

Poetics of Empire: Literature and Political Culture at the Early Modern Ottoman Court

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Abstract

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"Poetics of Empire: Literature and Political Culture at the Early Modern Ottoman Court" argues that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Ottoman scholars and statesmen produced a new literary language in order to express political thought. Poetic and literary composition was an extension of contemporary politics, a medium through which Ottoman learned men expressed, debated, and ultimately transformed political communication in the early modern Islamic world. Building on the work of cultural and intellectual historians over the past twenty years, I posit that literary production at the imperial court crafted distinctive modes of expression in order to articulate the Ottoman sultanate's place in the world, particularly vis-à-vis its imperial rivals in Europe and the Islamic world. To this end, "Poetics of Empire" focuses on the composition, editing, and circulation of Turkish and Persian literary works, as well as diplomatic correspondence

produced during the reigns of Mehmet II (r. 1451-1481) and Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512), whose patronage played a key role in the formation of a new intellectual elite. "Poetics of Empire" engages with emerging scholarship on intellectual and cultural history, especially that which foregrounds the relation between material culture, literary composition, and the transformation of political thought in early modern Europe and Asia.

“Poetics of Empire” addresses one of the fundamental problems in the current state of Ottoman intellectual and literary history, namely, the lack of any systematic study of the social context in which political and literary ideas circulated. This dissertation shows that poetic composition played a much more important role in the daily life of Ottoman elites during the early modern period than is generally recognized by the historiography.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, NAMES, AND DIACRITICS

This dissertation quotes texts, names, and places in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. For specific passages I discuss in detail, I have quoted the original in transcription followed by its English translation in the main text of the dissertation. Otherwise, I have either added a transcription in the footnotes or refer to a published edition if available. For quotations in transcription in Ottoman Turkish, I have used a modified version of the American Library Association-Library of Congress transcription system. In the few occasions when I have transcribed Arabic and Persian in Ottoman texts, I have used the Arabic and Persian transliteration system and vowels, but have omitted case endings in Arabic.

For words that have recognized spelling in English, I have opted for the English. So, I have preferred *madrasah* to *medrese* and *sheikh* to *şeyh*, *pasha* for *paşa*. However, whenever any of these words is part of a proper name, I have used the original in Ottoman transcription to emphasize its value as a proper name or patronymic as opposed to the generic term. Thus, I have use *sheikh* to refer to the position of a Sufi master (e.g. a *sheikh* of the Zeyniye order) but *Şeyh Vefā*, since the word *şeyh* in this occasion has become part of Muslihüddin Mustafa's name. In the case of historical characters with widely-known names in Modern English, I have preferred the English name, such as *Mehmet II* instead of *Mehemmed II*. Similarly, I have used all geographical terms in Modern English.

I have preferred to translate the titles of books and give the original in brackets in its first occasion, thus *The Book of Passion (Heves-nāme)*. In a few instances I repeated

the original name, whenever the same work appears in a chapter subsequent to its first appearance. For Ottoman literary genres, I have used the English equivalent and specified the original in Turkish in brackets, thus panegyric (*kaşide*). In the rare occasion when I considered necessary to keep the original term, I have specified the reasons in footnotes. These decisions were taken to facilitate reading while making possible the easy identification of historical characters, literary works, sources, and literary genres.

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Il n'y a guère au monde un plus bel excès que celui de la reconnaissance

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Ofelia and José, and my brother, Octavio.

INTRODUCTION

In Defense of Words: Poetry and the Construction of an Ottoman Imperial Utopia

...for we have learned from Derrida himself that texts (texts from philosophy from the majority of his examples) contain what apparently isn't there at all: that they pull against their overt meaning, in the unregarded details, in chains of metaphors, in the footnotes; on all the wilder shores of signification that are signaled by punctuation marks; by absences, spaces, lacunae, all working against their overt propositions.

Carolyn Steedman¹

Dağı şi'r ü gazelden kesb-i 'irfân
müveccehdür gerekmez aña burhân

Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi²

In the sixteenth century, Fuzuli (d. 1556), one of the most acclaimed poets of the Turkish language, addressed the controversial place of poetry in the very first sentences of the prologue to his collected poems (*dīvān*):

He [God], limitless in praise and countless in eulogy, is the orator of the speech of Creation. While making the ship of hope of the settlers of the seas and oceans of poetry fluctuate in the waves of ecstasy and sink in the whirlpool of frustration of "only those who are lost in error follow the poets",³ He left the chain of exceptions and pulled out the poets of Islam to the coast of right and good deliverance. And He [God], who has incomparable praise, the versifier of verses of earth and sky, made the verses of the invocation "in the Name of God" (*besmelleh*) the crown of distinction of the Qur'an, and planted in earth and skies, the tree of happiness of the versified words, which is the field of hearts of the people of knowledge, and turned it into a treasure house of secrets.⁴

¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2001), 40.

² "It's acceptable to acquire divine knowledge from poetry/ There is no need to provide a proof for that." Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, 504. See note 12.

³Fuzuli inserts as the second part of a compound noun a Qur'anic quote from the surah of the Poets, Qur'an 22:224. I have used Abdul Haleem's translation for this and all subsequent in-text Qur'anic quotations. See M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For the sake of simplicity, all future references to Qur'anic verses are given only by specifying the number of the relevant surah and ayah (ex. Qur'an surah: ayah). Whenever I make a direct quotation from Haleem's translation, I indicate the corresponding pages in the printed edition cited above.

⁴ Fuzulî, *Divan-i Fuzuli* (Kahire: Bulak, 1841), 3–4.

Fuzuli introduces his poetry by making use of two traditional elements of rhetoric: first, he starts with the customary praise to God (*tevhid*) by re-interpreting the moment of Creation through metaphors that preview the book's content, namely, his own collected poems; second, Fuzuli presents the Qur'an and Creation itself as God's acts of poetic speech. God as versifier presents an alternative to the more traditional identification of poets as charlatans, as they appear in various Qur'anic verses.⁵ In Fuzuli's prologue, those who inhabit poetry struggle between ecstasy and frustration, trapped within the transient and confusing movements of this world. Those who deny the Truth drown, while those who follow the message of Islam are safe.⁶ God, who composed the verses that give shape to this world, is the only one who can guide poets to the shores of deliverance. This series of similes allows Fuzuli to establish a distinction between good poetry and bad poetry. Good and bad are not considered here in terms of poetry's aesthetic value, but rather in terms of the capacity of its verses to convey true meanings. In other words, Fuzuli suggests poetry's spiritual power, and its necessity when an author wants to convey Truth. Fuzuli speaks to the contradictory place of poetry in Islamic thought: poetry is openly criticized in the Qur'an, yet it is also considered a form of knowledge, revered as a spiritual exercise, and used as a means of distinction amongst educated elites. The widespread practice of introducing a book such as a compilation of poems or letters by invoking the discussion about poetry and its place in society is testament to the centrality of poetry in the life of Ottoman intellectual elites. "Poetics of Empire" precisely focuses on the social and spiritual dimensions of poetic language in verse, prose, or

⁵ See Qur'an 21:5, 36:39, 52:30, 69:41, and 37:36.

⁶ Fuzuli's image resembles the Koranic verse about those who denied Noah's message, and thus were left behind to drown in the flood. See Qur'an 26:120.

hybrid form, and the potential for communication and transformation that Ottomans attached to it. Ottoman scholars argued over the centuries whether writing poetry was worthwhile. This dissertation takes on the Ottoman intellectuals' defense of poetic language and examines it in relation to its power of spiritual, political, and social expression.

Poetry remained vital in Ottoman learned society up to the empire's transformation at the turn of the twentieth century.⁷ Scholars continuously discussed poetry's social value and importance as much as its dangers, adapting it to different value systems as well as updating its meaning to fit the preoccupations of their times. In the second half of nineteenth century, Ziya Paşa (d. 1880), an Ottoman litterateur of the Tanzimat period, considered it was indispensable for Ottoman society to explore the meaning of poetry and prose, and the true nature of Ottoman poetry.⁸ In "Poetry and Literary Prose ("Şi'ir ve İnşâ", 1868)," he presented his thoughts in a didactic reflection that privileged folk poetry over elite poetry, right at the moment when Ottoman literary tradition was being questioned vis-à-vis the development of a literary current inspired by European literature.⁹ Similarly, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (d.1895) discussed poetry in a letter to Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II in order to illustrate the change of trends in love practices and morality amongst the educated elite after its contact with Europe, and by

⁷ During the second half of the nineteenth century, many bureaucrats and intellectuals wrote poetry, either following or challenging the tradition of classical Ottoman court poetry. Similarly, scholars also continued writing biographical dictionaries, some of which focused on or recorded the poetry of Ottoman scholars, bureaucrats, and intellectuals in the nineteenth century. See Mehmet Süreyya Bey, *Sicill-i Osmanî, Yahut, Tezkire-yi Meşahir-i Osmaniye* (İstanbul: Matbaa-yi Âmire, 1891); İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Asir Türk Şairleri*, (İstanbul: Orhaniye Matbaası, 1930).

⁸ Ali Donbay, "Tanzimat Dönemi Tenkit Anlayışı Çerçevesinde: Ziya Paşa'nın 'Şiir ve İnşâ' Makalesi," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 10 (2001): 181–88.

⁹ Ziya Paşa, "Şiir ve İnşâ," *Hürriyet*, no. 20 (September 7, 1868). For a transcription into Modern Turkish see Ziya Paşa, "Şiir ve İnşâ," in *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Antolojisi*, ed. Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, and Birol Emil, 2nd ed., vol. II (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, 1993), 45–49.

extension to comment on the corrupted state of morality of many intellectuals of his time.¹⁰ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa echoed discussions already present in sixteenth-century biographical dictionaries, and later adapted in seventeenth-century social critiques, including the well-known works of Mustafa Ali.¹¹

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, discussions about poetry were mostly concerned with religious knowledge and morality, usually phrased in terms of poetry's capacity to distract the believer or enhance his good behavior as a Muslim. Love is at the center of this question. As I will discuss in detail in later chapters, Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi (d. 1512, hereafter Ca'fer Çelebi) introduces the *Book of Passion* (*Heves-nāme*), a long versified narrative of his love pursuit, by means of a fictional discussion about poetry between him and his boon companions. During an evening gathering, they ponder whether poetry is fit for a man of learning, or whether it diverts the believer from his obligations as a Muslim. He concludes that poetry serves to communicate Truth, religious and spiritual knowledge, and consequently its composition should be deemed as a spiritual merit rather than as a distraction.¹²

¹⁰ Selim Kuru, "Il Genere del Desiderio. L'Amore per i Bei Ragazzi nella Letteratura Ottomana nella Prima Età Moderna," in *Le Trasgressioni della Carne. Il Desiderio Omosessuale nel Mondo Islamico e Cristiano Secc. XII-XX*, ed. Umberto Grassi and Giuseppe Marcocci (Rome: Viella, 2015), 81–82.

