Rewriting the history of port cities in the light of contemporary global capitalism

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Ports have historically functioned as both spatial mediums shaping core-periphery relations and as spatial terrains for flows of people, goods, and ideas. Such flows have been fundamentally shaped by commercial relations, which has also created new life-styles and in turn changed the built form of urban space, demonstrating the intricate relationship that has always existed between social structure and the physical form of port cities. Ports have also functioned as key sites for the integration of empires into the world economy with their commercial networks which have created new types of interaction. Through these interactions, different groups have integrated with each other and extended their communities by making them mobile. Language, ethnicity, religion, and family ties have determined the communal and commercial ties in port cities,¹ and

¹ The concept of “port city” here not only refers to a “geographic expression applicable to all times and places.” Rather, it refers to a political and social space developed by the world economy. Yaşar Eyüp Özeren uses the concept of “port-city” instead of port city. For further discussion, please see Yaşar Eyüp Özeren, “The Making and Unmaking of an Ottoman Port-City: Nineteenth Century Beirut, Its Hinterland, and the World Economy” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990), 3-4. However, the author of this review article will use the concept of “port city” in order not to cause any confusion related with the usage of this concept in the article collections.
these communal and commercial networks have projected the port cities as “autonomous niches” in the larger economic and spatial order. Due to this localized sense of autonomy, port cities have often become the locus of conflicts among various human ecologies when competing groups have wanted to utilize the urban space in their own interests.

Many scholars believe that understanding the economic and cultural environments of the early port cities may enable us to understand the dynamics of contemporary global capitalism, in which these port cities have played key roles. The recent increase in economic and cultural interactions generated by emerging global networks/globalization has raised new questions and new theoretical approaches to the history of world port cities. Today, social scientists generally evaluate the intensification of flows of people, goods, and information as a part of contemporary capitalism. However, at the same time, they argue that contemporary capitalism should be considered differently from earlier versions of capitalism, and as such requires a new name; globalization. Globalization as such has no homogeneous structure. New opportunities in transportation and communication and new modes of consumption have produced a very cosmopolitan world, and cultural diversity is now more visible than ever. However, the crucial point is not the intermingling of cultures, but the increasing “global awareness of that intermingling, its associated risks and potential benefits.”

The heated debates over globalization were followed by a new socio-cultural condition called the age of cosmopolitanism; a highly contested term about which there has been ongoing debate. Socio-economically speaking, cosmopolitanism means the reorganization of new global and institutional forms and new market relations. Culturally speaking, it produces particular moral norms and cultural expressions that may favor all citizens from different social and ethnic backgrounds. The crucial tests of cosmopolitanism are a global outlook and more inclusive forms of socio-economic relations among global citizens. One could argue that cosmopolitanism is relevant to a wide range of geographical and social issues: geopolitics, governance, and territoriality; globalization and new transnational social movements; international migration and labor; multiculturalism and living with difference; human rights; the branding and marketing of cosmopolitan spaces and cities; moral and ethical ge-

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4 Ibid., 307.
The existing scholarship on port cities has mostly provided us with detailed and comparative information about the appearance, layout, economics, demographics, stratification, politics and culture of maritime cities and their activities. Yet this has also mostly involved understanding the history of port cities through what Çağlar Keyder, Y. Eyüp Özyer and Donald Quataert call “the prism of colonial intercourse.” This interpretive prism has usually been accompanied by the modernization paradigm, dependency theory and class-based approaches. According to Keyder et al., the modernization paradigm operates on the level of various values, norms, cultures, patterns of consumption and, naturally, politics. However, thinking on this level alone, the economic logic of modernization does not receive the emphasis it deserves. The dependency approach criticizes this silence, using a concept of structured exploitation as the foundation of its own analysis. According to this approach, the process of imperialist exploitation inspires the logic employed by the port city. The colonial city acts as an intermediary between its hinterland and the imperialist core, and its inhabitants are reduced to being servants of the imperialist project. These citizens become alienated from the surrounding land and its inhabitants and establish themselves as members of a new comprador class. One assumes that, were it not for exploitation, there would be development and transformation, but the compradors are not capable of introducing a positive dialectic into what is in essence a stagnant environment. The class approach thus regards the port city as a site of class formation and class conflict, and sets out to discover the dynamics of this situation.

In order to go beyond this prism of colonial intercourse, academia has once again turned its eyes to the history of the world’s port cities, which may provide hints to deciphering contemporary capitalism and its dynamics. In the context of these comprehensive discussions on port cities, scholars working on the Ottoman Mediterranean have focused on

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5 Ibid.
6 See Çağlar Keyder et al., “Port-Cities in the Ottoman Empire: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives,” Review (Fernand Braudel Center) 16, no. 4 (1993): 520.
7 Ibid., 522.
the crucial role of port cities in the region’s economy, on the role of port city inhabitants in regional and international trade, on multi-national networks rather than the role of citizens in local institutions, and on the influence of nascent nationalism in port cities. The present three books on port cities all aim to contribute to this growing discussion and literature, and prove the existence of a multidimensional and complicated relationship between port cities’ inhabitants and their administration, suggesting that the globalization and cosmopolitanism these cities experienced requires further investigation.

