of the assertions of this chapter, since they all rest on that strange mistake which forms the basis of a third of *The Spirit of the Laws*—that there is no law in Asia, that the temporary will of the prince is the only constant rule—it is not worth the trouble to answer them. One needs only to open any travel book concerning Asia to sense the illusion. The Quran is the certain, immutable rule to which the princes themselves are subject. Properties are fixed there. It is only there, indeed, that there is true danger in attacking them; and the pretended caprices of the prince, restricted to the interior of his Seraglio, never extend, as Chardin and all judicious travelers confess, to the possessions of his subjects.

Counter-point: Anquetil-Duperron



ANQUETIL.

Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) was a French Orientalist best known for pioneering the European study of Zoroastrian and Indian religious texts and for challenging influential European theories about Asian government. In *Législation orientale* (1778), written explicitly against Montesquieu and other theorists of “Oriental despotism,” he argued that the political systems of the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India were neither uniformly arbitrary nor devoid of law. Drawing on travel, textual study, and administrative evidence, Anquetil emphasized the existence of legal restraints, customary rights, religious

norms, and institutional practices that limited rulers in practice. His purpose was both polemical and scholarly: to show that European descriptions of an utterly lawless and despotic East were exaggerated, and that such representations could justify conquest and domination.



Législation Orientale (1778, excerpt)

I return to M. de Montesquieu. The reflections of this great politician are supported by facts he believed to be true. The Travelers are his guarantors. It is these facts that it is appropriate to discuss: and to make the discussion more interesting, I will produce several original pieces which appear to me capable of destroying the phantom of Despotism which has until now been believed to be that of the Orient....

I reduce to three heads the points that I propose to examine in this work.

I. Does Despotism, even that which would exclude property, reduce the State to a sort of barbarism, by annihilating the laws (or rendering them absolutely useless), the sciences, the arts, commerce, internal and external politics, by removing the reciprocal bonds which unite the subjects to the Sovereign, the Sovereign to the subject, the States among themselves? M. de Montesquieu maintains the affirmative.

II. Is there in the Orient, and particularly in Hindustan, a written Code, laws which bind the Prince and the subjects, which regulate commerce, contracts, inheritances, &c.? Are these laws, if they exist, in force there? M. de Montesquieu insinuates the contrary.

III. Does the ownership of goods exist in Turkey, in Persia, in Hindustan, or is the Sovereign in these States the owner and heir of all the goods, of all the lands, movable and immovable, of his subjects?....

In the East, as elsewhere, artisans are generally able to live securely and peacefully from the proceeds of their work. Human desires and tastes create demand for their skills and encourage them to improve their craft. If governors or powerful nobles sometimes refuse to pay them, that is an abuse of power also found in monarchies and mixed governments; it is not something uniquely produced by “Oriental despotism.” Artisans therefore do not live in the perpetual state of terror that M. de Montesquieu portrays....

Fortunate are those peoples whose status and property are protected by stable laws that the sovereign regards himself as bound to respect. Yet even in governments where the ruler’s authority appears highly arbitrary, the ordinary course of social life can sometimes perform the function of formal legal codes—codes which, in any case, are themselves too often violated. In normal circumstances, when powerful political interests are not at stake, basic standards of humanity reassert themselves: people are governed much as though fixed laws existed, and they peacefully enjoy their property and inherited possessions.

As though fixed laws existed? I correct myself. There is no people in the world that does not have laws, either written or unwritten. In Turkey, Persia, and India the Laws are written, and the Monarch himself is subject to them....

In these states, religion is said to exercise greater influence than anywhere else—one form of fear reinforcing another. That is M. de Montesquieu’s claim. Yet, according to a Turkish recluse who had formerly been a statesman, the Turks believed that freedom of conscience was an effective way of keeping subjects loyal. They therefore allowed Christians to practice their religion freely and granted them churches that Muslims did not molest.

This tolerant spirit also reflects the diversity of religious opinion among the Turks. The same former statesman explains that, although the Sunni tradition associated with Abu Bakr is regarded as the least erroneous, Muslims themselves hold several competing views, which he groups into five positions. The first, associated with legal scholars, teaches that salvation is impossible outside Islam. The second, associated with dervishes and other religious devotees, holds that God's grace and the merit of good works are sufficient for salvation even without adherence to religious law. A third position claims that good works alone can save a person, without either law or grace. A fourth bases salvation on moral virtue and allows that a Muslim, Christian, Jew, or follower of any other religion may be saved through good works. The fifth, attributed to learned scholars, rejects free will and teaches that everything is inevitably guided by God toward its ultimate end, leaving human beings without independent power over themselves.

Christians are divided over many of these same theological questions. Such disputes reveal intellectual activity and disagreement, which contradict M. de Montesquieu's picture of the despot's subjects as sunk in passive and gloomy submission....