¹¹ See, for instance, Mustafa Ali, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli's Mevâ'idü'n-Ne- Fâ'is Kavâ'idü'l-Mecâlis, Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings*, ed. D.S. Brookes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Üniversitesi Yakındoğu Dilleri ve Medeniyetleri Bölümü, 2003). Mustafa Ali's discussion of poetry is quoted by Kuru, "Il Genere Del Desiderio," 83.

¹² Ca'fer Çelebi's *Heves-nāme* has been edited by Necati Sungur in Ca'fer Çelebi, *Hevesnāme* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 2006) and a digital transcription exists as part of the *Ottoman Text Archive Project* at the University of Washington by Hivren Demir and Hakan Atay. See Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, "Hevesnāme," Ottoman Text Archive Project, accessed October 9, 2015, http://courses.washington.edu/otap/archive/data/arch_txt/heves_eng.html. For the translation in this chapter I have consulted the Nuruosmaniye manuscript as well as Sungur's and Demir and Atay's transcriptions. See Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, Nuruosmaniye 4373, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul. All subsequent references to the *Book of Passion* in this dissertation correspond to the couplet numbers in the Demir and Atay's online edition, unless otherwise noted (hereafter, Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*). For the section discussed here, see couplets 476-543.

Ottoman poetry should not be considered in opposition to prose. Most long narrative romances, like Ca'fer Çelebi's *Book of Passion*, were written in verse. The *Book of Passion* narrates the love pursuits of Ca'fer Çelebi with the same narrative force than a prose text would do. Furthermore, it includes lyrical poems alongside narrative verses, as well as panegyrics—a poem written in praise of a ruler, patron, or friend. The combination of different forms of poetry also occurs in larger prose narratives. Scholarship interested in the intersection of poetry and prose has centered on the expressive capacity of each medium, at times identifying poetry as a more adequate form for oral delivery, easy to memorize and excellent for entertainment.¹³ However, if we are to believe what Ottomans themselves said about poetry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the power of poetic expression derives from its capacity to establish new meanings and convey religious knowledge.¹⁴ In this sense, poetry inserted into prose texts also bears the potential of deepening the spiritual experience of the reader or listener.

It is in through metaphorical language, and the adequate use of rhetoric and expression, that poetic meaning, or rather, spiritual meaning is created. The interconnection between poetry and prose becomes more evident when attention is given to the metaphorical and allegorical similarities of both mediums. Ottoman prose, especially in its literary form, is not always foreign to poetry, but rather another part of the poetics of spiritual expression. Lāmi'ī Çelebi (d. 1531), Ottoman poet and stylist of

¹³ See, for instance, Robert Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance: The Use of Ghazals in Persian and Turkish Maṣnavīs," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (1984): 9–25; Barbara Flemming, "The Poem in the Chronicle: The Use of Poetry in Early Ottoman Historiography," in *Essays on Turkish Literature and History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 344–51. Of particular interest is Menage's discussion of the different roles of verse and prose in 'Āşıkpaşā-zāde and Neşrī's histories in Victor Lois Ménage, *Neshrī's History of the Ottomans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 17-8. The relation between prose and verse has been specially stressed in relation to the oral component of popular texts and epics; see, for instance, Yorgos Dedes, *Battalname: Giriş, İngişizce Tercüme, Türkçe Metin, Yorum ve Tıpkıbasım*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Üniversitesi Yakınođu Dilleri ve Medeniyetleri Bölümü, 1996).

¹⁴ Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, 476-534.

the sixteenth century, compares prose to poetry in the introduction to his collected poems and concludes that poetry excels prose in all respects.¹⁵ At the same time, in the introduction to his epistolary collection, Lāmi'î Çelebi defends prose as a form of spiritual self-awakening, a path to knowledge that is based on the act of writing rather than in the institutional education of the Ottoman madrasah system.¹⁶ To add to his defense of prose, Lāmi'î Çelebi compares the act of Creation to that of the production of a book, from the writing of its contents, to the polishing its pages with a shell, just like the moon and the sun polish the firmament (*mühre-i mihr ü meh ile dün ü gün müherleyüp*).¹⁷

There seems to be a contradiction between the two introductions: in one Lāmi'î Çelebi praises poetry while in the other he exalts prose. Rather than dismissing these seemingly opposing opinions as mere rhetorical devices, we must see that this contradiction is a result of today's literal translation of poetry and prose as two distinct genres. In both cases, Lāmi'î Çelebi refers to the highly metaphorical language of literature. A more accurate distinction should be made only in regards to form, but not necessarily in terms of conventions or even content or power of expression. The distinction thus resides on whether the text is expressed in verse or prose, many times using a combination of both. In all these cases, Ottoman scholars defend metaphorical, stylistic, literary language as a means of communicating spiritual truths.

"Poetics of Empire" argues that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Ottoman scholars and statesmen produced a new literary language in order to express political

¹⁵ Tahir Üzgor, *Türkçe Dîvân Dîbâceleri* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990).

¹⁶ Lāmi'î Çelebi, *Münşeât-i Lâmiî: (Lâmiî Çelebi'nin Mektupları): İnceleme, Metin, İndeks, Sözlük*, ed. Ali Hasan Esir (Trabzon: Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2006), 79–101.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 79.

thought. Poetic and literary composition was an extension of contemporary politics, a medium through which Ottoman learned men expressed, debated, and ultimately transformed political communication in the early modern Islamic world. Building on the work of cultural and intellectual historians over the past twenty years, I posit that literary production at the imperial court crafted distinctive modes of expression in order to articulate the Ottoman sultanate's place in the world, particularly vis-à-vis its imperial rivals in Europe and the Islamic world. To this end, "Poetics of Empire" focuses on the composition of Ottoman Turkish and Persian literary works, as well as diplomatic correspondence produced during the reigns of Mehmet II (r. 1451-1481) and Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512), whose patronage played a key role in the formation of a new intellectual elite.

The temporal focus of this dissertation is on the second half of the fifteenth century. The reigns of Mehmet II and Bayezid II are marked by the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the expansion of Ottoman authority in the Balkans and Anatolia, and the collision of the Ottoman sultanate's borders with other Islamicate empires, namely: the Timurid court of Herat, the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria, and the emergence of the Safavids in Iran. The consolidation of Ottoman authority and the subsequent reconfiguration of the balance of power in the region both derived from and produced new cultural policies at court. These transformations included the shaping of Constantinople into the ultimate imperial city, the integration of non-state power holders into the Ottoman line of authority, and the centralization of the bureaucracy.

The geographical focus of this study is Constantinople and the imperial court. Yet, some of the historical characters discussed in this dissertation had strong

connections to other places of the empire. Their poetry reflected their education in cities like Bursa and Edirne—former imperial capitals— and their networks with families and Sufi orders based in the provincial cities of Amasya and Manisa, the seats of princely governorships. The tension between the increasingly centralized administration and the provinces informed the themes of correspondence manuals. The preeminence given to Constantinople as the locus of empire does not intend to erase the existence or importance of other provincial cities and elites. Indeed, as recent studies on the cities of Anatolia and the intellectual life of the Arab provinces show, local elites, both intellectual and economic, retained an important degree of leverage with the center.¹⁸ On the contrary, the focus on Constantinople of this dissertation intends to reveal the tensions produced by the territorial expansion of the empire, the need to conceptualize a capital city, and the challenges presented by an imperial administration that was meant to center on the imperial court while successfully controlling the periphery. The poets and bureaucrats explored in this dissertation all lived in Istanbul, but they all dwelled elsewhere as well. After the downfall of their careers, Aḥmed Paşa and Mesīḥī were exiled to Bursa and Bosnia, respectively, and spent many an effort trying to return to the imperial center. Their poetry was produced in and about Constantinople, but was also informed by the tension between the different geographical locations within the Ottoman domains. More importantly, I argue, their poetry attempted to define the relationship between the capital and the empire, as well as that between the sultan and his subjects.

¹⁸ Hakan Karataş, “The City as a Historical Actor: The Urbanization and Ottomanization of the Halvetiye Sufi Order by the City of Amasya in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries” (PhD. Diss., University of California, 2011); Helen Pfeifer, “To Gather Together: Cultural Encounters in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Literary Salons” (PhD. Diss., Princeton University, 2014); see also idem, “Encounter after the Conquest: Social Gatherings in 16th-Century Ottoman Damascus,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 47 (2015): 219–39.

Until recently, studies that explored the relation between Ottoman literary works and politics have been limited to panegyrics that include literal references to notables and diplomatic or political events, mostly celebrating military victories or architectural patronage. The study of Ottoman panegyric, particularly in English, still suffers from the tendency in post-romantic literary criticism to consider the use of traditional imagery in a hyperbolic depiction of the panegyric's patron as inferior in relation to other allegedly less context-dependent forms of lyric poetry. The most influential account of Ottoman literary history, published in 1900 by E. J. W. Gibb, dismissed Ottoman panegyric as a "waste of time and talent."¹⁹ Gibb recognized certain elements within the Ottoman tradition of panegyric as extremely beautiful. Yet, these are limited to the so-called exordium (*nasīb*) of the poem, which is the introductory section dealing not with the eulogy itself (*medhiye*) but with the lyric element that sets the poem's central theme, such as Spring, Winter, or the holy month of Ramadan. Accordingly, in Gibb's view, the beauty of the *nasīb* derives from its apparent independence from the panegyric proper (*maḳṣūd*) and its use of more "poetic" elements, as it were, such as nature-inspired themes.²⁰ Ironically, while Ottoman panegyric clearly left Gibb uninspired, his monumental survey confirms the central role of the *kaṣīde* (henceforth panegyric), recognizing its value in the professional path of Ottoman court poets during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This involuntary affirmation of the centrality of Ottoman panegyric results from Gibb's sources, namely, poetry collections (*dīvāns*) and biographical dictionaries (*tezḳīres*).

¹⁹E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 2nd ed., (London: Messrs. Lucac and Company, 1958), 1:87.

²⁰Gibb, 1:82.

Similar to Gibb's dismissal of the genre for its "lack of originality," Turkish scholars of the first half of the twentieth century downplayed the social and artistic value of Ottoman panegyric. Early republican Turkish scholarship attempted to record the literary monuments of Turkish civilization. Historians of Turkish literature such as Mehmet Fuad Köprülü and Vasfı Mahir Kocatürk focused their efforts on recovering the imagined historical continuity of Turkish folk literature as opposed to the Persian-inflected literature of the learned elite.²¹ Ottoman panegyric represented a foreign element in the Turkish literary tradition as imagined by these nationalist historians. The practical elements of Ottoman panegyric, such as requests for patronage or royal favor, combined with its Arabic origins, reinforced the nationalist discourse that conceptualized the literature of the Ottoman learned elite as a mechanical and unsuccessful attempt to impose Arabic and Persian forms upon the national genius of the Turkish people. Ottoman panegyric was, in this paradigm, a genre that represented artifice, pretension, and ultimately, failure.