Stories end in tears: From splendor to catastrophe

Philip Mansel’s Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean focuses on three Eastern Mediterranean cities; Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut, at one time the three largest, richest, and most diverse cities shaping the commercial and cultural networks of the Mediterranean. What these cities have in common is a multi-ethnic European-originated diaspora called the Levantines. The Levantines, as Mansel argues, tried to modernize the economy, provided some technological and infrastructural improvements and transformed education and health practices in these cities. In short, they aimed to have better living conditions for themselves and the city populations, as well as to benefit economically from these transformations.

Mansel categorizes the Levant as simultaneously an area, a dialogue, and a quest. The term Levant refers to an area of the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean from the sixteenth to the twentieth century encompassing today’s modern states of Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt. These shores were the site of multicultural cities shaped by the different cultures, languages, and religions of various communities. For Mansel, the Levant is also a dialogue between apparent oppositions; East and West, Islam and Christianity, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern, nationalist and internationalist. Finally, the Levant is also a quest to understand the globalization of the nineteenth century in contradistinct-

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8 For a detailed discussion of these different approaches see, Malte Fuhrmann and Vangelis Kechriotis, “The late Ottoman port-cities and their inhabitants: subjectivity, urbanity, and conflicting orders,” Mediterranean Historical Review 24, no. 2 (2009). This issue of the journal is a special issue on Ottoman Mediterranean port cities. The editors of the issue aim to initiate a dialogue between different methodological approaches rather than to precipitate a dead-end discussion. See also, Sibel Zandi-Sayek, Ottoman İzmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840-1880 (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Julia A. Clancy-Smith, Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

tion to its present form. The transformations in these cities challenge the traditional narrative that juxtaposed cosmopolitanism and nationalism as opposed concepts, and offer a new vision of the region’s history. Mansel claims that, rather than being incompatible antitheses, cosmopolitanism and nationalism coexisted in the cities of the Levant in the nineteenth century. In that sense, Mansel criticizes the narrative which associates the end of cosmopolitanism, and thus of the port cities, with a narrow understanding of the rise of nationalism.

He argues that, without Smryna, Alexandria, and Beirut, the history of the Levant would have been totally different. These Levantine cities became the laboratories of the new world. A square or a quay were more than a geographical location; they became the contested terrains of political tensions and cultural transformations. Furthermore, the cultural changes in these cities influenced their inhabitants and shaped city life more than the state’s political and military power.

Diversity and flexibility became the essence of these Levantine cities. Most of their migrants and inhabitants were not bounded with a single nationality on the grounds of nationality or a religion. They did not find it hard to switch identities or languages. The Baltazzi family of Smyrna, Constantin Cavafy or the Benaki family of Alexandria and the trilingual writers of Beirut exemplify this ethnic and religious diversity and flexibility in the region. Their experiences also provide some hints as to how cosmopolitanism and nationalism coexisted till the early twentieth century.

Mansel provides us with a very detailed depiction of these Levantine cities, with their similarities or differences and a very prosperous history of institutions and individuals endowing cosmopolitan characteristics on these port cities. For instance, in order to find out whether Alexandria’s cosmopolitanism was real or imaginary, he variously analyzes: a cosmopolitan dynasty (the family history of Abbas Hilmi and Prince Omar Toussoun); cosmopolitan households with Greek or Italian maids, an Italian cook, and French or English governesses; the cosmopolitan Alexandrian municipality; cosmopolitan clubs and cosmopolitan business. Yet, he claims, despite a cosmopolitan structure in its institutions and habits, Alexandria also had a community-centered structure. This engendered institutional, professional, and class-based tensions which would eventually lead to the annihilation of the Levantine city more generally. Although Alexandria was quite different from Smyrna and Beirut, community-centered tensions determined the urban history of the latter two cities as well. Mansel argues that splendors of the nineteenth century turned out to be big catastrophes in the
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Along with its contributions to the literature of port cities, Mansel’s book poses some questions in the reader’s mind. Although he intends to criticize the conventional narrative of the dissolution of port cities with the expansion of nationalism, his focus on the history of these cities in the context of significant institutions and individuals and mercantile class means that he ends up reproducing the conventional “modernization” narrative of port cities. Furthermore, his focus on the history of the dynasties, merchants and intellectuals of these cities creates a crucial but a very descriptive narrative without any theoretical frame that would situate Mansel’s work in the emerging port cities literature.

Mansel argues that, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a process of re-Levantinization or globalization returned. Cities, once cosmopolitan, are becoming cosmopolitan again. With the changes in economic relations and the existing geography, global cities have become increasingly independent from nation states, and the long Levantine farewell of the twentieth century has gone into reverse. Thus, he basically associates the absence of the Levant with the existence of nationalist ideas, and re-Levantinization with the end of hyper-nationalism, even though this may undermine his argument on the compatibility of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. The death of hyper-nationalism may strengthen the resurrection of port cities, but cannot be the only reason behind it.

Mansel mentions that these Levantine cities put the needs of the city before the demands of nationalisms, but he also implies that these cities did not survive, since they had no armed forces for protection: “No Levantine city produced an effective police force or national guard of its own. The very qualities that gave these cities their energy—freedom and diversity—also threatened their existence. No army, no city.”10 He then posits London, Paris, New York, Dubai, Bombay, and Singapore, as the true heirs of the Levant, claiming that they will survive since they are protected by national armies and police forces. Mansel’s argument on the survival of port cities seems unclear here. National armies or security forces are indispensable for strong nation-state and most of the organized security forces emerged in the wake of nationalism. Thus, when Mansel associates the survival of contemporary port cities with the existence

10 Ibid., 356.
of an army or police force, his argument about the revitalization of the Levant being dependent on the weakening of nation-state seems unconvincing. One may agree that there should be a regulatory power for the survival of port-cities, but should it be necessarily be a national guard?