Many Europeans who travel to India, already steeped in denunciations of "Asiatic government," come to believe that by imitating the greed and cruelty of certain Indian rulers or commanders they are simply following local custom. In doing so, they alienate the population, damage trade, and provoke resentment through acts of violence that the inhabitants themselves detest. It is hard to behave justly and humanely when self-interest encourages bloody judgments and when one assumes that the people one governs are merely slaves—human beings regarded as scarcely superior to animals....

I maintain that the people are generally governed as if the State were monarchical; and that... one must consequently discount what travelers say.

A private individual—whether a merchant, statesman, military officer, or even a man of letters—full of the ideas he has formed of the excellence of European Governments, goes to India, always to make a fortune; that is to say, to amass in four years what his fatherland would not give him in twenty. The difficulties he experiences upon arrival embitter him. The soldier is stopped in his conquests by what he calls a band of blacks. What a scandal! The lowest of his soldiers thinks himself more than their chief.

The merchant, the politician finds in the country other Europeans in dispute with the natives, always over money: the latter have the bad grace not to let themselves be despoiled without saying anything. Our traveler addresses himself to a rich Saukar or Banian (Banker); European trading posts have only such. At the end of a year, the Banian is imprisoned by order of the Governor, his goods are seized. “There,” says the European, “is a sign of tyranny. One is not sure of one’s property under such a Government.”

He does not know that this rich Banian, proud of the support of Europeans—who know well in these countries how to shield their protégés from the pursuits of justice—has fattened himself on the blood of the people; that the seizure is only a legitimate confiscation, that his judgment lacked only the apparatus of an ordinary or extraordinary court that would have made the affair last two years; and that the people, in short, look upon this punishment as divine vengeance.

The same thing happens to a Governor who has long shaken off the yoke: more tyranny.

Our traveler has goods. As a European, everything must be permitted to him. Yet his goods are stopped at customs, duties are demanded, contraband is seized. What an outrage! And upon his return, he will experience many others in his own country, about which he will not complain.

Whatever is bad in Asia is always a consequence of the Government. Locusts have devastated a district; war has depopulated another; the lack of rain causes a scarcity [famine] that forces a father to sell his child to live (I saw this in 1755 in Bengal): again, it is the Government.

The traveler composes his work in Paris, in London, in Amsterdam, where it is permitted to say anything against the East. The same misfortunes in his own country he would attribute to the earth, to the heavens, to the malice of men; because it is reason that dictated the Laws there. Unfortunately, these laws are not always followed; just as in the East, the Government does not always have the consequences, in good and in evil, that it might have.

Let us not delude ourselves, Frenchmen, Englishmen! I plead here the cause of man. Never was a more important trial brought before the tribunal of the universe. We still shudder at reading of the horrors committed against the Americans [Indigenous peoples of the Americas]... Interest and ambition, these are the motives of all conquests: then come the manifestos. We make guilty the one we wish to despoil: and by what right? ‘Despotism

is the Government of these regions: The Sovereign declares himself the owner of all the goods of his subjects. Let us become this Sovereign, and here we are masters of all the lands of Hindustan.' Thus reasons greedy passion. But it hides beneath appearances that must be torn away from it.

I summarize in a few words the proofs upon which the three points I proposed to establish in this work rest.

I. The Sciences, the arts, agriculture, and commerce cultivated in the Orient, the profound politics of the Ministers and Monarchs of Turkey, Persia, and Hindustan... clearly show that despotic Government does not necessarily have the fatal consequences attributed to it by M. de Montesquieu; that Despotism, such as this Publicist represents it, that is to say where authority is arbitrary, is an imaginary Government which does not and cannot exist anywhere; that consequently in all countries men are guided by laws, more or less clear and authentic, according to whether circumstances keep Sovereigns within the limits fixed by reason, or allow them to give free rein to their passions; but that ultimately, humanity reclaims its rights, and peacefully enjoys them; which is less noticeable, because it is the natural state of things.

II. I have proven that in Turkey, in Persia and in India there are written laws and customs having the force of laws, according to which individuals are judged and the State administered; that these laws bind even the Sovereigns, who at their coronation swear to observe them...

III. FINALLY, I have established by the very testimony of the Turkish and Mogul Emperors, by that of the first Pontiffs, the grandees of the State, and the people, that there is property in Turkey, in Persia, in India, in landed estates, gardens, houses, movable goods, and even in offices; that children, both boys and girls, have the right of succession to their father, and in fact inherit his goods... from whence it follows that if travelers affirm the contrary, it is because they have mistaken the state of violence for the legal state.

[...] The purity of my intentions will doubtless excuse me... for the heat I may have put into a discussion whose object so strongly interests humanity. Despotism, such as it has been represented until now, is not a form of government: it is the abuse of authority, continued for a longer or shorter time, but against which the sacred and inalienable rights of man will eternally protest, even when his voice is stifled by violence.