The assumption that Ottoman panegyric replicated Persian and Arabic panegyrics in form and content has limited the scope of scholarship to analysis of the work of individual poets or compilations of panegyrics grouped by period of composition. One of the major questions in the field had been formulated in relation to the change of the traditional constitutive parts of the panegyric, which do not quite correspond to the Ottoman case.²² In his article "Speaking of Power: the 'Ottoman Kaside,'" Walter

²¹ Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006); Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1999); Vasfı Mahir Kocatürk, *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi; Başlangıçtan Bugüne Kadar Türk Edebiyatının Tarihi, Tahli ve Tenkidi*, (Ankara: Edebiyat Yayınevi, 1970).

²² Some of the discussions regarding Persian and Arabic *qasîda* deal with the substitution of traditional themes in the exordium (*nasîb*) and the way in which Persian poets adapted the Arabic form to suit the courtly context of the Persianate Islamic literary world. Scholars of earlier Islamic literature have also paid

Andrews argued for a reassessment of the genre with more attention to the context of its production. He identified a practical dimension in the poem as a gift, an element of a larger palace economy, wherein panegyrics constitute a “genre of expression for addressing a group of [specific] people.” Recently, Yorgos Dedes and Stefan Sperl focused on Andrews’ arguments against the continuity of Persian and Arabic elements in Ottoman panegyric and successfully placed the genre within the larger literary tradition of the Islamicate world. Andrews’ invitation to rethink Ottoman panegyric as a product of Ottoman palace culture remains unchallenged, regardless of the genre’s connection to other literary traditions. He correctly stresses the creative use of traditional literary forms in this very specific context, which can reveal the meaning of these poems.²³

More recently, in collaboration with Mehmet Kalpaklı, Andrews has further argued that the genre of Ottoman panegyric represented a means by which a poet proved his value to the literary community to which he belonged. In Andrews and Kalpaklı’s words, it was an “exam” that tested the poet’s capacity to participate in the edification of his social group and through which he was able to show his understanding of the emotional investment of this group.²⁴ In this reading, the poet’s literary community is at the same time his social world, an elite community with a particular emotional economy based on patronage and gift exchange. Andrews and Kalpaklı consider panegyric as a

attention to the uses of *qaṣīda* in courtly contexts and the transformation of this genre in relation to historical transformations of the region. See Stefan Sperl, “Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8, no. 1 (1977): 20–35; Julie Scott Meisami, “The Uses of Qaṣīda: Thematic and Structural Patterns in a Poem of Bashshār,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 16, no. 1 (1985): 40–59.

²³ Yorgo Dedes and Stefan Sperl, “‘In the Rose-Bower Every Leaf is a Page of Delicate Meaning’: An Arabic Perspective on Three Ottoman Kasides,” in *Kasīdeye Medhiye: Biçime, İşleve ve Muhteveya Dair Tespitler*, ed. Hatice Aynur et al., Eski Türk Çalışmaları, VIII (Istanbul: Klasik, 2013), 240–313.

²⁴ Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, “Ottoman Love: Preface to a Theory of Emotional Ecology,” in *A History of Emotions 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Lilequist (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2012), 21–47.

poetic form about love and separation, in what they see as the two poles of Ottoman emotional and social interactions.²⁵ Following this, they argue, the depiction of the characteristics of the patron/beloved is not as important for understanding Ottoman panegyric as it is the implication of an act of negotiation between poet/lover and patron/beloved, which is ultimately based upon an Ottoman economy of love and an ever-present expectation of reunion. Andrews and Kalpaklı's approach contrasts with other historical readings of the genre. While Andrews and Kalpaklı attempt to reconstruct a cultural history of Ottoman emotions against which panegyrics and poetic composition can be analyzed together with the social actions that they imply (such as singing/reciting, meeting, and communicating), others have attempted to mine Ottoman panegyrics for references to Ottoman imperial political history, as poems can prove to be helpful to corroborate dates and social relations beyond their poetic value.²⁶ While this scholarship provides us with a helpful index of historical events mentioned in panegyric poetry, they by and large do not integrate these events with the surrounding poetry. How were these events integrated in the larger structure of the specific poems or how were panegyrics read in relation to other literary products recording the same events, such as chronicles and dynastic histories?²⁷

²⁵ See also Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

²⁶For instance, Murat Karavelioğlu has recently identified the most common historical events explicitly mentioned in fifteenth and sixteenth century Ottoman panegyrics, mostly victories and military campaigns. See Murat Karavelioğlu, "Tarihin Edebiyatı: 15. ve 16. Yüzyıl Kasidelerinde Tarihi Arka Plan," in *Kasideye Medhiye: Biçime, İşleve ve Muhteveya Dair Tespitler*, Eski Türk Edebiyatı Çalışmaları, VIII (İstanbul: Klasik, 2013), 380–454.

²⁷ Recent scholarship of Persian and Arabic literatures has introduced new approaches to the study of panegyric, mainly with a focus on cultural history or biography. See Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); *idem*, "Forbidden Love, Persianate Style: Re-Reading Tales of Iranian Poets and Mughal Patrons," *Iranian Studies* 42 (2009): 765–79.

Building on Andrews and Kalpaklı's critique of the limited and formalistic studies of Ottoman panegyric poetry, I focus on the way words were used to define, debate, and discuss perceptions of power. I do not see each poem as an example in scale of a larger and shared Ottoman mentality, nor as a mere literary register of particular historical events, but rather also as a small, constitutive, and not necessarily successful act in the political and intellectual space of the Ottoman court. In other words, this approach assumes that every poem may also be a political act with restricted results and well-defined effects. In order to understand the role of the poems analyzed in this dissertation, within the social space of the imperial court, I reconstruct the connections between poems with explicit references to either contemporary authors, political figures, or other poems. In order to understand the role of literary language in fifteenth century Ottoman society, it is necessary to investigate Ottoman poems first and foremost as the intellectual products of a tight community of scholars and statesmen who were in constant dialogue with each other. By reconstructing the connections between poems and historical characters, I show the dynamic nature of poetic composition as a medium through which statesmen were capable of not only displaying their literary skills but also expressing their political anxieties.²⁸ Furthermore, I argue, these poems did not only reflect these networks but were indeed central in constructing them.

Scholars have overlooked the relation between poetry and politics mainly for three reasons. The first is the modern divide between the historical and the literary, often times considered strictly fictional. This has created a tendency to relegate Ottoman verse

²⁸ I have purposefully avoided the binary poet/patron since its use obscures the multiple professions that Ottoman authors had at the time. The binary terminology also implies an artificial power dynamic in the process of poetic composition and intellectual production. I have thus privileged the relation between language (acts/products) and historical personae (writer/reader/references to historical figures, friends, patrons, etc.). See below Chapter 1.

and poetic imagery to a purely aesthetic exercise, dislocating Ottoman poetry from its connection to other intellectual products. The second is yet another divide between the religious and the literary. Court poetry, mostly about love, has been studied in terms of its imagery and its play with other literary traditions, such as the Persian and the Arabic. Court poetry has been contraposed to so-called folk-poetry, mostly longer versed narratives that have some religious sentiment. Nonetheless, Ottoman poetry is infused with religious knowledge. These two premises have limited our understanding of how Ottoman intellectuals expressed, debated, and ultimately transformed political communication through poetry and literary prose. In other words, a dismantling of the binary oppositions of high versus folk literatures, fictional versus historical, social versus literary, and spiritual versus intellectual, will allow us to see how Ottoman scholars and court members were able to comment on morals, ethics, and ideas of governance through their poetry.²⁹

"Poetics of Empire" reconstructs the interactions between groups of scholars as well as their political ideas by reading their poetry. It shows that poetry was part of a larger set of intellectual and spiritual expressions of people trying to live and thrive in an expanding empire. While most scholarship has focused on the individual efforts and literary merit of poets and scholars, Selim S. Kuru has recently shown the importance of reconstructing the means by which an interpretative community of poets was created in Anatolia.³⁰ Kuru's focus has been on the production of textual tools such as biographical

²⁹ Sooyong Kim criticizes these dichotomies in his study of the Ottoman poet Zati. Kim's study maintains a contextual approach that focuses on the context and life of the poet on the one hand, and the literary on the other. See Sooyong Kim, *The Last of an Age: The Making and Unmaking of a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Poet* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018).

³⁰ Selim Kuru, "The Literature of Rum: The Making of a Literary Tradition (1450-1600)," in *The Ottoman Empire as a World Power, 1453-1603*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Kate Fleet (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 548–92; *idem*, "Sex in the Text: Deli Birader's Dâfi 'ü 'l-Gumûm Ve

dictionaries and compilations of poems that functioned as reference works for a community of scholars trying to define a literary canon for the Ottoman Empire. My work takes on the inquiry of the formation of an Ottoman community of poets as posed in Kuru's work, but takes a different approach. Rather than considering questions of identity and literary canon, I investigate literary language in its political capacity. "Poetics of Empire" shows that poetics and rhetoric were a means of making the empire meaningful for scholars adapting to its expansion and bureaucratization.

Outside the Ottoman context, the systematic study of rhetoric and the development of a literary language during the early modern period have been successfully incorporated in the discussion of the foundations of modern political thought.³¹ Similarly, recent scholarship in social and cultural history has incorporated the study of language and rhetoric into the analysis of the formation of political cultures in the early modern world.³² This scholarship describes a moment when cities and small polities expanded into empires, and faced challenges exerting control over newly incorporated cities and populations. In this moment, it seems that all of the scholars and the educated elites of the various empires of the fifteenth and sixteenth century valued literature and language for its creative power. Although this dissertation does not take a comparative approach examining the Ottoman Empire in the context of other empires of

Râfi 'ü'l-Humûm and the Ottoman Literary Canon," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10 (2007): 157–74; *idem*, "Latîfî Tezkiresinde Mutasavvıflar," in *Bursa'da Dünden Buğüne Tasavvuf Kültürü*, ed. Hasan Basri Öcalan, (Bursa: Bursa Kültür Sanat ve Turizm Vakfı, 2004), 197–202.

³¹ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); Filippo Di Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³² Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Colin P. Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009); Antje Richter, *Letter and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013). For an approach that combines language with other media, see Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

the Islamic world and the Mediterranean, it does respond to the need to consider language in its political dimension, particularly in a time when most Ottoman scholars and members of the governing elite spent a considerable amount of energy in refining and applying the Ottoman language.³³

The expansion of Ottoman power over Anatolia, the Balkans, Greater Syria, and Egypt during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries occurred alongside institutional transformations that were aimed at securing imperial authority over new subjects, new territories, and new rivals. The rapid change of scale in governance and administration forced those involved in the imperial government to re-conceptualize the empire.³⁴ Amongst these transformations, scholars have paid particular attention to the production of an Ottoman imperial discourse and the development of new techniques of power.³⁵ While “Poetics of Empire” builds upon scholarship that has mapped the formation of an Ottoman historical consciousness, it recognizes that the focus of this scholarship has centered on the problem of representation of Ottoman imperial rule and authority in what we identify today as historical genres, namely, chronicles and narratives, or in objects of art and architectural history, documenting important events like the conquests of new

³³ Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Theochaes Staurides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelovic (1453-1474)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Christopher Andrew Markiewicz, “The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century” (University of Chicago, 2015); Christine Woodhead, “Ottoman Languages,” in *The Ottoman World* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 160–75.

