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## European Revolutions and the Ottoman Balkans

### Nationalism, Violence and Empire in the Long Nineteenth Century

Edited by

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## Emulating Petrine Russia: Thick Mechanicism and the *Foundations of Government* in Istanbul after the Rebellion of 1730<sup>1</sup>

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On 13 February 1732, İbrahim Müteferrika, now printer to Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1732–1754), concluded his *Foundations of Government in Various Social Orders* with the following words:

Take, for example, the Russians. The infidels of this completely Christian nation used to be held in the lowest esteem, nay, they were positively despised. They were a group of men deserving the worst insults and the most unpleasant titles. They did not even have the power to make real enemies. Because of this, they had to retreat from those places civilized by other nations and live in a dark land, where they were content with making do with the meager resources at their disposal. Yet, a reasonable Tsar appeared twenty or thirty years ago, and brought, from many other countries, men who were competent in the military arts and in the other sciences. He listened to their advice and admonitions and thus, rapidly brought order to his army . . . Not only that, he hired English and Dutch artisans who were excellent at shipbuilding and built for himself a magnificent navy – a navy that could withstand the storms and other rigors of the Baltic Sea, a navy the likes of which you have never seen. And, he brought engineers from neighboring countries to map each and every part of the Baltic Sea, and later, to learn about and then to conquer many parts of Iran and of Dagestan. He added Azov first to his title, then to his possessions.<sup>2</sup>

Hungarian-born Müteferrika's understanding of the Petrine project was not about Westernization, still the standard interpretation of his role in the Ottoman context, but about good governance. It was about order, about reason, about the mechanical arts, and about the organization of labour. Russia – not France, the Low Countries, or England – was his model for government reform. Here, I would like to focus on 'thick mechanicism', on how Müteferrika, as a person who spent the majority of his career as a printer and a geographer, might have come to appreciate mathematics and the

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