Validation: Volney



Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney (1757–1820), was one of the most influential French interpreters of the Middle East in the late Enlightenment, combining the ambitions of the philosophe, traveler, historian, and political theorist. His *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte* (1787), based on several years of travel and study in the region, sought to explain the condition of Ottoman society not through picturesque description but through a systematic analysis of government, religion, economy, climate, and social organization.

Volney shared much of the Enlightenment critique of Oriental despotism, but gave it an unusually empirical and materialist cast: arbitrary government, insecure property, oppressive taxation, and religious fanaticism together produced economic stagnation and political weakness. Deeply suspicious of revealed religion, he treated Islam less as an exotic faith than as one instance of the broader alliance between superstition and political domination. His insistence on observation, causation, and comparative analysis gave that argument an authority extending well beyond conventional travel literature.

Volney occupied an unusual place in the intellectual world of the early United States, where his writings appealed especially to republican, deistic, and anticlerical currents. He traveled in America from 1795 to 1798, met leading political figures including Thomas Jefferson, and studied the country with the same comparative ambitions he had brought to the Middle East. His *Ruins, or Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*, circulated widely, reinforcing the belief that political liberty depended upon reason and resistance to priestcraft and despotism. Jefferson admired Volney, hosted him at Monticello, and assisted with an English translation of *The Ruins*, while Volney's *View of the Climate and Soil of the United States* offered an influential foreign assessment of the young republic. Yet his religious skepticism and French radical associations made him suspect to Federalists, who portrayed him as a potential subversive during the political crisis of the late 1790s.



Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte (1787, excerpts)

From the height of such power, how can a sultan regard the rest of mankind? What can the land he possesses and distributes seem to him except a vast estate of which he is the absolute master? What can the peoples he has conquered seem to him except slaves bound to serve him? And what can the soldiers he commands seem to him except servants through whom he keeps those slaves obedient? Such, in fact, is the nature of Turkish government. The empire may be compared to a plantation in the sugar islands, where multitudes of slaves labor for the luxury of a great proprietor under the supervision of a few servants who share in the profits. The only difference is that the sultan's estate is too vast to be administered as a single unit. It must therefore be divided into subordinate estates, each governed on the same model. These are the provinces ruled by the pashas. Since the provinces themselves are too large, the pashas divide them again, creating a hierarchy of officials that descends, rank by rank, to the smallest localities.

Throughout this hierarchy, the purpose of office remains the same, and so does the character of the means used to carry it out. Since power is absolute and arbitrary at its source, it passes down to every agent in the same form. Each official becomes an image of the authority above him. It is always the sultan who commands, whether under the name of pasha, motsallam, qa'immaqam, agha, or even the humblest delibashi. One has only to hear the pride with which the lowest of these soldiers, issuing orders in a village, declares: "It is the will of the sultan; it is the sultan's good pleasure." The reason is simple. By becoming the bearer of the sultan's word and the instrument of his command, he becomes, for the moment, the sultan himself.

Consider, then, the effects of such a regime. Experience in every age has shown that moderation is among the most difficult of virtues, and that even those who preach it often practice it only in theory. Imagine, therefore, the abuses of unlimited power in the hands of grandees who know neither suffering nor pity, of upstarts eager for wealth and proud of command, and of subordinates hungry for advancement. One may then judge whether speculative writers are right to claim that despotism in Turkey is less harmful than commonly supposed because, being concentrated in the

sovereign, it weighs only upon the great men surrounding him. The Turks may say that the sultan's sword does not descend into the dust. But the sultan places that sword in the hands of his vizier; the vizier passes it to the pasha; from the pasha it descends to the motsallam, the agha, and finally the lowest delibashi. In this way the sword comes within reach of everyone and can strike even the humblest heads.

The mistake in such reasoning arises from observing the condition of the people of Constantinople, for whom the sultan takes precautions not extended elsewhere. But these precautions are designed for his own security, not for the welfare of the empire. They may even have harmful effects: if Constantinople lacks provisions, ten provinces may be impoverished in order to supply it. Yet does the empire rest upon the capital, or upon the provinces? It is therefore in the provinces that despotism must be studied. There, in Turkey as elsewhere, one sees that arbitrary power in the sovereign is disastrous to the state because it is necessarily transmitted to his officials; and as it descends through the hierarchy, it becomes progressively more abusive. The harshest tyrant, after all, is often the slave who becomes a master. Let us therefore examine the abuses of this system in Syria.