³⁴ Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

³⁵ Hakan Karateke, “Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate. A Framework for Historical Analysis,” in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 13–52; Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); *idem*, “A Kanun for the State, a Canon for the Arts: The Classical Synthesis in Ottoman Art and Architecture during the Age of Süleyman,” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son Temps, Actes du Colloque de Paris Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 7-10 Mars 1990*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Rencontres de l’école du Louvre, 1992), 195–216.

territories or ceremonies related to the sultan and the royal household.³⁶ “Poetics of Empire” takes a novel approach in that it sees language as a political act in itself, wherein attitudes toward rule and justice are contested in the exercise of a literature that is as prescriptive as it is descriptive.³⁷

The question of empire in the early modern world has, in addition to language and legitimacy, led to the discussion of faith, religiosity, and the relation between different communities.³⁸ Scholarly work on confessionalization and the multiplicity of religious practices existing within the expanding empires of the early modern world has examined the social dynamics that existed between an increasingly centralized state and an increasingly orthodox religious practice, and how these changes took place as empires became more diverse.³⁹ The focus has turned mostly into the analysis of non-elite narratives that challenge what scholars have seen as an artificially homogenous discourse produced by the state or its actors.⁴⁰ Indeed, the history of the Ottoman Empire could not

³⁶ Derin Terzioğlu, “The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation,” *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 84–100; Esin Atıl, *Levni and the Surname: The Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival* (İstanbul: Kocbank, 1999); Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

³⁷ While my approach differs in the ways scholarship has used poetry as descriptive vignettes of Ottoman social life, I have benefitted from the approach of recent scholarship analyzing the formation of architectural and urban space as constitutive to the formation of social attitudes. See Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Palace*; Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul. Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009); Shirine Hamadeh, “Invincible City: Istanbul’s Migrants and the Politics of Space,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 50, no. 2 (2017): 173–93.

³⁸ Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); *idem*, “Conversion and Converts to Islam in Ottoman Historiography of the Fifteenth Century and Sixteenth Century,” in *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 58–79; Derin Terzioğlu, “Where ’İlm-i Hal Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization,” *Past & Present* 220, no. 1 (2013): 79–114.

³⁹ Derin Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion,” *Turcica: Revue d’études Turques*, no. 44 (2013 2012): 301–38.

⁴⁰ Most of this historiography derives from Cemal Kafadar’s reading of Ottoman sources to understand the creation of an Ottoman historical consciousness and a historiographical tradition. See Cemal Kafadar,

be told without due attention to the social.⁴¹ This dissertation builds upon that work by looking back into elite discourses not as monolithic conceptual blocks imposed on historical narrative or in opposition to non-elite populations, but rather by foregrounding the people who created those discourses. The premise of this approach is that the so-called official discourses were in fact the byproduct of vivid debates amongst the intellectual elites, who were interested in affecting the way the empire was governed. In other words, this dissertation parts from the assumption that Ottomans did not willfully produce a misleading official historiography for imaginary future readers.⁴² In fact, Ottoman authors used language to produce a mirror of society, an ideal imperial utopia that prescribed aspirations of rule, justice, and spiritual realization. The benefits of approaching the sources with the Ottomans' bona fides intact are greater than the risks, in that it forces us to consider their political, religious, and social anxieties as real and palpable forces behind the production of what, for us, constitutes their textual traces, our craft's textual evidence. This dissertation, however, does not propose that the study of empire can only be undertaken in relation to language. Instead, it proposes that the existing scholarship on other power dynamics such as gender, religiosity, and class,

Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Suraiya Faroqhi's work inaugurated a turn in Ottoman history towards social and cultural history, emphasizing the importance of non-state actors in the configuration of the Ottoman Empire. See, for instance, Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). Similarly, the scholarship has focused on the dynamics between the central administration of the empire and social groups with less audible voices in the sources, such as women, nomads, and refugees. See Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983); Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

⁴² Recent scholarship has begun to address questions about readership and circulation of knowledge, in particular in the context of the seventeenth century. See Tülün Değirmenci, "An Illustrated 'Mecmua': The Commoner's Voice and the Iconography of the Court in Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 41 (January 1, 2011): 186–218; Gabrielle Rachel Van den Berg and C. P. Charles Peter Melville, *Shahnama Studies III: The Reception of the Shahnama*, Studies in Persian Cultural History (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Nir Shafir, "The Road from Damascus: Circulation and the Redefinition of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, 1620-1720" (PhD. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2016).

among others, allows us to look at the political and social dimension of language as yet another space for political action. “Poetics of Empire” addresses one of the fundamental problems in the current state of Ottoman intellectual and literary history, namely, the lack of any systematic study of the social context in which political and literary ideas circulated. This dissertation shows that poetic composition played a much more important role in the daily life of Ottoman elites during the early modern period than is generally recognized by the historiography.

I have opted for a study that focuses on specific instances in which Ottoman scholars used poetry to communicate their political and social expectations. This includes, at times simultaneously, pragmatic uses of poetry, as is the case of exiled scholars trying to find ways to return to the capital, and more abstract ideal representations of the Ottoman polity. For this reason, this dissertation does not focus on one single author and his works, their political or social context, or their literary achievements. While the benefits of such approaches are clear from the large number of scholarly works on Ottoman history that trace social transformations into the lives and works of exemplary men, the analysis of social problems as they transpire in different texts will offer another dimension to our understanding of how these exemplary men interacted with each other, with their works, and with Ottoman society at large.⁴³ Indeed,

⁴³ I have greatly benefitted from works in biographical vein, just as I have benefitted from philological works that have produced editions and translations of Ottoman literary works in Modern Turkish and English. See Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Theohares Staurides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelovic (1453-1474)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Christopher Andrew Markiewicz, “The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century” (University of Chicago, 2015); Cornell H. Fleischer, “Between the Lines: Realities of Scribal Life in the Sixteenth Century” in *Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of V.L. Ménage*, ed. Colin Heywood and Colin Imber (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1994), 45–61; Victor Lois Ménage, “A Survey of the Early Ottoman Histories, with

the scholars that represent the main characters of this historical analysis have all been the object of biographical, philological, and literary scholarship.⁴⁴ It is precisely by building upon this literature that it is possible now to move into a different approach, focusing on networks of scholars and the social dynamics at play in their works.

The chapters focus on different loci of intersection between poetic language and the political engagement of poets, from the configuration of urban space in Istanbul to the professional practice of the imperial bureaucrat. Nonetheless, as I hope it will become clear in the paragraphs that follow, in the interests of analytical clarity I have imposed a logical progression on these intersections that, in practice, may have occurred simultaneously. I first focus on the social networks (chapter 1), discussing the interactions between scholars, the court, and language, to foreground the ways in which poetic and literary language became a medium for political debate and negotiation. The dissertation then offers three case studies to illustrate these interactions (chapters 2-4), first by showing how Ottoman scholars used poetry to inhabit, transform, and prescribe the urban space. The capital city of Istanbul constituted the arena in which poets fully inhabit their professional, social, and moral ideals. Once it defines this space, the dissertation moves on to the agents of poetry, that is, the poets and other political actors, and shows how they interacted with each other through poetry, and more importantly, how poetry was a means to advance one's own career or, ultimately, to save oneself from disgrace—or even death. Lastly, this dissertation turns to literary language and the moral,

Studies on Their Textual Problems and Their Sources” (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1962).

⁴⁴ Turgut Karabey, *Ahmet Paşa: Hayatı, Edebî Kişiliği, Eseri ve Bazı Şiirlerinin Açıklamaları* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1991); İsmail E. Erünsal and Tâci-zâde Ca’fer Çelebi, *The Life and Works of Tâci-Zâde Ca’fer Çelebi, with a Critical Edition of His Dîvân* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1983); Çetin Derdiyok, “XV. Yüzyıl Şâirlerinden Mesîhî’nin Gül-i Sad-Berg’i” (Çukurova University, 1994); Harun Tolasa, *Ahmed Paşa’nın Şiir Dünyası*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Akçağ, 2001); Faruk Timurtaş, “Şeyhî’nin Şöhreti ve Tesiri,” *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi* 107 (1958): 86–87.

aesthetic, and spiritual vision it represented, and how it affected bureaucratic practice. Literary language ultimately filtered down into a social project enacted in daily administrative practices through the constraints imposed by the formulaic repetition of language rather than in the theoretical elaboration of a philosophy of power.

Three dynamics inform all chapters in this dissertation. First, the tension between different classes of political actors within the empire, to which poets belonged either thanks to or independent from their poetic work; second, the transition of power between generations of poets and bureaucrats, at times corresponding with opposing political factions; third, the awareness of poetry and language as a spiritual exercise, even in its most elite form. As I have explained above, the scholarship consider most poets in relation to the reigns or sultans under which they worked, obviating the generational and class tensions that existed between different political factions and intellectual currents within the court and among the intellectual elite of the empire. Similarly, scholars of Ottoman literature have understood lyrical poems produced by elite poets in opposition to folk or Sufi literature, anachronistically seeing the elite lyric as a secular craft, wherein religious motifs are devoid of any spiritual dimension and used only as erudite expressions of the Islamic tradition. Although scholars such as Talât Sait Halman have identified the artificiality of this divide, there have been only a few attempts to challenge this dichotomy.⁴⁵ This dissertation brings both the spiritual and social dimension of literary language to the forefront of the historical analysis, and shows how poetry was indeed articulated within the dynamics produced by the tensions of class, piety, and power, as much as it helped define these very same dynamics.

⁴⁵ Talât Sait Halman, "Poetry and Society: The Turkish Experience," in *Modern Near East: Literature and Society*, ed. Max Kortepeter (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 45. For a summary of this debate, see Kim, "Minding the Shop," 6–15.

Chapter 1, "Agents of Poetry: Patronage of Ottoman Poetry in the Fifteenth Century," argues that the second half of the fifteenth century saw a transformation of patterns of patronage in Anatolia that led, ultimately, to the professionalization of poetry and the appearance of the Ottoman poet as an independent class. This chapter shows how local power relations, the crisis of imperial legitimacy at court, and the specific tensions between the Anatolian nobility and the palace led a handful of influential scholars to consciously transform the nature of literary patronage. It not only analyzes the intertextual connections between diverse forms of literary production and political correspondence (work continued in chapters 3 and 4), it also reconstructs the material implications that the composition of said works had upon the lives of the poets and bureaucrats at the imperial court. By focusing on the gifts and salaries granted by the court, as well as the administrative positions held by the poets under study, I map the different political factions existing in the Ottoman courts of the late fifteenth century and identify the most important political debates of the time.