Mansel defines Levantine cities as the future, as well as the past, and so Levant shares the concern of the next two books to understand the dynamics of contemporary capitalism by working out the history of port cities. But in not raising the same theoretical questions, and despite the well-woven craftsmanship of his detailed history of Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut, Mansel’s analysis of these three cities remains unable to provide a broader picture of port cities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

**A networked analysis of port cities**

*Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks*, edited by Caroline Hein, offers a networked analysis of the urban environment which aims to help us decipher the complexity of the development of port cities. It describes the dynamics of changing trade relations and their influence on the transforming architectural and spatial characteristics of port cities. Moreover, since it is shifting global/local economic and political conditions that determine trade networks and travel patterns during industrialization and post-industrial development, such an analysis undertakes to work out the exact relationship between the global and the local and to locate these local, urban transformations within larger networks.

Hein defines port cities as dynamic, multi-scaled, and interconnected cityscapes with maritime and associated networks. She identifies the components of port cities as shipping and trade networks, diasporas, religious congregations, ethnic groups, elites, migrants, artisans, slaves, and ship workers (among others). An analysis of the networks among these groups not only brings the material culture of port cities into the open; it also reveals “the hidden elements of built form in specific locations.”

The first part of the book focuses on ports’ global networks and their influence on urban form in colonial settings and trading networks of the imperial age from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. This part describes financial, professional, and migratory global networks, the actors and engines of network transformation, and their impact on the built environment. Patrick O’Flanagan’s essay argues that the characteristics and composition of migration played a vital role in the rise and decay of port cities between 1400 and 1715. One significant point

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12 After they had been expelled from Portugal in the sixteenth century, the migration of the Sephardic
related to this ceaseless flow of people, voluntary or involuntary, is that these migrations made port cities both cultural melting pots and hubs for the spread of diseases. These mass movements accelerated the spread of diseases, and an infrastructure was constructed to control the disease which defined the morphology of port settlements, and thus port cities experienced a new form of urbanism.

Lars Amenda examines the transformation of mass culture in the docklands of the major port cities by focusing on the transformations of Chinatowns which transformed the waterfronths into “a local representation of the whole world,” starting from the middle of the nineteenth century. Her analysis shows that trade and migration are both economic components of maritime labor in the docklands. Mostly, the basic skills of illegal migrants determined the characteristics of maritime labor and culture. Amenda argues that in port cities like Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Hamburg, Chinese people satisfied the need of European shipping for maritime labor and that, as a result, Chinatowns became more visible after the First World War. Even during the Second World War, the Chinese labor force was an influential element in port cities. However, a new technological change called containerization led maritime Chinese communities to vanish gradually. With the advent of containerization in the 1960s, national and global standardization and normalization accelerated, and cheaper transportation caused the decline of maritime hubs, transforming maritime labor and culture. As labor became relatively cheaper and labor costs declined in the shipping industry, many manufacturers outsourced production to Asian factories.

Dirk Schubert defines seaports as places where innovation has materialized in world economies, societies, and cultures. Seaports have been places, “in which the local and the exotic, the foreign and familiar, poverty and riches, tradition and modernization, and phenomena of glo-

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13 These Chinese neighborhoods became the nodal points of commerce and migration and exemplified the global scale of migration. During the development of these neighborhoods, Chinese seamen and migrants established social networks within and between cities. The dissemination of ideas through newspapers and communist leaflets became crucial forming a sense of solidarity and working class identity among Chinese seaport workers. See Lars Amanda, “China-towns and Container Terminals: Shipping Networks and Urban Patterns in Port Cities in Global and Local Perspective,” in Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks, ed. Carola Hein (London: Routledge, 2011), 46.
balization have been anticipated before they became common later and were distributed globally.”

Similar to Amenda, Schubert argues that containerization and computerization rationalized transshipment and altered the urban environment. This led to an urban renewal and revitalization after the 1960s, creating an urban environment which combined hotels, small shops, boutiques, restaurants, and bars. Then after the 1990s, participatory planning, in which the local community participate in planning processes, became popular.

Schubert provides six phases explaining the rise and fall of waterfronts: 1) primitive port cities with pre-industrial infrastructure from ancient/medieval times until the nineteenth century, 2) the expansion of port cities during the rapid industrial and commercial growth of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 3) the emergence of the modern industrial port city with the development of Fordism in the mid-twentieth century, 4) the retreat of land use from the waterfront to the city center in the post-Fordist era of the 1960s and 1980s, 5) the redevelopment of the waterfront with flexible accumulation between the 1970s and 1990s, and 6) the renewal of port cities linked to global economic development after the 1990s. He offers these phases as a systematic comparative analysis which considers the similar and dissimilar characteristics of port cities. To enable a comparison between European, Asian, and American port cities, Schubert focuses on both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of their rise and fall, such as planning strategies and targets, location and size.