In every province the pasha, as the image of the sultan, is himself an absolute despot. He combines all powers in his own person: military command, finance, police, and criminal justice. He has the power of life and death; he may make peace or war as he chooses; in short, he can do almost anything. The principal purpose of this authority is to collect tribute—that is, to transmit revenue to the great proprietor, the master who has conquered the land and claims possession of it by right of his terrible spear. Once this duty is fulfilled, little else is required. No one asks closely how the pasha has raised the money. The means are left largely to him, and circumstances almost force him to be unscrupulous. In the first place, he cannot advance, or even retain his post, unless he produces money. In the second, he owes his office to the favor of the vizier or some other influential patron, and such favor can be obtained and preserved only by outbidding rival candidates.

Money must therefore be extracted: to pay the tribute, recover the sums advanced to obtain office, maintain the dignity of the post, and create a reserve for the future. The first concern of a newly arrived pasha is consequently to find ways of raising money, and the quickest methods are

always preferred. The customary system for collecting the miri and customs revenues is to appoint one or more principal tax farmers for the year. These in turn subdivide their contracts into smaller farms, which descend through successive levels until they reach the smallest villages. The pasha awards such positions to the highest bidder because he wishes to obtain the greatest possible return. The tax farmers, having taken the contracts solely for profit, use every means available to increase their receipts.

The result is a class of officials whose greed constantly verges on dishonesty, and whose exactions are all the easier because they are backed by authority. Within the population itself there thus arises a group with a direct interest in multiplying the burdens imposed upon everyone else. The pasha may congratulate himself on reaching the deepest sources of private prosperity through the well-informed rapacity of his subordinates. But what follows? The people, unable freely to enjoy the fruits of their labor, reduce their efforts to what is necessary for survival. The peasant sows only enough to live; the artisan works only enough to feed his family; any surplus is carefully concealed. Thus the arbitrary power of the sultan, transmitted to the pasha and then to all his subordinate agents, gives free rein to their passions and becomes the driving force of a tyranny extending through every level of society. Its ultimate effect is to diminish agriculture, industry, commerce, and population—in short, everything that constitutes the strength of the state and therefore the strength of the sultan himself.

The same power produces equally serious abuses in military affairs. Constantly pressed by the need for money on which his security depends, the pasha cuts as much as possible from ordinary military expenditures. He reduces the number of troops, hires soldiers as cheaply as possible, and overlooks their misconduct. Discipline disappears. If a foreign war were to break out—if, as happened in 1772, the Russians were again to appear in Syria—who would defend the sultan's province?

Pashas, being little sultans within their provinces, sometimes develop personal hatreds toward one another. To satisfy them, they use the power entrusted to them and wage covert or open wars against each other, while the ruinous consequences invariably fall upon the sultan's subjects.....

In Asia the moral means by which skillful legislators have sometimes built great powers upon weak foundations have been forgotten. The pashas understand only money.... No one thinks of cultivating that attachment to

the public good which, in Greece and Italy, and even in Holland and Switzerland, enabled small peoples to resist great empires. Emirs and pashas alike imitate the sultan: they regard the country as an estate and its inhabitants as servants. Their subjects, in turn, see them only as masters; and since one master resembles another, it matters little whom they serve. Hence the preference in such states for foreign troops over national ones. Rulers distrust their own people because they know they have done nothing to deserve their loyalty. Their object is not to govern the country but to control it. The country, in return, cares little whether they are attacked, while the mercenaries they employ remain true to the same principle and readily sell them to the enemy in order to profit from their downfall....

It is worth noting that many states of Asia and Africa, especially since Muhammad, have been governed according to such principles, and that few regions have experienced so many internal disorders and so many political revolutions. Must we not therefore conclude that arbitrary power in the sovereign is as destructive to military strength as it is to financial administration?...

As the representative of the sultan, the pasha is also the head of police in his province, a function that includes criminal justice. He possesses an almost unlimited power of life and death, exercised without formal procedure and without appeal. Whenever he encounters an offender, he may have him seized, and the executioners accompanying him may strangle or decapitate him on the spot. Sometimes the pasha performs the execution himself. Three days before my arrival at Tyre, Jazzar had killed a mason with a blow from an axe. The pasha often moves about in disguise, and woe to anyone he catches in wrongdoing.

Since he cannot perform this function everywhere personally, he delegates it to an officer called the wali. The wali performs something like the duties of our watch officers: he patrols by day and night, watches for disturbances, and arrests thieves. Like the pasha, however, he also judges and condemns without appeal. The condemned man bends his neck, the executioner strikes, the head falls, and the body is carried away in a leather sack. The wali maintains a network of spies, almost all of them rogues, through whom he learns what is happening. It is therefore not surprising that cities such as Cairo, Aleppo, and Damascus may be safer than Genoa, Rome, or Naples. But at what cost is that security purchased, and how many innocent men

must pay with their lives for the bias or corruption of the wali and his agents?...

