



**INTERVIEW WITH DR. OZAN ÖZAVCI ON THE LAUSANNE PROJECT**

<https://thelausanneproject.com/>

**Çiğdem BALIM<sup>1</sup>**

Dr. Ozan Özavcı is Assistant Professor of Transimperial History. His research focuses on the entangles histories of Europe and the Middle East & North African from the late eighteenth century until the 1950s. In his new monograph *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798-1864* (Oxford University Press, 2021), he analyses the genealogy of western armed interventionism in the Ottoman Levant in the long nineteenth century. Dr Özavcı is currently writing his third monograph provisionally titled *The Invention of the Eastern Question: International Law, Capitulations, and Security in the Embassies of Sir Robert Liston* (under contract with Bloomsbury). In his previous research, Dr Özavcı investigated the idea of liberty in the Middle East and the Caucasus, which resulted in the publication of his first book *Intellectual Origins of the Republic* (Brill, 2015).

**What is the Lausanne Project? How did it come about and who are the co-conveners?**

The Lausanne Project (TLP) came into existence in 2017. At that time commemorations were being organised and all kinds of new publications were coming out about the WW1 and its aftermath. Everything was organized around 2018 and 2019, based on the (incorrect!) assumption that the story of the "Great War" ended in 1918, with the 1919 Versailles Treaty as the epilogue. My colleague Professor Jonathan Conlin of the University of Southampton and I got together and realized that, left unchallenged, this narrative would leave out the events of 1919-1923: the 1923 Lausanne Treaty would just be "the epilogue to an epilogue", at least among scholars based outside Turkey. We decided to organise a workshop in 2019 and publish an edited volume. The Gingko Library in London had published a series of biographies of the delegates who signed the Versailles Treaty, but recognized the importance of Lausanne for the Middle East. They agreed to fund our workshop. And that's how it all began.

We received a very large number of responses to our call for papers. Unfortunately the pandemic forced us to postpone the workshop to 2020. In the meanwhile, we decided to build a website that would act as a forum for our contributors, a place to share research in progress.

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The website soon attracted a lot more attention than we thought, however, so we quickly began inviting "outsiders" to contribute posts and podcasts: not just senior scholars, but also researchers at the beginning of their careers.

### **What does the TLP aspire to achieve?**

Our goal is to have an informed discussion on the events and ideas of 1922-3 and consider their tangled legacies for today. We are an interdisciplinary forum that invites participation from anthropologists, sociologists, scholars in law and International Relations and journalists, as well as historians. Lausanne really did shape much of the world we inhabit, even if some of the stories told and discussed on our website might seem unrelated, at first sight.

We also acknowledge a responsibility to share our knowledge with high schools in Turkey and Greece. In both countries the events of 1922-3 tend to be told from a single point of view, and opportunities to teach new skills as well as new knowledge are overlooked. With the help of teachers in Turkey and the UK, last year we developed a pilot set of lesson plans in Turkish. We've received our first feedback, where teachers tell us that while they were teaching Lausanne with a one-sided approach, now they could teach it through multiple-angles and by inviting students to do more than memorise historical events. This was exactly what we hoped to achieve. We were delighted to get some follow-on funding, to allow us to bring Turkish high school history teachers together with their Greek colleagues later this year in Lausanne. This isn't about us sitting them down and lecturing, it's about dialogue and co-creation.

### **Has there been any interest in your offer for teaching materials to schools?**

Yes, our pilot set of lesson plans have been trialled in a number of towns in Turkey. The initial feedback we've received is overwhelmingly positive.

### **Are you planning a conference in the UK? Any details you can share with us?**

We were thinking of holding a conference on the exact centenary of Lausanne, in London. But 24 July 2023 is not ideal, so we decided to move it to autumn 2023. In the meanwhile, after talking with our Greek colleagues, we agreed to move the event to Greece. It will now take place on 9-11 November 2023, in Salonika, at the University of Macedonia.

**You have a new book coming. What would you like to tell our readers about your work? And when can we expect to read it?**



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The edited volume will consider Lausanne 1923 from a variety of angles. We not only embed Lausanne in the much longer history of the Eastern Question, that is, the forceful opening up of the Ottoman economy and the gradual partition of the empire. We also look at the legal, financial and economic aspects of peace-making and the forced population exchange. How American oil interests were tied with the Armenian quest for a national home in Asia Minor, for example. How the Armenian, Arab and Kurdish interests were frustrated; what the Iranians made of Lausanne. The book has other chapters on the legacy of Lausanne in Turkish political culture, where the conspiracy theories arise, and on the experience of Alois Derso and Emery Kelen, the two Hungarian cartoonists that met in Lausanne in 1922 and collaborated on an album of caricatures entitled *Guignol à Lausanne*. Our volume ends with their story.