Stephan V. Ward defines port cities as information hubs where knowledge is “concentrated, accumulated, synthesized, circulated and exchanged.” This was especially so in the pre-industrial and early industrial eras, when they functioned as significant knowledge hubs. Using two examples, Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and the London Docklands, he argues that the global circulation of knowledge about port regeneration since the 1980s has shown many similar characteristics to other urban development plans.

The second part of Hein’s book focuses on regional dynamics, examining the transformation in the local spatial context and investigating how traders and planners have shaped the built form of port cities. Sakis

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15 Ibid., 55.

Gekas and Mathieu Grenet examine cultural and commercial connections and compare the mercantile economies of Livorno, Trieste, and Corfu, which had some similarities in terms of socio-economic development, size and the flow of merchants from the 1770s to the 1870s. The authors position their article as an “approach in a concrete and comparative way to historicize the cosmopolitanism of cities and individuals.”

They analyze the relations of Greek and Jewish merchants with civic and state authorities and locate them in these cities’ local contexts. What they define as cosmopolitanism is the ways these merchants led their communities, or rather how they represented their communal identities in their host societies. For instance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Livorno, Trieste and Corfu attracted many foreigners for trade, and the Greek and Jewish communities became significant and visible commercial actors. The Greek merchant communities in these cities were especially successful at negotiating with local state authorities and controlling their economic environment. During this period of changing perceptions of religious and ethnic minorities, Greek merchants became geographically more dispersed, while managing to keep “a strict and exclusive understanding of Greek-ness.” Gekas and Grenet thus propose a new term—“communitarian cosmopolitanism”—to explain the dichotomy and duality of minorities’ identity in these cities.

Gekas and Grenet define cosmopolitanism as a constant negotiation between city authorities and collective and individual actors. Criticizing the conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as a “social equalizer,” the authors cite civic plans for Livornese, Triestine and Corfiote public spaces to indicate forms of spatial discrimination and withdrawal which supported the preservation of distinct communal identities. In short, a cosmopolitan person in a nineteenth-century central Mediterranean port city was at once a member of his own community and a denizen of his host city.

Huibert Schijf examines the role of mercantile elites in Amsterdam and Rotterdam from 1850 to 1940. Elite families in these cities played central roles in the innovation of the city ports in the second half of the nineteenth century as the members of city courts and chambers of commerce. These rising elites also played a key role in creating a common


18 Ibid., 101.

19 The authorities of Western European port cities aimed on the one hand to limit the visibility of minorities, while also opening free ports, granting citizenship rights, allowing and facilitating the observance of religious practices and encouraging the formation of commercial associations to optimize commercial and fiscal benefits. Ibid.
mercantile culture with cultural institutions and social clubs. However, for Schijf, with the beginning of the twentieth century, as local elites became national elites in the context of a changing political atmosphere, the gaps between the economic, political, and cultural elites increased, and thus the era of dominance of mercantile elites in local politics and cultural institutions started to fade.\footnote{Huibert Schijf, “Mercantile Elites in the Ports of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, 1850-1940,” in \textit{Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks}, ed. Carola Hein (London: Routledge, 2011).}

The degree of influence of Western cities on other world cities in terms of urban planning is still an ongoing discussion. Jonathan A. Farris describes how Western ideas of city planning transformed the urban fabric of Chinese treaty ports, as well as the local topography and social and commercial relations. Although Farris argues that Western powers were not really interested in transforming their Chinese settlements’ urban environment on a grand scale, they had an influence on architecture and urban form. Social and economic institutions such as colleges, universities, banks, hotels, and department stores introduced a western style of living and consuming. Yet, the Chinese inhabitants modified these structures and spaces according to the conditions of their everyday life, successfully adapting to this novel environment.\footnote{Johnathan A. Farris, “Treaty Ports of China: Dynamics of Global and Local in the West’s Architectural Presence,” in \textit{Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks}, ed. Carola Hein (London: Routledge, 2011).}

Since the port cities of the Ottoman Empire used to be primary sites for the flow of money, merchants, and travelers, and since they were also the first visual and symbolic encounters with the empire for outsider gazes, the Ottoman state authorities undertook great infrastructural efforts to beautify the waterfront districts.\footnote{Malte Fuhrmann, “Staring at the Sea, Staring at the Land: Waterfront Modernisation in nineteenth century Ottoman Cities as a site of Cultural Change,” in \textit{Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks}, ed. Carola Hein (London: Routledge, 2011), 139.} Malte Fuhrmann argues that, “Europeanization of the waterfront was not simply the result of a simple transmission of Western know-how, technology and financing, but a process in which locals of the eastern Mediterranean attempted to restructure their surroundings according to the European paradigm.”\footnote{Ibid.} Focusing on Salonica, Constantinople and Smyrna, Fuhrmann analyzes the ways Ottoman state authorities tried to satisfy both seaward and landward gazes. He claims that the efforts in urban planning and the organization of waterfront districts aimed to create transit zones that could influence alien gazes and provide for them a European familiarity. This led to infrastructural changes and the emergence of quarters...
for leisure and entertainment facilities in all three cities, as well as new controversies. The quays in particular became a visual terrain for Ottomans to prove how European they were by walking up and down the promenade. However, they also became sites of class and cultural clashes. Nude bathing, clam fishing or *rebetiko* music performances became ways for the lower class to appropriate the transformations into their daily life.