On the Influence of Religion

If religion among the Turks pursued the purpose it ought to have among all peoples—if it taught moderation to the powerful in the exercise of authority and tolerance to ordinary people amid differences of opinion—it would still be doubtful whether religion alone could correct the abuses just described. The experience of mankind shows that morality shapes conduct only when reinforced by civil law. But Islam, far from correcting the abuses of government, is one of their original sources.

To be convinced of this, one need only examine the book in which Islam is contained. Muslims may claim that the Qur'an contains the foundations, and even the full development, of all knowledge concerning legislation, politics, and jurisprudence; but only the prejudices of education, or partiality arising from some hidden interest, could dictate or accept such a judgment. Anyone who reads the Qur'an must admit that it offers no real account of the duties of men in society, of the formation of political institutions, or of the principles of government—in short, nothing that constitutes a legislative code. The few laws it contains concern polygamy, divorce, slavery, and inheritance among close relatives; and even these provisions, which do not amount to a code of jurisprudence, are so contradictory that Muslim jurists still dispute over how to reconcile them.

The rest is little more than a vague succession of meaningless phrases; an emphatic recital of the attributes of God that teaches no one anything; an accumulation of childish tales and ridiculous fables... If, amid the disorder of this perpetual delirium, any general spirit or underlying meaning can be discerned, it is that of an ardent and obstinate fanaticism.... Such is the spirit of the Qur'an. It announces itself from the very first line: there is no doubt in this book; it guides without error those who believe without doubting, who believe in what they do not see. What can the consequence be except to establish the most absolute despotism in the person who commands, through the most blind submission in the person who obeys?

And such was Muhammad's purpose. He did not seek to enlighten, but to rule; he did not seek disciples, but subjects. From subjects one does not ask reasoning, but obedience. To secure it more easily, he referred everything to

God. By presenting himself as God's minister, he removed suspicion of personal ambition. He avoided offending that jealous sense of independence found in all men. He pretended to obey so that others would obey him. He made himself merely the first among God's servants, confident that each man would strive to become the second in order to command all the rest. He enticed men with promises and drove them forward with threats. He did more still: since every new doctrine encounters opponents, he frightened them with his anathemas while leaving them the hope of pardon. Hence the appearance, in certain passages, of a kind of tolerance. But this tolerance is so harsh that sooner or later it must lead back to complete submission. Thus the fundamental spirit of the Qur'an always returns to the most arbitrary authority in the messenger of God and, by natural consequence, in those who succeed him....

It would be easy to show that the political disorders of states and the ignorance of peoples in that part of the world are, more or less directly, effects of the Qur'an and its morality.

Explanatory Notes

- **p. 5 — “sangiacates”** — *Sanjaks*: Ottoman administrative districts governed by officials appointed by the central government. Machiavelli uses them to illustrate the absence, as he saw it, of an independent hereditary nobility in the Ottoman Empire.
- **p. 6 — Bordeaux Parlement** — Not a parliament in the modern legislative sense, but one of the high law courts of ancien-régime France. Montesquieu inherited and later served as president of a chamber of the Parlement of Bordeaux.
- **p. 8 — caravanserai** — A roadside inn, especially along Middle Eastern and Central Asian trade routes, where merchants, travelers, animals, and goods could lodge.
- **p. 9 — “Moon of Rebiab”** — An older European rendering of one of the months of the Islamic lunar calendar. Montesquieu gives his fictional Persian letters dates in an exoticized approximation of the Muslim calendar.
- **p. 10 — Henri IV** — Henry IV of France (r. 1589–1610), who ended the French Wars of Religion and issued the Edict of Nantes. He was assassinated in Paris in 1610 by François Ravaillac; this is the “parricide” to which Montesquieu refers.
- **p. 11 — Tokat** — An important town in north-central Anatolia, on major Ottoman commercial and administrative routes.
- **p. 11 — Smyrna** — The historical European name for modern İzmir, the major Ottoman port on the Aegean coast of Anatolia.
- **p. 11 — pasha** — A high Ottoman title applied to senior military and administrative officials, including many provincial governors.
- **p. 11 — “Christians materializing out of a rock” / Malta** — A reference to the Knights of St. John, or Knights Hospitaller, who ruled Malta and fought the Ottomans in the Mediterranean.
- **p. 12 — Rammazan** — Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar; the spelling reflects an older European transliteration.
- **p. 13 — Gaul** — The Roman name for the territory encompassing most of present-day France, Belgium, and adjoining regions.