Chapter 2, "Spaces of Poetry: Inhabiting Istanbul through Poetry after the Conquest," focuses on the process of re-building Constantinople and the role that literary spatial descriptions had in the making of an Ottoman imperial capital. I first examine the development of urban spaces in Anatolia during the fifteenth century in order to show the shortcomings of Istanbul as a capital immediately following the conquest. The city's condition after the conquest was marked by absences. Ottoman poets, scholars, and members of the court, forced to move together with the court and the sultan, re-inhabited the damaged metropolis by adapting it to the conceptual ethos produced and reproduced by the literary world of the Ottoman ruling elite. The material needs of the city were

embodied both in the continuity of buildings inherited from the conquered past and the absence of spaces expected in the capital of an Islamic empire. By incorporating Istanbul into the mechanics that articulated the Ottoman poetic and spiritual worldview, poets and scholars rendered the new urban space meaningful, consequentially prescribing how to interpret it and, ultimately, how to inhabit it.

Chapter 3, "Networks of Poetry: Poets, Statesmen, and Mystics at the Fifteenth-century Ottoman Court," studies of how Ottoman intellectuals used poetry to create networks of support among other members of the Ottoman elite. It demonstrates the value of praise and invective as a means of negotiating political allegiances. Here I examine the works of prominent scholars and poets who held key positions at the imperial court. Through their works, I explore the role of panegyric poetry in legitimizing the charisma of contested Sufi orders.

Chapter 4, "Bureacracy's Poetry: the Politics and the Poetics of Ottoman Administrative Procedure at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century," offers a study of how Ottoman intellectuals and bureaucrats provided models for social and political behavior through the creation of a new literary language for official correspondence and diplomatic letters. It shows how Ottoman bureaucrats created a corpus of exempli for diplomatic and official writing, and in so doing advanced their own models for a new Ottoman imperial society. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the literary language created *ex professo* for imperial and personal communications allowed Ottoman intellectuals to make a series of social prescriptions for the ruling elite. By attempting to standardize bureaucratic procedure, Ottoman scholars aimed to create an authoritative manual for letter writing that would become the canon of model responses to social problems like

corruption in the provinces, declarations of war, oaths of peace and friendship with neighboring states. In what I call the politics of bureaucracy, scholars used the constraints of diplomatic and official language in order to argue for the ideal Ottoman society they believed in.

Through a systematic study of literary language and rhetoric in relation to the material context of intellectual production, "Poetics of Empire" demonstrates that literary composition was not an intellectual enterprise detached from its political and social context, but that the exercise of literary language facilitated the creation of new forms of governance and political practice.

CHAPTER 1

Agents of Poetry: Scholars, Notables, and Bureaucrats

In his biographical dictionary of poets, Laṭīfī describes the years of Bayezid II (r. 1481-1520) as a bygone era of splendor. Indeed, if we are to believe the words of the sixteenth-century poet and biographer, Bayezid's were years of flourishing culture and justice:

There were many poets and eloquent men during his [Bayezid II's] time and age, and in his period there was neither higher nor better current goods than pearl-ordered verses. The majority of the leading poets of the province of Rum arrived in his period of justice and in his reign, they found fame and renown according to their ability [...]⁴⁶

Laṭīfī is not alone in his rosy-eyed assessment of the era. Twenty years after the publication of his dictionary, Aşık Çelebī, Laṭīfī's rival biographer and poet, described Bayezid II's reign as a period of abundance and fair patronage.⁴⁷ He contrasts Bayezid's rule to the bellicose reigns of Bayezid's father, Mehmet II, and his son, Selim I. According to Aşık Çelebī, Bayezid II was stable and firm in nature and provided his subjects with the necessary stability that allowed the institutions of the Ottoman lands to thrive and prosper. In what seems a blunt criticism of other sultans, Aşık Çelebī compares the reigns of the sultans to evanescent celestial objects. Bayezid's predecessors, he contends, were like fleeting stars in the sky, always waging war and rarely remaining in the capital. Bayezid II, by contrast, is a celestial body on the ninth level of the celestial

⁴⁶ Latīfī and Rıdvan Canım, *Tezkiretü's-Şu'ara ve Tavşiratü'n-Nuzama (İnceleme-Metin)* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı, 2000), 141. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. I have used Canım's edition whenever I did not see the need to discuss a specific passage in relation to the different editions of Laṭīfī's biographical dictionary. When the first and second editions differ from each other, I have consulted several manuscripts and made the comparison explicit. For further discussion, see below.

⁴⁷ 'Aşık Çelebi, *Meşāirü's-Şuarā' İnceleme-Metin*, ed. Filiz Kılıç, vol. 1 (Istanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2010), 193–96. For different accounts, see Walter G. Andrews, "Osmanlı Metin Çalışmaları: Geçmiş Meydan Okuma, Geleceği Tasarlama" in *Eski Metinlere Yeni Bağlamlar: Osmanlı Edebiyatı Çalışmalarında Yeni Yönelimler*, ed. Hatice Aynur et al., Eski Türk Edebiyatı Çalışmaları (Istanbul: Klasik, 2015), 36-59.

spheres, that of the fixed stars. Aşık Çelebî's metaphor draws upon the tenets of Islamic astrology, in which the constellations exist in the ninth and last plane of the heavens, and they are the fixed and powerful stars that rule and govern the world below.⁴⁸ Both Laṭîfî and Aşık Çelebî wrote their biographies during reigns of Suleiman I (r. 1520-1566) and Selim II (r. 1566-1574), and as I explain in the introduction to this dissertation, sixteenth-century biographical dictionaries of poets must be seen first and foremost as social commentaries on imperial patronage, morality, and the social conditions of poets.⁴⁹

In modern scholarship, Bayezid II's reign is mostly seen as a moment of transition between two expansionist periods, those of Mehmet II (r. 1451-1481) and Selim I (r. 1512-1520).⁵⁰ Furthermore, this scholarship portrays Bayezid II in stark contrast to Mehmet II, depicting him as a pious and religious sultan who reversed most of his father's aggressive policies. Indeed, the characterization of Mehmet II and Bayezid II as opposite partly derives from contemporary sources.⁵¹ For instance, Franz Babinger's remarks on Bayezid II's "narrow bigotry" in his biography of Mehmet II is based on the history of Gio Maria Angiolello, the Venetian merchant and adventurer who served at the

⁴⁸ For an overview of the use of the celestial spheres in literature see Cemal Kurnaz, "Felek (Edebiyat)," *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1995; Atilla Şentürk, "Osmanlı Edebiyatında Felekler, Seyyâre ve Sâbiteler (Burçlar)," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, no. 90 (1994): 131–80.

⁴⁹ Laṭîfî completed the first edition of his biographical dictionary of poets in 1548. Aşık Çelebî finished his biographical dictionary in 1569, and presented it to Selim I (r. 1566-1574), but he must have been working on it during Suleyman's reign. Laṭîfî must have completed his dictionary's second rendition between 1569 and 1575. See Walter G Andrews, "The Tezkere-I Şu'arâ of Latifi as a Source for the Critical Evaluation of Ottoman Poetry" (PhD. Diss., University Microfilms, 1975), 31–34.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, related sections in the large surveys of Ottoman history by Colin Imber and Halil İnalçık. Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 27-44; Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 23-34.

⁵¹ For a discussion on Bayezid II's image in contrast to Mehmet II, see Cihan Yüksel Muslu, "Ottoman-Mamluk Relations and the Complex Image of Bâyezîd II," in *Conquête Ottomane de l'Égypte (1517): Arrière-Plan, Impact, Échos*, ed. Benjamin Lellouch and Nicolas Michel (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 49–76.

Ottoman court during the reigns of Mehmet II and Bayezid II.⁵² Since Bayezid II's accession was secured only after the civil war that followed Mehmet II's death and the subsequent exile of his brother Cem Sultan, Bayezid became a representation of one of two possible futures for the empire after its second phase of expansion. Modern scholarship drew two retrospective teleological lines, and depicted them as alternatives: on the one hand, Cem Sultan's thwarted rule symbolized possible continuity of Mehmet II's vision of an empire open to Western science and art, while on the other hand, Bayezid II's empire represented Islamic orthodoxy.

The contrast between Bayezid and Cem as centerpieces for alternative political projects was all the more meaningful considering how Mehmet II came to be seen in modern scholarship as a Renaissance-style, European-minded ruler and was assigned a cosmopolitan and strangely anachronistic secular mentality that saw opposition in the more conservative elements of fifteenth-century Ottoman society. The *Historia Turchesca*, the Italian history of the Ottomans ascribed to Gio Maria Angiolello, claimed that Bayezid had said of his father that "he did not believe in Mahometo (Muhammad), and in fact it was so that everyone said that this Mehemet (Mehmet II) did not believe in any faith."⁵³ Angiolello's report is not a positive commentary on the sultan's secularism, but rather a negative depiction that confirms Mehmet II's ruthlessness in a time when lack of faith was as bad as heresy. Furthermore, sixteenth-century commentaries on Bayezid

⁵² Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 411.

⁵³ "[...] et disse il detto Baiasit che suo padre era padrone, et che non credeva in Maccometto, et in effetto era così per quello dicono tutti questo Mehemet non credeva in fede alcuna." Donado Da Lezze, *Historia Turchesca (1300-1514) / Publicată, Adnotată, Impreună Cu O Introducere Di I. Ursu.*, ed. Ion Ursu (Bucharest: C. Gobi, n.d.), 121. For the debate over its authorship see Pierre MacKay, "The Content and Authorship of the *Historia Turchesca*," in *İstanbul Üniversitesi 550. Yıl, Uluslararası Bizans ve Osmanlı Sempozyumu (XV. Yüzyıl): 30–31 Mayıs 2003*, ed. Sümer Atasoy (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2004), 213–23.

II's religiosity have helped to create further juxtaposition between Mehmet II's sons. In older scholarship, Cem Sultan is often presented as an enlightened prince, poet and courtier fallen in Papal captivity without fulfilling his promise, while Bayezid II is represented as a pious Muslim, a ruler oriented towards religious orthodoxy and mystical thinking.⁵⁴ These associations created a sense of backwardness and unimportance in discussions of Bayezid's reign. Since the nineteenth century, the succession struggle between Bayezid and Cem has been portrayed as the moment when the Ottomans abandoned the possibility of a 'Western-style' empire.⁵⁵

Bayezid II reversed some of Mehmet II's policies, many of which were economically unsustainable, while others risked social unrest.⁵⁶ Furthermore, his lack of success in eliminating his brother caused a legitimacy crisis that changed the balance of power at court. More recent studies highlight Bayezid II's role in the consolidation of Ottoman institutions, which were to a certain extent the basis for the expansion and developments of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ Laṭīfī's and Aşık Çelebī's commentaries, which are based on the correlation between justice and literary patronage, deserve further consideration, not only in terms of a re-evaluation of Bayezid II's reign as a whole, but also in relation to the emerging discourse around poetry and its craft in the context of an expanding imperial bureaucracy.

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive, albeit dated survey of Cem Sultan, his life, and sources in both Turkish and European languages, see İsmail Hikmet Ertaylan, *Sultan Cem* (İstanbul: Alfa, 2015 [1951]).