Céline Frémaux examines town planning and construction in three Suez Canal port cities from 1869 to 1956: Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez/Port Tewfik. Frémaux argues that, differently from other cities of the colonial world, the Suez Canal cities look like company towns. During the urban planning of these three cities, French power in this part of Egypt and other European powers became dominant. Despite their cosmopolitanism, the cities assumed a French character, since the company’s leaders were French. Alongside the European equipment, personnel and conflicts, the company brought European anxieties about non-Europeans and this created areas which were contested and negotiated between Arabs and Europeans. Frémaux points out that while the Europeans wanted to create cities that reflected only themselves, the residents of the city managed to weave in the local and external cultures.24

The third part of the book considers the impact of global networks on specific urban cases. Focusing on different parts of the world, it illustrates how a specific port activity related to commercial and industrial relations can shape a single city. Focusing on the case of Hamburg, Carola Hein examines the social actors—the professionals like architects, planners, engineers, or traders—who have affected the development of ports. She discusses the redesign of the port and its wider area in the context of global changes and the influence of local forces, including such events as disasters and wars, and the requirements that lead to a specific built, urban form.25 She analyzes how policy and planning decisions promoted by the Hamburg government altered architectural designs. After the Great Fire of 1842, Hamburg’s port cityscape was redesigned by trained practitioners with the aim of making the inner city a better place for business. A new face of the maritime city thus emerged through innovations in technology, urban organization, and architecture. Due to industrialization, the port itself started to function in line with multiple national, international, and local needs. There emerged

Carol Herselle Krinsky’s essay explores how commercial and industrial relationships led by Manhattan’s port shaped the physical form of Manhattan’s streets and buildings. The port influenced new street patterns and affected the distribution of buildings, creating certain zones for commerce and residence. From the second half of the nineteenth century till the 1940s, it also determined the location of the port facilities themselves; and this both after waterfront rehabilitation and long after containerization.  

Marisa Yu focuses on the foundation of a non-governmental organization—the Trade Development Council (1953)—which played a key role in the rapid modernization of Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s transformation from British colony to Special Administrative Region of China altered the global image of the city as well. The TDC’s marketing strategies influenced the creation of Hong Kong’s significant buildings and port terminals. The TDC thus helped to shape the city’s iconic waterfront. Moreover, the flexible economic and design strategies promoted by government investment and social networks propelled Hong Kong as a global port city and as a creative global metropolis.  

Stephen J. Ramos argues that all the previous efforts of urban transformation led by Sheikh Rashid—land dredging and reclamation, industrial areas, trade facilities, residential development, hotel infrastructure for tourism, free port policies and the airport—functioned as the first steps in the development of Jebel Ali’s port, industrial area and Free Zone. According to Ramos, Jebel Ali also exemplifies Dubai’s master-planning for mega-projects with autonomous spatial logics.  

Providing various examples from all over the world, Hein’s book offers a networked analysis of port cities, focusing on basic themes like health, education, cultural interaction, migration, and city building projects. It explores the similarities and dissimilarities of urban landscapes
and architectures and the reasons behind these transformations or developments.

Since it involves a multidisciplinary approach to examining historical and contemporary port cities and their connections with their built environments in a dynamic way, it provides a comparative analysis of different port cities. Moreover, as it deals with various geographies, the articles in the collection examine a long time span that enables the reader to see the historical continuities in the port cities it describes. In short, it deliberately exemplifies the dynamic, multi-scaled, and inter-connected port cityscapes created by historical and present-day international maritime networks.

A cartographic analysis of the Eastern Mediterranean “cities of commerce”

Cities of the Mediterranean, edited by Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz, focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean. Since the sixteenth century, Eastern Mediterranean ports have delineated the spatial, historical, and socio-political contours of the Mediterranean Sea and functioned as gateways of mobility for people, goods, and information. Not only have they been connected to these ever-intensifying circuits, they have also organized political, commercial, and social relations between the state authorities, the mercantile class, and the local inhabitants, while also being polyglot cultural environments. The book examines the relationship between Eastern Mediterranean port cities and their hinterlands from political, economic, international, and ecological perspectives, paving the way for a new understanding of the history of port cities.

According to Kolluoğlu and Toksöz, the dominant trend in scholarship is a tendency to write micro-scale urban histories without exploring the venues, directions and connections which make the city’s history possible. Rather than developing a micro-scale urban history, they present the Eastern Mediterranean as a coherent whole with distinct but interrelated commercial and cultural relations. Thus the book re-evaluates port cities as spatial terrains that indicate the dynamics of the Ottoman state’s political power and the ongoing relations between the city authorities and their inhabitants.30 Overall, it examines the wide spectrum of networks between cities and the elements which have made and remade the cartography of the Mediterranean.