- **p. 13 — Hesperis** — An ancient geographical term associated with the lands of the far west; classical writers applied related forms of the name at different times to Italy or Spain.
- **p. 13 — Baetica** — The Roman province covering much of southern Spain, especially modern Andalusia; Montesquieu loosely associates it here with the far western lands of the Iberian Peninsula.
- **p. 13 — Cappadocians** — The inhabitants of Cappadocia in central Anatolia. Montesquieu refers to an ancient story in which Rome supposedly offered the Cappadocians political freedom and they preferred monarchy.
- **p. 13 — Dido** — The legendary Phoenician queen and founder of Carthage, familiar from classical tradition and Virgil's *Aeneid*.
- **p. 14 — Vandals and Goths** — Germanic peoples who established successor kingdoms in parts of the former Western Roman Empire during the fifth century. Montesquieu uses their institutions as evidence for what he regarded as the ancient European tradition of limited kingship.
- **p. 14 — Rhegeb** — Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic lunar calendar, in an older European transliteration.
- **p. 15 — “the Mogul”** — The Mughal Empire of India. Eighteenth-century Europeans commonly used “Mogul” for both the empire and its emperor.
- **p. 16 — Osman / Mustapha** — The reference is to the deposition of Ottoman Sultan Osman II in 1622 and his replacement by Mustafa I. Osman was subsequently murdered by Janissaries, an episode often cited by European writers to demonstrate the vulnerability of supposedly absolute Ottoman sultans.
- **p. 17 — cadi** — *Qadi*: a Muslim judge administering Islamic law.
- **p. 17 — Grand Signior** — A common early-modern European title for the Ottoman sultan, from the Italian *Gran Signore*, “Great Lord.”
- **p. 17 — Sophi of Persia** — An older European term for the Safavid shah of Persia, derived from “Safavi/Sufi.”
- **p. 17 — Myrrweis** — Mirwais Hotak (c. 1673–1715), the Afghan leader whose revolt against Safavid Persia began the process that culminated in the overthrow of Shah Sultan Husayn in 1722.

- **p. 17 — Domitian** — Roman emperor from AD 81 to 96, remembered in the classical and early-modern tradition as an especially autocratic and cruel ruler.
- **p. 18 — Ahasuerus** — The Persian king in the biblical Book of Esther, usually identified with Xerxes I. Montesquieu refers to the story in which an irrevocable royal decree against the Jews is countered by a second decree permitting them to defend themselves.
- **p. 19 — “right of nations”** — The *law of nations* (*droit des gens*): the body of principles thought to regulate relations among states and the conduct of war, an ancestor of modern international law.
- **p. 19 — Charles XII** — King of Sweden (r. 1697–1718), famous for his wars against Russia and other powers during the Great Northern War.
- **p. 19 — Bender** — A fortress town in present-day Moldova, then under Ottoman suzerainty. Charles XII took refuge there after his defeat by Peter the Great at Poltava in 1709.
- **p. 19 — Peter I** — Peter the Great, tsar of Russia (r. 1682–1725), whose military and administrative reforms transformed Russia into a major European power.
- **p. 19 — Muscovites** — Russians; “Muscovy” was a common early-modern Western name for the Russian state.
- **p. 20 — seraglio** — Literally a palace or enclosed court; in European writing about the Ottomans it usually means the sultan’s palace and, more particularly, its secluded domestic or harem quarters.
- **p. 21 — usufruct** — The legal right to use and enjoy property belonging to another person without owning the property itself.
- **p. 21 — precarium** — A form of possession or tenure held at another person’s pleasure and therefore revocable; Montesquieu uses the Latin term to emphasize the alleged insecurity of Ottoman property.
- **p. 21 — Bantam** — The Sultanate of Banten, an Islamic state in western Java, in present-day Indonesia. European writers often called it Bantam.
- **p. 22 — Artaxerxes** — The name of several kings of ancient Persia. Montesquieu’s anecdote belongs to the classical tradition concerning Artaxerxes II (r. 404–358 BC) and dynastic intrigue at the Persian court.

- **p. 23 — bastinadoed** — Beaten on the soles of the feet with a stick or rod, a form of corporal punishment also known as *falaka*.
- **p. 24 — vizir** — Vizier: a senior minister. The **grand vizier** was the Ottoman Empire's chief minister and, at many periods, the principal executive officer under the sultan.
- **p. 25 — Tartary / Greater Tartary** — A loose European geographical designation, not a single state, applied to enormous stretches of Central and Inner Asia inhabited by various Turkic, Mongol, and other peoples.
- **p. 25 — Irtysh** — A major river of Central Asia and Siberia flowing through present-day China, Kazakhstan, and Russia.
- **p. 25 — Novaya Zemlya** — An Arctic archipelago north of Russia.
- **p. 25 — Abo** — Åbo, the Swedish name for modern Turku in Finland, then part of the Swedish kingdom.
- **p. 26 — Bucharies** — The region around Bukhara in Central Asia, in present-day Uzbekistan.
- **p. 26 — Charizme** — Khwarazm, the historic region surrounding the lower Amu Darya, now divided principally between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
- **p. 26 — Father Verbiest** — Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), a Flemish Jesuit missionary, astronomer, and geographer who served at the Qing imperial court in Beijing. His geographical observations were an important European source of knowledge about China and Inner Asia.
- **p. 28 — Soliman the Great** — Suleiman I, or Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), under whom the Ottoman Empire reached a high point of territorial expansion and institutional development.
- **p. 29 — Capiculy / capiculi** — *Kapıkulu*, literally “slaves/servants of the Porte”: the sultan's centrally controlled household military and administrative establishment. The Janissaries formed its best-known infantry component.
- **p. 29 — Ulama** — The learned scholars of Islam, particularly specialists in Islamic law and religious doctrine. Ottoman members of the ulema occupied important judicial, educational, and religious offices.

