Acknowledgments

Since this is a book about conversion narratives, let me begin with my own. Like many converts whose stories will be discussed in the following chapters, I would describe my conversion to Ottoman history not as a moment but as a long and convoluted process. The idea of studying the Ottoman Empire crept up on me gradually, almost in spite of me, since like generations of Balkan school kids I was taught that Ottoman history was an endless string of calamitous events about which we knew everything we needed to know—those were the bad times. The war that ravaged Yugoslavia in the early 1990s while I was in high school made my aversion toward Ottoman history even deeper, as it was the subject of ongoing contestation, malicious misuse, and falsification by nationalists of all stripes. I had no intention to enter the brawl. However, the process of “turning” began in my junior year at the American University of Bulgaria where I attended classes in Ottoman and Middle Eastern history by Professor Fredrick F. Anscombe. He was the first in a series of agents of conversion who made me realize that there was more to Ottoman history than the proverbial yoke and that it was important to deal with one’s own perceptions of the Ottoman past.

Still unsure whether I would like to study the Crusades, which were my first academic interest, or go in the direction of Ottoman history, I arrived at the University of Michigan where I became a student of Rudi Paul Lindner—in the context of this story, the great şeyh who brought about my conversion. He proselytized Ottoman history to this unwitting novice ignorant of the Turkish and Ottoman languages by introducing me to the great “saints” in the silsile of Ottoman historiography (Witttek, Giese, Taeschner, Babinger, and others) and by initiating me into the field through translations of Ottoman sources into German. I am forever grateful to Professor Lindner for taking a chance on me and being the kind of adviser that I could have only wished for—there when you most need him, able to provide expert and coherent guidance and allow for great freedom of exploration and expression.
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