Differently from the previous collection of articles, which offered a novel perspective on interpreting the history of port cities but did not

question the concept of “port cities” itself, Cities of the Mediterranean proposes a new term—city of commerce—in place of either “port city” or “merchant city.” According to the editors, the city of commerce can be said to boast various essential activities and social relations which have kept making and remaking the city. For the authors, the term “port city” both seems to emphasize these urban terrains as gateways connecting different and discrete worlds, and also occludes the influence of British hegemony on the late Ottoman Empire and the liberal world order established and sustained in the nineteenth century. The term “merchant city” highlights one group at the very heart of the city’s social and economic life, but excludes all the other relations and groups that make a city run, ranging from the people employed at the shipyards to communication officers, from customs officers to consulate staff. Rather than focusing on either the spatial aspect or on the specific historical actors who shaped the city, Kolluoğlu and Toksöz posit the transformations in the cities under study as a commercial experience that includes multiplicity of relations and groups. The concept of the city of commerce is therefore able to refer not only to diverse kinds of trade on a large scale and over a wide area, but also to the many groups living in the city or somehow related to it, as well as to the many relations between them.31

Another significant point the editors underline is constancy of space, meaning that even though commercial and political dynamics and the composition of the Eastern Mediterranean have changed, the unity of the space has endured:

What reveals the durability of the unity of the Eastern Mediterranean despite changes is the space: The constancy is in the space, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The city of commerce valorizes this space, cosmopolitanism generates the city, and the extended community is the city’s fabric.32

The articles in the book thus deal with these spaces and make the Mediterranean visible through a cartographic analysis. The cities of commerce of the nineteenth century had spaces of commerce, spaces of connections, and spaces of leisure and public social relations: the spaces of com-

31 Ibid., 6-7. The authors of the articles do not use the term “city of commerce” in general. It could be argued that the concept “cities of commerce” was invented by the book editors as a response to the discussions in the articles, rather than being a theoretical frame structuring the perspectives of the authors participating in the book. This essay will stick to the conceptualizations the respective authors of the articles prefer to use.

32 Ibid., 12.
merce organized the commercial activities through institutions like custom houses, shipping agencies, insurance companies, inns, hotels, banks, and market stores; the spaces of connection such as railroads, tramlines, piers, or post offices provided for the flow of people and information; and the spaces of leisure and public social relations, with their theaters, beer gardens, dance halls, or coffeehouses, created a new lifestyle and formed multiple levels of belonging.\(^{33}\)

*Cities of the Mediterranean* indicates that an examination of the cosmopolitanisms of port cities and their commercial structures helps to reframe current discussions of the globalization of capitalism. Cosmopolitanism is described in the modern sense as a tendency and eagerness to live in and establish different cultural experiences independent from the local. Moreover, these experiences—whether cultural, social, political or economic—are derived from unequal power relations; cosmopolitanism is closely related to a vision of one world, and this can also be perceived as a reference to the First World. In order to challenge these conceptions of cosmopolitanism, the editors of the book want to decolonize the concept of cosmopolitanism from the imaginary of the nation-state and European hegemony.\(^{34}\)

In his essay, Çağlar Keyder points out that these port cities became locales for the flow of people from different multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural backgrounds. While restructuring the cities, the decisions of the city population became the motivating force for modernization, and it was the merchants especially who became the primary historical actors of change. However, these cities not only represented the new forms of economic activity which came into being with 1838 Anglo-Ottoman treaty liberalizing trade, but also produced a new lifestyle with novel social spaces and material cultures adapted by the peripheries of the Ottoman empire.\(^{35}\) Such a political and cultural environment exemplified cosmopolitan port cities with divergent cultural experiences derived from the clinch of global and local.

In the context of transformations of the nineteenth century global economy which restructured the Eastern Mediterranean, the making of port cities has always reflected some political project or other, from cosmopolitanism to nationalism. However, the emerging nationalist ideas strengthened themselves by threatening the polyglot culture in the port cities. Keyder argues that port cities also became a territory of human

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 5.

tragedy with the ethnic cleansing during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the present-day nation-states. The changing relations in the world economy and the new commercial and cultural networks after First World War altered the perception of port cities and caused distrust among the port city inhabitants. Following the war, national economies created their own economic and cultural patterns. The culture of the remaining inhabitants of the port cities was absorbed into this novel national order. The national elite rather than the mercantile elite became the decision-makers. This has been also observed in some of the European port cities: the power of mercantile elites on local politics and cultural institutions starts to fade away with the emergence of national elites. However, later in the century, the emergence of a strong bourgeoisie forced the states to legislate a liberal economy and autonomous markets were opened up. Thus, in an age of liberalism and globalization, port cities became crucial commercial hubs once again. Keyder claims that a reevaluation of the history of port cities may enable us to understand the current dynamics of globalization.

Faruk Tabak focuses on large-scale economic shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean from the 1350s to the 1850s, reinforcing the argument of the editors on the decolonization of cosmopolitanism. Giving the Eastern Mediterranean spatial constancy, Tabak illustrates the economic and ecological long durée transformations of the centuries between the Pax Neerlandica and the Pax Britannica, and contextualizes nineteenth century globalization with regards to these two sets of transformations. The Levantine trade in the 1350s played a key role in galvanizing the world trade networks in the southern part of Eastern Mediterranean. However, when the center of the world economy shifted from the Mediterranean to Antwerp and Amsterdam, this restructured trade relations in the Mediterranean. The Little Ice Age in the 1550s resulted in serious flooding and a population decrease, and caused a decline of Levantine trade as well. Alongside this, the colonization of the Atlantic islands also altered the dynamics of Mediterranean trade. These developments shifted the gravity of the Levantine trade from the south-eastern to the north-eastern Mediterranean. They also triggered the infrastructural transformations in the Anatolian and Balkan peninsulas in the nineteenth century. The end of the Little Ice Age in the 1870s also altered the Eastern Mediterranean drastically. The success of drainage companies and central and local governments' reclaiming of low-lying maritime and inland plains played a significant role in rearranging commercial relations. Thus two factors determined the changing commercial relations in the Mediterranean: the shift of the center of gravity from the
South to the advantage of the North, and the desertion of low-lying landscapes for higher altitudes. Tabak also claims that the organization of trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which “turned into regional centers of collection and distribution for local goods” came to life in the mid-nineteenth century with the increase in cereal and cotton production. Tabak thus makes a cartographic analysis of the cities of commerce by illustrating the emergence of modern states throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, by tracing the patterns of the integration of the Mediterranean economy into the world economy, and by providing a temporally and spatially comprehensive and comparative perspective.