- **p. 29 — “horse-tails”** — Horse-tail standards (*tuğ*) were Ottoman insignia of military and administrative rank. The number displayed indicated the status of a high official.
- **p. 30 — the Porte** — The Ottoman central government, from the “Sublime Porte,” the monumental gateway associated with the grand vizier’s offices in Constantinople. European diplomats routinely used “the Porte” as shorthand for the Ottoman government.
- **p. 30 — Divan** — A governing or judicial council. At the imperial level the Ottoman Divan was the chief council of government; provincial governors also presided over divans.
- **p. 30 — Tefterdars** — *Defterdars*: Ottoman financial officials responsible for treasury and fiscal administration.
- **p. 30 — Janissaries** — The elite infantry corps of the Ottoman standing army. Originally recruited largely through the *devşirme* system, the Janissaries eventually became a powerful political corporation capable of influencing or overthrowing sultans.
- **p. 30 — Aga** — An Ottoman title used for military officers and other officials; here it refers to a superior Janissary officer.
- **p. 31 — “war of Vienna”** — The great Habsburg-Ottoman war associated with the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the subsequent Holy League campaigns, culminating in the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.
- **p. 33 — timariots** — Holders of Ottoman *timars*: grants of revenue from specified lands given in return for military service. They did not simply own the lands in the modern sense.
- **p. 33 — benefice** — An office or grant carrying revenues, especially an ecclesiastical office or, by analogy, a grant given in return for service.
- **p. 33 — fief** — Land or revenue held from a superior in return for service, especially military service; a central concept in traditional descriptions of European feudalism.
- **p. 34 — chiaoux** — *Çavuş*: an Ottoman court messenger, usher, or official. European accounts frequently depicted such officials carrying the sultan’s orders.
- **p. 34 — fetva / fatwa** — A formal opinion on a question of Islamic law issued by a qualified jurist. It is not in itself equivalent to a modern judicial sentence.

- **p. 34 — mufti** — A scholar of Islamic law authorized to issue fatwas. The chief Ottoman mufti, the *şeyhülislam*, was one of the empire's highest religious-legal officials.
- **p. 34 — “the bowstring”** — A conventional reference to execution by strangulation, a method historically used against high Ottoman officials because shedding their blood was sometimes avoided.
- **p. 35 — Grand Seigneur** — Another spelling of Grand Signior: the Ottoman sultan.
- **p. 35 — Greek Empire** — The Byzantine Empire, the eastern continuation of the Roman Empire, whose capital Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453.
- **p. 36 — Louis XI / Henry VIII / Sixtus V** — Respectively king of France (1461–1483), king of England (1509–1547), and pope (1585–1590). Voltaire invokes them as European examples of rulers capable of severe and arbitrary conduct.
- **p. 36 — Rycaut** — Sir Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), an English diplomat and author whose *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1667) became one of the most influential European accounts of Ottoman government.
- **p. 36 — Murad IV** — Ottoman sultan (r. 1623–1640), remembered for restoring strong central authority and personally leading the campaign that recovered Baghdad from Safavid Persia in 1638.
- **p. 36 — Great Mogul** — The Mughal emperor of India; Europeans commonly used “the Great Mogul” as a title for the ruler of the Mughal Empire.
- **p. 37 — ancien régime** — Literally “old regime”: the political and social order of France before the Revolution of 1789, particularly the monarchy and society of legally defined estates and privileges.
- **p. 38 — Archon** — An ancient Greek title for a magistrate, especially one of the principal officials of Athens.
- **p. 38 — Doge** — The elected chief magistrate of the republics of Venice and Genoa.
- **p. 38 — Gonfalonier** — A civic magistrate in several medieval and Renaissance Italian republics; the Gonfalonier of Justice was the highest executive office of republican Florence.