⁵⁵ In a similar vein to what is argued in this dissertation, Cemal Kafadar recently pointed out in an interview for the magazine *Atlas Tarihi* that discussions around Cem Sultan and Bayezid II began in the nineteenth century when Ottoman scholars wondered when Europeans have diverted and progressed faster than the Ottomans. Kafadar suggests that the opposition between the two princes in the literature actually reflects debates about Mehmet II, his legacy, and the aura his historical figure inspires. See Kansu Şarman, "Cem-Bayezid Mücadelesinin Öteki Yüzü 'Devletin Taşradan Kopusu Böyle Başladı' (Interview with Cemal Kafadar)," *Atlas Tarihi*, 2017.

⁵⁶ İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 30.

⁵⁷ For Bayezid II's role in institutionalizing the religious judgeships, see Richard Cooper Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul: A Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy* (London: Oxford University, 1986), 64–67.

In this chapter, I argue that the second half of the fifteenth century saw a transformation of patterns of patronage in Anatolia that led, ultimately, to the professionalization of poetry and the appearance of the Ottoman poet as an independent class. Previous scholarship has most often explained the Ottoman system of patronage as an adaptation of the Persian tradition.⁵⁸ While models of court patronage in both the Persian and Arabic traditions were relevant to the Ottomans, I suggest that local power relations, the crisis of legitimacy at court, and the specific tensions between the Anatolian nobility and the palace led a handful of influential scholars to consciously transform the forms of literary patronage and were responsible for another regional manifestation of a network of patronage relations centered around the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. These scholars considered poetry's importance in the making of an imperial bureaucracy and created a sense of a period of justice as remembered by Laṭīfī and Aşık Çelebī.

Patronage and Scholarship

Two pivotal and controversial studies by Halil İnalçık in the early 2000s placed the study of Ottoman literary patronage on a new footing.⁵⁹ Before İnalçık, Ottoman patronage had been discussed only in passing, as part of general descriptions of Ottoman literary history or biographical works for specific poets.⁶⁰ The study of poetic gatherings

⁵⁸ See discussion below of İnalçık's work on patronage.

⁵⁹ Halil İnalçık, *Şair ve Patron* (Ankara, 2003); *idem*, "Klasik Edebiyat Menşei: İranî Gelenek, Saray İşret Meclisleri ve Musâhib Şâirler," in *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, ed. Talât Sait Halman et al., vol. 1, 4 vols. (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2006), 221–31. For an English translation of the latter, see *idem*, "The Origins of Classical Ottoman Literature: Persian Tradition, Court Entertainments, and Court Poets," *Journal of Turkish Literature*, no. 5 (2008): 5–75.

⁶⁰ Most major surveys of Ottoman literature reproduce ideas of patronage as portrayed by the biographical dictionaries of the fifteenth century, and many of them are explicit critiques of the state of literary patronage in the age of Suleiman I, particularly after the execution of the Grand Vizier İbrahim Paşa. See, for instance, Günay Kut, "Turkish Literature in Anatolia," in *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation*, ed. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and

and their relation to imperial patronage was first delineated by Haluk İpekten in his study of social circles of court poets. While İpekten did not study them using the category of patronage, he established the ground for future studies on both patronage and Ottoman literary criticism.⁶¹ Following this scholarship, İnalçık attempted a sociological and a historical approach to Ottoman literary patronage, first by dissecting the relationship between patrons and poets and later by drawing a general picture of the origins of Ottoman literature in the fifteenth century. İnalçık's limited use of primary sources in *Poet and Patron (Şair ve Patron)* stirred objections among Turkish scholars of Ottoman literature, often overlooked in English historiography.⁶² Relying mostly on secondary literature and the only two available, yet incomplete, registers of rewards given by the court to poets and other craftsmen⁶³, İnalçık bases his analytical insights on the distinction between a patrimonial state in the East and the development of a powerful bourgeoisie in the West (lit. Batı), following Weberian models of state formation, authority, and monopoly of power.⁶⁴ In his “Origins of Classical Ottoman Literature,” İnalçık parts from the sociological model explored in *Poet and Patron* to develop the idea

Culture, 2002), 25–45; Gönül Alpay Tekin, “Fatih Devri Edebiyatı,” in *İstanbul Armağanı: Fetih ve Fatih*, ed. Mustafa Armağan (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 161–235; Harun Tolasa, *Sehî, Latîfî, Âşık Çelebi Tezkirelerine Göre 16. Y.y. 'da Edebiyat Araştırma ve Eleştirisi* (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Matbaası, 1983); Haluk İpekten, *Divan Edebiyatında Edebî Mühitleri* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1996).

⁶¹ İpekten, *Divan Edebiyatında Edebî Mühitleri*; Tolasa, *Sehî, Latîfî, Âşık Çelebi Tezkirelerine Göre 16. Y.y. 'da Edebiyat Araştırma ve Eleştirisi*; Hanna Sohrweide, “Dichter und Gelehrte aus dem Osten im Osmanischen Reich (1453—1600),” *Der Islam* 46, no. 1 (1970): 263–302.

⁶² Scholars of Ottoman literature have considered İnalçık's approach too limited because it focuses exclusively on the Ottoman panegyric. For İnalçık's response to his critics, see Halil İnalçık, “Şair ve Patron Hakkında,” *Zaman*, June 12, 2003, sec. Kültür & Sanat.

⁶³ This document, a draft copy of a court register of gifts, was first published in İsmail E. Erünsal, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi'nin Arşiv Kaynakları I. II. Bayezid Devrine Ait Bir In'amat Defteri,” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 10–11 (1981): 303–42. I discuss this critical source in more detail below.

⁶⁴ İnalçık, *Şair ve Patron*, 13. See also Halil İnalçık, “Comments on ‘Sultanism’: Max Weber's Typification of the Ottoman Polity,” *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 49–72.

that the origin of the Ottoman literary tradition was closely tied to the culture of the *meclis* (ar. *majlis*), the public drinking gathering of poets.

The abundance of poetic gatherings correlates in İnalçık's study to migration of Persian poets and practices to Ottoman lands. The movement of poets from Persian courts during the late Seljuk and beylik periods in the fifteenth century, he argues, consequently led to the adaptation of models derived from the Persian canon. İnalçık's argument is based on the association of the literary work and material rewards; İnalçık establishes a logical teleology of increasingly centralized patronage, a system based on the proportional relation between the imperial court's development and the production of a literary tradition. With his focus on the sultan, İnalçık's model of patronage echoes historiographical accounts of artistic patronage from the sixteenth century onward.⁶⁵ While İnalçık is right in looking for a social space wherein poetic composition was enabled, his work presents a mechanical causation between what he identifies as a patrimonial state and the increase of Ottoman literary production, similar to Gibb's assessment of the Ottoman panegyric as a purely pragmatical literary product.⁶⁶

İnalçık's sociological model of court patronage places the sultan as the source of wealth distribution and literary production as the direct outcome of subjects benefitting from the sultan's generosity. This model disregards class and political change as factors of intellectual and cultural production. As İnalçık's critics point out, his exclusive focus on panegyric poetry (or *kaside*) ignores other forms of literary expression beyond those

⁶⁵ İnalçık brings together work on artistic patronage and social gatherings done particularly for the sixteenth century. This includes the work of Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı on poetic gatherings. See Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*. For a discussion on the importance of poetic responses and the community of Ottoman poets, see Walter G. Andrews, "Starting Over Again: Some Suggestions for Rethinking Ottoman Divan Poetry in the Context of Translation and Transmission," in *Translations: (Re)shaping of Literature and Culture*, ed. Saliha Paker (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2002), 15–40.

⁶⁶ See above for a discussion on the study of the Ottoman panegyric.

that were solely intended to mediate the relation between patron and poet. Indeed, his model presumes that the composition of poetry is a social mechanism resulting from the interaction of two social blocs, one at the center and one at the periphery. Even when the intellectual elites of the empire were at the core of the imperial court, this interpretation positions the sultan in opposition to any other social actor, artificially creating a division between the ruler as the sole agent behind the political project of the empire and his subjects reacting mechanically to the imperial mastermind. As I have already discussed in the introduction, the assumption that all political, cultural, and social projects in the empire depended on or derived from the monarch or at least from the grand vizier's office, and thus depending mostly on each powerful individual's personality, limits our understanding of how Ottoman subjects other than the sultan and his most powerful ministers participated in the configuration of the emerging empire.

The transformations of the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century point to the emergence of new classes among the subjects of the empire. As discussed above, recent scholarship has demonstrated the creation of a new scholarly class, a group of individuals with shared political and social modes of self-identification, particularly among religious and legal scholars. Recently, Abdurrahman Atçıl has shown that at the turn of the sixteenth century, scholars became aware of their social group as a self-sustaining class, based mostly on their profession, and with some political power.⁶⁷ Atçıl traces institutional transformations in the religious hierarchy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in particular the bureaucratization of the legal and religious scholarly production. Guy Burak also identifies a shift towards the consolidation of religious

⁶⁷ Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

scholars into a new social class. In contrast to Atçıl's work, Burak focuses on explaining the legal, ideological, and intellectual repercussions that the centralization of scholarly work about religious law had on the empire.⁶⁸ However, as much as Atçıl and Burak identify the formation of a new scholarly class within the empire, their narrative derives the process of class formation from the sultan's personality, the support and opposition created around the sultan's policies, and, once again, from their artificial assumption of the clarity of the sultan's political project. As I show in chapter 2 in the case of the configuration of an urban identity, the dynamics that prompted scholars were the result of contending political projects, errors and improvisation in enacting of new policies, and the expansion of bureaucratic function across old and new social actors.

Understanding the importance of class formation in the early modern Ottoman Empire adds considerable depth to the discussion of patronage as it provides collective and individual agency to political actors other than the sultan. This is not to say that I intend to disregard the findings of existing scholarly works that have successfully reconstructed the ways in which the court and other elites promoted the creation of cultural and material wealth for the empire. Gülrü Necipoğlu's analysis of artistic patronage during the age of Suleiman I demonstrates the centrality of the office of the grand vizier in promoting particular forms of arts and crafts according to specific political agendas.⁶⁹ Similarly, Gönül A. Tekin's survey of Ottoman literature under Mehmet II provides an overview of the creation of a court literature by a group of elite in competing literary salons.⁷⁰ Even more important for the purposes of this dissertation, Walter G.

⁶⁸ Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Ḥanafī School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶⁹ Necipoğlu, "A Kanun for the State."

⁷⁰ Tekin, "Fatih Devri Edebiyatı."

Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı have recently mapped an Ottoman emotional economy in the poetic worldview of the early modern Ottoman world, particularly as it appears in the tropes of Ottoman lyric poetry.⁷¹

The work of these scholars, among others, is an indispensable foundation of my analysis. My intent here is to problematize the process by which these practices of patronage and the representation of the sultan at their core was discussed, debated, and eventually canonized. Indeed, this chapter presents those same patronage relations from the perspective of class configuration. In order to do so, I focus on three main classes of poets, which I have divided into poets who came to the Ottoman lands as refugees, members of the local political and economic elites, and scholars with mid-level bureaucratic appointments. In other words, instead of highlighting the amounts of their rewards or the nature of their successes, I focus on each poet's reliance on court patronage. Consequently, this approach distinguishes poets and scholars based on their level of independence from court patronage. The basic assumption behind this approach is that rewards had different impact, and therefore different implications, depending on the social class of the poet in a given moment. Varying degrees of independence or external support resulted in different liberties for the poet. Each poet's freedom of action was contingent on whether he was fully reliant on the patronage garnered by his work in order to survive, or whether he was capable of acting with some autonomy, protected by sources of revenue independent of his literary craft. It is important to remember that many poets were scholars or bureaucrats as well as members of the emerging class that Atçıl and Burak describe.

⁷¹ Andrews and Kalpaklı, "Ottoman Love."

In order to disentangle the class dynamics at play in the production of a new imperial political culture during the late fifteenth century, I focus on a group of individuals from different classes who interacted with each other through their literary works. My close reading of these interactions intends to provide a sample of the dynamics that resulted in the creation of a literary language as a means to communicate political ideas. In the rest of this chapter, I will draw a general overview of three classes of poets. This characterization aims to give a context for the interactions explored in subsequent chapters. However, these are not rigid categories, and as I explain throughout this dissertation, some poets were able (or were forced by circumstances) to move from one class to another throughout their career.

Class, Reward and Literary Canon

Previous scholarship has drawn much of its evidence from the study of sixteenth-century biographical dictionaries and an incomplete register of gifts and other awards given by the court. As mentioned above, biographical dictionaries represent complex discursive constructions by poets and bureaucrats of Selim I, Suleiman I, and Selim II's reigns who had vested interests in the production of encyclopedic works on Ottoman poets, past and present.⁷² These authors' commentaries on patronage should not be considered in relation to the material and political realities of their topics or contents, but rather should be considered in relation to the realities of the authors themselves. The registers, in turn, offer information from the imperial court's expenses in general to subjects who were granted or awarded recognition during specific years. The *Draft Copy of the Register of Gifts, Alms, Honors, and Others (Defter-i Müsvedat-i İn-āmāt ve*

⁷² Kuru, "Sex in the Text," 151–61.

Taşaduḳḳat ve Teşrifāt ve Gayrihi, hereafter the *Draft*) records the amount of resources that Bayezid II's court spent on rewards and gifts granted to poets who presented panegyrics to the sultan during the years between Muharrem 909 and Zilhicce 917 (June-July 1503 and February-March 1512 respectively).⁷³ The *Draft* was prepared by Ruznāmçeci Hızır Beg, and it contains the gifts given to artists, ambassadors, statesmen, and other members of the court. The register considers poets as a separate category from other artists.⁷⁴

Gifts from the court were most often monetary (cash or a pension in *aspers*) and/or a robe of honor (*hil'at*). The amount of each grant oscillates between 2000 and 3000 aspers per occasion and poet, with some exceptional cases involving 500, 1500, or 5000 aspers. The robes, when described, were embroidered (*münaḳkaş*), spotted garment (*benek cāme*), or squared broadcloth (*mürabba-çuka*). In addition to the type of rewards granted, the register records whether the poet presented a panegyric. However, there is no indication why one poet was rewarded more than others, either in the amount of aspers, or the addition of a robe. The *Draft* lists the grants for two identifiable periods: June-July 1503 and February-March 1512. In 1503, poets presented panegyrics nineteen times, with some poets being rewarded more than once. The total amount of cash spent by the court (excluding robes) was 44,000 aspers for the first period of five years. For the second

⁷³ “Defter-i Müsvedat-i İn’āmāt ve Taşaduḳḳat ve Teşrifāt ve Gayrihi” MS Muallim Cevdet 0.71, İstanbul Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı, İstanbul (henceforth, *Draft*). İsmail Erünsal has published a transcription of this document, although only for the entries related to poets and/or of interest to the history of Turkish literature. See Erünsal, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi’nin Arşiv Kaynakları I. II. Bayezid Devrine Ait Bir İn’amat i,” 303–42. In addition to Erünsal, this document had been partially published or employed by other scholars focusing not only on poets but also on other subjects of the sultan, among these are Muallim Cevdet, Rıfki Melul Meriç, Tayyin Gökbilgin, Şahabeddin Tekindağ. For a list of these scholars and their works see Erünsal, 304.

⁷⁴ Halil İnalçık published together with his study two tables indicating poets presenting poems to the sultan and rewards received as part of his study on patronage and poetic composition in the Ottoman Empire. See İnalçık, *Şair ve Patron*, 72–83. For a pioneering use of this document to calculate Gazali's income in gifts. See Selim Kuru, “A Sixteenth Century Scholar: Deli Birader and His ‘Dāfi Ü’l-Gumüm ve Rāfi Ü’l-Humüm” (PhD. Diss., Harvard University, 2000).

period, twelve poets presented panegyrics. The total amount for this two-year period, without counting robes, was 30,500 aspers.

The total amount of aspers dedicated by the court to individuals related to literary production (presenting poems, compiling books, or presenting them) is close to 500,000 (ca. 493,000) aspers. The lowest amount given is 400 and the highest 10,000 (only one instance). If one remembers that the highest academic position in a madrasah was paid 50 aspers a day, the income of a madrasah teacher (*müderris*) of the highest academic institutions was approximately 18,250 aspers a year.⁷⁵ Pensions oscillated between 1000 aspers a month and 55,000 aspers a year. Ghazali's life story offers a good example of a contemporary poet and scholar, and his income. Ghazali was able to earn 20 aspers a day as a madrasah teacher (*müderris*). Then, he obtained 25 to 30 aspers a day as a courtier. After Prince Korkud's death he received 50 aspers daily, 30 aspers as a teacher in a madrasah and 20 aspers as its administrator. Şeyh Cāmī, by contrast, offers a well-known example of having received a continuous pension for his literary and intellectual endeavors. According to Latīfī, Şeyh Cāmī received an annual pension of 1000 florin by Bayezid II. Latīfī most likely refers to Venetian ducats, worth about 55 aspers each.⁷⁶ While the *Draft* shows that panegyrics and poetic production were highly rewarded in the Ottoman court, it registers a very limited number of poems and forms of reward or benefit.

⁷⁵ See Richard Repp, "Some Observations on the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy" in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis; Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 20.

⁷⁶ Latifi and Canım, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 142. For the asper/ducat equivalence see Halil Sahillioğlu, "Akçe," *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1982). As cited by Kuru, "Deli Birader," 29. Selim S. Kuru has also further detailed Gazali's income including a study of the register in the manuscript for his forthcoming book *Unruly Acts of Passion*. I am thankful to him for sharing it with me.

Panegyric poetry was only one of many literary genres consumed by and produced for Ottoman elites. According to the register, poets mostly received monetary rewards for their panegyric poetry, but other evidence reveals how lyric poetry and romance could likewise contribute to poet's fame and renown. For instance, Mihrî Hatun (d. 1515), Amasyan poetess, received in 1508 a total of 3000 aspers for her collected poems (*dīvān*) which she presented to Bayezid II.⁷⁷

Poets regularly interacted with each other by responding to each other's poems through the practice of *nazire*, or *imitatio*. Together with the compilation of these poetic responses into manuscript volumes, the increasing representation of an emotional economy based on the sultan as the beloved, granter of benefits and rewards, led to the creation of a community of poets with the necessary textual tools, such as dictionaries, compendiums of exempla, and works of literary criticism, to produce an Ottoman literary canon in the sixteenth century.⁷⁸

The solidification of an Ottoman literary canon derived from new textual tools available to poets and intellectuals as much as it was part of the formation of new political and social classes within the empire. The political developments of the late fifteenth century, the conquest of Constantinople, the territorial and administrative expansion of the empire, and the incorporation of new political actors within the court produced a shifting system of patronage and intellectual production. The political histories of the Ottoman Empire record the sultan's attempt to check the political power of his subjects by strengthening certain factions within the imperial court. Although most

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that she received the same amount of aspers on two other occasions, each for a panegyric. See Didem Havlioğlu, *Mihrî Hatun: Performance, Gender Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017), 87–88.

⁷⁸ Kuru, "The Literature of Rum"; Andrews, "Starting Over Again," 15–40.

sultans have been identified as supporting the Janissary corps, others seemed to have yielded to the local nobility, the alliances in the court were fluid, the result of ad hoc negotiations rather than strict adherence to a single policy.⁷⁹

Bayezid II, for example, supported the Janissary corps, yet also appointed members of the powerful Anatolian households to important positions.⁸⁰ Eventually, the Janissary corps forced him to abdicate in favor of his son, Selim I.⁸¹ The story of these shifting alliances has been represented mostly in terms of the capacity of a sultan to seize the full monopoly of power within the imperial court, treating other figures vying for control almost as rebels, if never quite calling them that. If we were to abandon reading the narrative from the sultan's viewpoint, the result would inevitably be a history of imperial formation based on the interactions, violent at times, between classes attempting to survive the expansion and consolidation of Ottoman power. One aspect of this story resides, I argue, in the monopoly of language. Indeed, the apparent homogeneity of themes and language in the narrative sources written at the end of the fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth centuries is a testament to the Ottoman elite's success in consolidating a mode of expression that invariably tells the same story: a teleology of Ottoman rule with God and the sultan at its core.⁸²

Poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were members of existing social classes. They were, for the most part, not poets exclusively, nor were they devoid of

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Imber's remarks on Mehmet II and Bayezid II: "The vizieral appointments of Mehmed II and Bayezid II indicate that these sultans were still careful to harness local dynastic interests to Ottoman service." Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, 162.

⁸⁰ Imber, 161.

⁸¹ Imber, 258.

⁸² While the first iteration of this Ottoman teleology occurs in Aḥmedī's *İskendernāme* (see below), it often resurfaces in subsequent histories of the Ottoman dynastic rule. For the two standard surveys of the Ottoman historiographical tradition, see Victor Lois Ménage, "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 168–79.; Halil İnalcık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *ibidem*, 152–67.

family ties and heritage. On the contrary, their background determined their education, and in turn their education provided many of them with the chance to be noted by the sultan or other patrons. Indeed, most poets were scholars and bureaucrats. In the late fifteenth century, the Ottoman elite seized the literary language. For Ottoman elites of the fifteenth century, language in verse and prose was an important means for the creation of meaning, and thus a prime space for enacting politics. Poetry had the spiritual capacity to communicate truth, and truth, inasmuch as it was an attribute of the divine, encompassed every aspect of the believer's life.