Eyüp Özveren and Erkan Gürpınar’s article on İzmir during the Great Depression criticizes approaches which interpret the decline of port cities only in the context of the emerging nation-state formation. Even though, as a critical port city of the Ottoman Empire, İzmir experienced major upheavals and transformations in the early twentieth century, the Mediterranean networks themselves continued to be strong and viable. Özveren and Gürpınar claim that the crisis of national economy after the Great Depression caused the end of port cities in the Eastern Mediterranean region, despite all the efforts to revive local and international trade. The transformation of İzmir into a decadent port city during the Great Depression substantiate the author’s claim in that sense. Some scholars explain the city’s decline as a product of internal factors: namely that the inexperienced leaders of the new Turkish nation-state did not apply the correct economic policies to handle the city’s problems. On the other hand, external factors played a crucial role in the decline of the city as well. The city did not have the economic power to compete internationally; most of the international markets were lost and the basic traditional items were no longer in demand. Thus it was not the emergence of a nation-state but both internal and external economic factors during the Great Depression which led to the decline of İzmir as a port city.

Carla Keyvanian studies the representations of the Mediterranean as a spatial category and a constructed space in the sixteenth century maps disseminated after the foundation of the printing press. Examining Italian and Dutch maps which reflect the European perception of Islamic

37 Ibid.
cities, Keyvanian focuses on the illustrations of the Mediterranean as a unified locale. She claims that the cultural, social and economic visions of Islamic cities contained in these maps should be evaluated as nuanced intellectual constructs, rather than as pure representations of traditional east-west relations. What she suggests is that both the circulation of these cartographic productions and the reasons behind it indicate the primacy of the Mediterranean in the early modern era and represent the mental landscape of their makers, all of which can help us understand the political dynamics of the period.\(^\text{39}\)

Focusing on Alexandria, İzmir, and Salonica in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Christina Pallini analyzes architectural transformation in Mediterranean cities and its relation to the changing social order, particularly the relationship of the port hinterlands to the residential layout of the cities. Similar to Keyvanian, Pallini aims to show the diversity and interconnectedness of these port cities, as opposed to the conventional representation of the Mediterranean as a great lake dotted with cities unrelated to each other. The infrastructural and architectural changes in these three port cities functioned as geographical theaters where individuals, societies, and states all played a role and urban space became a showcase for new building technologies. Pallini argues that a reevaluation of a historical architectural transformation like the emergence of residential areas and its influence on social order (or vice versa) may enable us to understand how present-day problems (such as industrial reorganization, migratory movements, and accessibility) relate to global port cities.\(^\text{40}\)

Harbor construction, along with other technological and infrastructural changes, transformed the port cities into the veins of the Eastern Mediterranean. It also functioned as a theater for the display of Ottoman state modernization in which navigation companies, construction firms, local municipal and port authorities as well as chambers and committees all played a part. Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis explores how harbor construction created a shared enterprise in Eastern Mediterranean cities between 1860 and 1910. The author argues that such construction facilitated the import and export trade among the major port cities and thus fostered various transformations in Levantine cities.\(^\text{41}\)


\(^{41}\) Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, “The Cartography of Harbor Construction in Eastern Mediterranean
Developments in technologies like the steamboat, the telegraph, and railways also facilitated the dissemination of information between Eastern Mediterranean cities. Johann Büssow examines the Palestinian press (both the Arabic Filastin and the Hebrew ha-Herut) and its local journalists in the late Ottoman period in order to illustrate the presence of wide intellectual and cultural networks. He claims that, after 1908, the local Palestinian press became a political actor and major agent in reshaping intellectual and cultural networks and sustaining the linkages between all Eastern Mediterranean port cities; not simply those close to Palestine. He concludes that the mental maps represented by these two newspapers were limited “by the borders of a regional core constituted by the Levant,” and that they demonstrated “an urban-centered vision of space shaped by the Ottoman political order, the structures of millet communities, and the personal networks of a new group of mobile middle-class actors.”

Isa Blumi focuses on the relationship between the Albanian-speaking actors of illegal trade and Ottoman state elites during the creation of an international frontier in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argues that Ottoman reforms to identify, catalog and distinguish people and to regulate regional and international trade led to the exploitation of the city population by a new group of local actors in the Balkans. The attempts to control the resettlement of the populations of Kosovo and Shkodër brought new bureaucracies to the region. This established a zone of commercial activity that offered Ottoman officials an opportunity to increase revenues by taxing trade according to their own interests. These changes also strengthened the power of local elites in local trade. Moreover, illegal trade linked the Adriatic and Balkan hinterlands to the other parts of Mediterranean.