- **p. 38 — Dey of Algiers** — The ruler of the Ottoman regency of Algiers. Although nominally under Ottoman sovereignty, eighteenth-century Algiers enjoyed extensive political autonomy.
- **p. 39 — Sophis** — The rulers of Safavid Persia; another form of the European term “Sophi.”
- **p. 39 — Moguls** — Mughals, the Muslim dynasty that ruled much of the Indian subcontinent from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century.
- **p. 41 — military benefice** — A grant of revenue assigned in return for military service; Linguet is comparing the Ottoman *timar* with European forms of service tenure.
- **p. 41 — Timariot** — The holder of a *timar*, expected to perform or provide military service in return for its revenues.
- **p. 41 — “three queues”** — Three horse-tail standards, symbols of the rank of a high Ottoman pasha; they belonged to the office rather than constituting hereditary property.
- **p. 41 — Order of Saint Louis** — A French royal military order founded by Louis XIV in 1693 to reward distinguished Catholic officers.
- **p. 41 — commandery** — An estate or house belonging to a military-religious order and assigned to one of its members, who received its revenues.
- **p. 43 — paralogism** — A faulty or invalid argument, generally implying an error in reasoning rather than necessarily deliberate deception.
- **p. 43 — Chardin** — Jean Chardin (1643–1713), a French Huguenot traveler whose extensive account of Safavid Persia became one of Montesquieu’s and other Enlightenment writers’ most important sources on the Middle East.
- **p. 45 — Hindustan** — A historical geographical term for India, used with varying meanings; eighteenth-century European writers often employed it broadly for northern India or the Mughal domains.
- **p. 46 — Abu Bakr** — One of Muhammad’s closest companions and the first caliph after Muhammad’s death in 632. Sunnis regard his succession as legitimate; Shiites hold that leadership properly belonged to Ali.

- **p. 46 — dervishes** — Members of Muslim mystical or Sufi fraternities, often associated in European literature with asceticism, devotional exercises, or distinctive ritual practices.
- **p. 47 — Saukar** — From South Asian terms for a moneylender, banker, or wealthy merchant.
- **p. 47 — Banian** — An older European rendering of *baniya*, referring broadly to members of Indian mercantile and banking communities; Europeans in India also used the term for Indian brokers or commercial intermediaries.
- **p. 47 — “trading posts”** — European commercial establishments or “factories” in India. A “factory” in eighteenth-century usage was a trading station staffed by merchants or “factors,” not primarily a manufacturing plant.
- **p. 47 — Bengal, 1755** — Bengal was then one of the richest provinces of the weakening Mughal Empire. Within two years, the British East India Company’s victory at Plassey (1757) would begin the transformation of the Company into a territorial power there.
- **p. 48 — Publicist** — In eighteenth-century usage, a writer or authority on public law, politics, and government—not someone engaged in modern publicity or public relations.
- **p. 49 — philosophe** — A conventional term for the intellectuals of the French Enlightenment—not simply “philosophers” in the modern academic sense, but writers who applied reason and criticism to politics, religion, society, and history.
- **p. 49 — deism** — Belief in a creator accessible through reason and nature while rejecting, or remaining skeptical of, revelation, miracles, and many doctrines of institutional religion.
- **p. 49 — Federalists** — The early American political movement associated with figures such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams. During the 1790s Federalists were deeply suspicious of revolutionary France and of Americans they regarded as sympathetic to French radicalism.
- **p. 50 — “sugar islands”** — The Caribbean plantation colonies whose economies depended heavily upon sugar cultivation and enslaved labor. Volney’s analogy deliberately compares Ottoman government with the slave plantation system.

- **p. 50 — motsallam** — *Mutasallim*: an Ottoman provincial or district administrator, often serving as a governor's local deputy.
- **p. 50 — qa'immaqam** — *Kaymakam*: literally a "deputy" or one who acts in another's place; an Ottoman administrative title used for officials exercising delegated authority.
- **p. 50 — agha** — An Ottoman honorific and administrative or military title, applied to many kinds of officers.
- **p. 50 — delibashi** — Literally "head of the delis"; an officer or leader associated with irregular Ottoman cavalrymen known as *deli*.
- **p. 52 — miri** — State or treasury revenue; in Ottoman usage *miri* could refer to state-owned land or to taxes and revenues due to the government.
- **p. 52 — tax farmer** — A private individual who paid the government for the right to collect specified taxes and then retained some or all of the amount collected above his obligation. Tax farming was widespread in early-modern Europe as well as the Ottoman Empire.
- **p. 53 — emir** — An Arabic title meaning commander or prince, applied to rulers, governors, military leaders, and members of ruling families.
- **p. 53 — Jazzar** — Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar (c. 1720–1804), the powerful Ottoman governor based at Acre, notorious in European accounts for extreme personal severity. His epithet *al-Jazzar* means "the Butcher."
- **p. 53 — Tyre** — The ancient Mediterranean port in present-day Lebanon, then part of the Ottoman province of Sidon.
- **p. 53 — wali** — An Arabic and Ottoman term for a governor or official exercising governmental authority. Volney uses it here for a local police and judicial officer acting under the pasha.
- **p. 55 — anathema** — A solemn condemnation or curse, especially one pronounced on religious grounds.