Focusing on the cultural representations and political conflicts within the Greek-Orthodox communities of the Ottoman Empire, Vangelis Kechriotis studies “the acculturation of ethnically identical groups from different geographical origins.” The communities moved first to İzmir...
and then to Athens, pursuing the better future promised by education and social mobility. Any analysis of these migrations requires a redefinition of the concept of “community,” since the very fact of the migrations meant that the demographic composition of the communities kept changing. Moreover, Kechriotis argues that inter-regional networks established by Greek-Orthodox communities and both the Ottoman and Hellenic state authorities became closer through the efforts by these communities to acculturate themselves. These efforts created a terrain for negotiation and a discourse which cut across nationalist and imperialist categories.

Constantin Iordachi’s article examining the port cities of Sulina, Tulcea, and Constanta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries undertakes a cartographic analysis of these port cities and questions the boundaries of states and state power. These three cities functioned as the Mediterranean’s organic links with the Black Sea via the Danube during the integration of the Lower Danube region into the world economy, and they became showcases for modernization projects promoted by the Ottoman authorities, the European powers, and the Romanian nation-state. A reevaluation of the history of these three port cities in the period demonstrates the variety of relations that existed between political centers and economic and commercial networks in the Mediterranean world.

Edmund Burke III argues that Islam and colonialism have prevented us from thinking the Mediterranean as a whole until now. While Islam continues, colonialism has ended, though its past still goes on shaping our perception and understanding of the modern histories of the eastern and southern Mediterranean in Turkey, the Balkans and the Arab Mediterranean. He claims that even though commercial cities displayed astonishing resilience towards dramatic changes in the long nineteenth century, in the early twentieth century they could not withstand the “convulsive collapse of the old order in World War I.”

For Burke, examining the political relations, commercial networks and different historical agents in the Mediterranean port cities from the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries in a larger spatial and temporal context would provide a better understanding of world history.

The editors have brought together a collection of articles which trace diverse trade networks on a large scale and over a wide area and analyze

\[\textit{Aegean at the turn of the twentieth century},\textsuperscript{46} \textit{in Cities of the Mediterranean: from the Ottomans to the present day}, eds. Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 140.

the many relations experienced by different groups living in the cities of commerce. The articles in the collection fruitfully examine the networks that make the cartography of the Mediterranean possible through the constancy of space. Moreover, the effort to rethink the history of port cities through the new concepts of city of commerce or constancy of space effectively reveal generally hidden experiences of the port cities.

**Common words: Cosmopolitan cities, cosmopolitan individuals**

Port cities have been gateways of migration and mobility control and locales for people from multi-confessional, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual backgrounds, but they have also been also locales for social and ethno-religious inclusion and exclusion. They have produced self-governing spaces that mediated diverse worlds and functioned as geographical theaters and showcases for building technologies where individuals, societies, or states played various roles depending on their own interests. The books under review provide a very detailed account of commercial, social and cultural lives of port cities and investigate their commonalities. All these works focus on both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the rise and fall of port cities—including commercial networks, migratory labor, planning strategies and targets, location and size of the city—in order to make a comparison between American, European, and Mediterranean port cities. They shed light on diverse social agents and various complex discourses and experiences in order to reconstruct the history of port cities. At the same time, they bring up old theoretical discussions and offer new approaches like networked or cartographic analysis of port cities. A reevaluation of the history of port cities from a comparative perspective demonstrates the variety of relations between political centers and commercial networks and helps us to understand the different aspects of present-day globalization through a comparison with its older mode.

The reviewed books, even though they focus on different geographies with different questions, aim to historicize the cosmopolitanism of cities and individuals. All of the architectural and infrastructural transformations in Eastern Mediterranean cities could be understood through the concept of cosmopolitanism, representing universality on the one hand and parochialism on the other. Cosmopolitanism did not always function as an alternative to patriotism or nationalism, but produced different versions of these phenomena in order to restrict solidarity to one single group. In that sense, Kolluoğlu and Toksöz have

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a similar perspective to Gekas and Grenet, who emphasize the dichotomy and duality of the minorities in port cities. Contrary to those who understand a cosmopolitan as being a citizen of the world or belonging to all parts of the world, Kolluoğlu and Toksöz offer a view of the cosmopolitan as “a citizen of a city, a city that embodies the former.”48 They develop a perspective on cosmopolitanism as not only an intellectual aesthetic or cultural stance, but as a “spatial phenomenon that mediates between the local and global”; these cities not only had multi-confessional, multiethnic, multilingual populations, but also produced autonomous spaces that mediated between these different worlds. Thus, rather than functioning as a social equalizer, cosmopolitanism created a constant negotiation.

Carola Hein’s book is a forum of disciplines as diverse as architecture, urban planning, geography, economy, and sociology, and proposes a multidimensional networked analysis of built and urban form in port cities, focusing on the interaction between larger global networks and local interests. The articles in Cities of the Mediterranean, oriented towards different geographies, make the Mediterranean visible through a cartographic analysis of the cities of commerce, valorizing space, the way that cosmopolitanism generates the city, and the communities that constitute the city’s fabric. These edited books offer new perspectives for reading the history of port cities and shed light on the hidden elements of the complex commercial and political networks which existed in these cities. Finally, if the histories of the three port cities in Mansel’s book, Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut, can be read keeping the theoretical concerns and questions of Hein, Kolluoğlu and Toksöz’s in mind, this could provoke a fertile conversation about the dynamics of contemporary capitalism and global cities through the history of port cities.

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48 Ibid.


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