The formation of a class of Ottoman poets with a semi-professional status within the bureaucracy resulted from the interaction of multiple classes of intellectuals. It began, as İnalcık shows, with the arrival of poets from neighboring courts. However, the migration of poets from one court to another did not result in the direct adaptation of the Persian tradition, but rather in the creation of new circumstances. Members of local families, who had the means and expectations to learn, traveled to both the Persian and Arab hubs of intellectual knowledge. They trained with local scholars and graduated from the burgeoning Ottoman madrasahs. By the mid-fifteenth century, Anatolian poets were poets in their own right, writing in Ottoman as much as in Persian. They had also developed their own dynamics with the Ottoman court. Many of these poets became members of the imperial court and were engaged in other forms of knowledge production, including religious commentaries, manuals for scribal duties, and diplomatic correspondence. Some of them served as advisers to the court and became patrons of poets themselves. And at the turn of the sixteenth century, these poets supported the appearance of new poets from classes below theirs. For the purpose of this dissertation, I

have identified three main groups, or classes of poets that led to the eventual professionalization of Ottoman poetry, namely, poets seeking refuge at the Ottoman court, poets who belonged to the local Anatolian nobility, and poets who depended on their appointments within the imperial bureaucracy.

Refugee Poets

The first major influx of poets moving into the Ottoman courtly system occurred as a result of the collapse and conquest of other Anatolian principalities in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. I refer here to a courtly system and not just to an Ottoman imperial court because, particularly at this time, both the central court of the sultanate and the provincial courts of prince governors benefitted from the flow of scholars and poets. Moreover, the movement of scholars from adjacent principalities, mainly Germiyan, coincided with, and partly resulted from, Timur's invasion of Anatolia and the defeat of Ottoman sultan Bayezid I in 1402. The defeat of Bayezid I left the Ottoman principality in a state of total war between contestants to the throne, and civil strife ensued.⁸³ With the main Ottoman court dispersed, the Ottoman courtly system paradoxically became even more relevant as each of Bayezid II's sons held court, behaving as if he were already the legitimate successor to the throne. This multi-centered courtly system resonated with the Seljuk tradition of allowing the sons of a ruler to govern their territories as autonomous principalities, which prefigured the political fragmentation of Anatolia during the so-called Beylik period.

⁸³ Dimitris Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1–11.

Scholars and poets from Germiyan and other Anatolian principalities oscillated between various courts, serving different patrons and trying to adapt their new homes to the models familiar to them. The signature example of this time is Aḥmedī (d. 1413), a Germiyan poet who first moved to Süleyman Çelebi's court in Edirne circa 1403, and after the latter's death in 1411, continued to serve the Ottomans under Mehmet I (d. 1421). Among other works, Aḥmedī composed a versified story of Alexander the Great with a post-script praising the Ottoman dynasty and a manual for letter writing (I will discuss the manual of letter writing in chapter 4). Aḥmedī's *Book of Alexander* (*İskendernāme*) is among the most studied texts of the early Ottoman Empire.⁸⁴ The section of this work about the Ottomans introduced the dynasty for the first time discursively and presented it as a culmination of just and legitimate Islamic rule vis-à-vis the rule of Mongol leaders descending from Genghis Khan.⁸⁵ Aḥmedī compilation of letters and manual for writing them, on the other hand, regulated official correspondence and instructed Ottoman subjects in the epistolary arts of the time, placing the Ottoman court among the concert of Islamic nations.⁸⁶ Aḥmedī brought with him models of patronage and rulership and attempted to inform his new masters of them, both in the poem of Alexander and in his manual for letter writing.

Fifteenth-century poet Şeyhī (d. 1428), who is praised in the biographical dictionaries as one of the fathers of Ottoman poetry, adds a certain sense of

⁸⁴ Aḥmedī, *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids against the Infidels*, ed. Kemal Silay (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Dimitris Kastritsis, "The Alexander Romance and the Rise of the Ottoman Empire," in *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia*, (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2016), 243–82.

⁸⁵ Baki Tezcan, "The Memory of the Mongols," in *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future*, ed. Erdem Çipa and Emine Fetvacı (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁸⁶ For letter writing as international relations see Cihan Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Cihan Yüksel Muslu, "Attempting to Understand the Language of Diplomacy between the Ottomans and the Mamluks (1340s-1512)," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30 (2013): 253–58.

exceptionality based on talent.⁸⁷ The biography of Şeyhî is different in each biographical dictionary, particularly in relation to his dismissal from Murat II's court. Nonetheless, all the accounts agree that Şeyhî was an apothecary of some renown who was asked to treat the sultan on campaign, earning his favor and eventually becoming the king of poets of his time. It remains unclear how a medical practitioner, who entered the court thanks to his skill in healing the sultan managed, to remain there as a poet. Given that Şeyhî's biography is preserved only in biographical dictionaries of poets, as is the case of other individuals who were both scholars and poets, we can only assume that the biographers highlighted the role of their poetic skills for rhetorical purposes. Nevertheless, Şeyhî's prominence and notoriety as a poet and not as an apothecary is unquestionable.

Before the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, migration from the provincial courts of Anatolia provided the courts of Ottoman princes with a steady stream of scholars with skill in composing prose and verse for various purposes. These scholars produced a variety of literary, diplomatic, and didactic works for the Ottoman sultans and princes. These include not only poets already established in the courts of the Turkish begs such as Aḥmedî or Aḥmed-i Da'î, but also of other individuals who moved up and down social strata, such as Şeyhî.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Faruk Timurtaş, "Şeyhî'nin Şöhreti ve Tesiri," 86–87; Günay Kut, "Ahmed-I Dai," *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1989).

⁸⁸ For the importance of Şeyhi, see Timurtaş, "Şeyhî'nin Şöhreti ve Tesiri." For the life and works of Aḥmed-i Da'î, see Gönül Alpay Tekin, *Aḥmed-i Dā'î and His Çengnâme An Old Ottoman Mesnevi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Günay Kut, "Ahmed-I Dai," *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1989).

Noble Poets

The consolidation of Ottoman power in Anatolia after the civil strife of 1405 and the consequent submission of rival Anatolian principalities allowed the Ottoman court system to incorporate both scholars and skilled individuals from said courts and descendants of their previously ruling families and elites. The tension created by dynasties that ruled before the advent of the Ottomans but had become subjects of their empire has been mainly explored in relation to the local Anatolian nobility's monopoly on the position of the grand vizierate or its tensions with the emerging palace educated corps.⁸⁹ The tension, in terms of its political importance, is also a prime difference between the policies of Mehmet II, who limited the role of these families in the imperial administration (e.g. the dismissal of the Çandarlı family) and the succession struggle between Bayezid II and Cem Sultan.

The changing balance of power between the imperial family, the palace corps, the newly emerging bureaucratic and scholarly class, and local Anatolian families had an important impact in the formation of the Ottoman elite in the second half of the fifteenth century. Up until the sixteenth century, many of the individuals appointed to the most powerful and influential positions in the empire, and in particular to positions of teaching, were scholars trained in Bursa who had some family pedigree in the madrasah system or roots among the local elites of princely governorships, such as Bursa, Amasya, Manisa, and Konya. At the same time, recent converts with experience in administration were being appointed to positions of considerable administrative power. Save for a few exceptions such as grand vizier Mehmet Pasha, recent converts or members of the palace-educated corps did not produce much poetry. Scholars who were heirs to families with

⁸⁹ Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: an Introductory History to 1923* (London: Longman, 1997), 72-5.

some renown became prolific poets during the reigns of Mehmet II and Bayezid II. In other words, the class, family history, and social networks of poets drastically changed in this period, and most poets were young and well-educated members of a strong family with extended networks among the urban educated elite—no longer the wandering scholar of Murat II's reign who depended on his fame and recognition.

The study of patronage has focused on the dynamics established after Timur's victory over Bayezid I in 1402, searching for the origins of the Ottoman literary tradition in the adaptation of Persian models.⁹⁰ The model resulting from these studies places the sultan at the center of the imperial court as a mastermind who both rewards and punishes poets, keeping them close to the court by means of gifts and rewards. However, the model works only for the first half of the fifteenth century, when poets were indeed individuals relying mostly, if not solely, on their skill as poets. The incorporation of poets with ties to the local nobility, heirs of scholars and state administrators, drastically changed the system of patronage, since poetry was for them not the only means of sustenance, but only another expression of their education and skill. The only available sources apart from biographical dictionaries of the sixteenth century are two incomplete registers of gifts and rewards granted by the court during Bayezid II and Suleiman I. When considered in isolation, these sources seem to confirm the central role of the court in providing recognition for the Ottoman poet and, more importantly, a salary or monthly allowance. What has not been considered is the drastically different historical conditions of the poets, if not the gifts. An allowance of one thousand aspers paid in recognition of a

⁹⁰ İnalçık, "The Origins of Classical Ottoman Literature," 5–75. İnalçık follows closely the work of Maria Subtelny for the Timurid case. See Maria Eva Subtelny, "Socioeconomic Bases of Cultural Patronage under the Later Timurids," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 4 (1988): 479–505. In a similar vein, see Subtelny's Weberian reading of the Timurids, Maria Eva Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition. Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

poem has a different significance for a poet taking refuge in a foreign court after his previous lord lost his lands than to a trained scholar teaching at a madrasah, aspiring to a position in the imperial council, and whose father and brother are respected scholars with regular salaries and income. Why did the biographical dictionaries of the sixteenth century seem to ignore this difference and look back into the fifteenth century with melancholy, longing for a past where patronage was more generous? One of the many answers resides, I believe, in the emergence of a new type of poet at the turn of the sixteenth century: the bureaucrat poet.

Bureaucrat Poets

The noble poets of the fifteenth century, regardless of their relative autonomy from the patronage system of poetry, invested much energy in creating examples of good poetry. Indeed, as I will argue in chapters 2, 3, and 4, noble poets were aware of the political, spiritual, and social significance of poetic composition. Their distance from the role of the dependent poet—the refugee poet who had to maintain a high level of quality in order to remain welcome in a foreign court—noble poets were able to thrive in poetry as part of their other intellectual, political, and spiritual enterprises. They were scholars, politicians, scribes, members of powerful families and part of an educated elite that had high standards for poetic composition and intellectual production at large. Poetry, as I have explained in the introduction, had an important and honest spiritual role; the execution of poetry was meaningful both in its aesthetic and intellectual dimensions as much as in the spiritual/religious and emotional levels.⁹¹

⁹¹ Andrews and Kalpaklı, “Ottoman Love.”

Noble poets of the fifteenth century, regardless of their success and skill, also became patrons of poets. Amongst these, Bayezid II's childhood friend, Mu'eyed-zāde Abdürâhman Çelebi is an excellent example. Ca'fer Çelebi is another (see below). Towards the end of his life, Ca'fer Çelebi became a patron of poets. Mesihî (d. 1512) and Zâfî (d. 1546), two of the paramount poets of the sixteenth century, received his favor and patronage.⁹² Ca'fer Çelebi established a micro-court that emulated those held at the imperial or princely palaces, but in contrast to his own more privileged experience. He supported poets who, regardless of their other profession, lacked any secure form of sustenance beyond the favor of a powerful man close to the court, *i.e.* a patron. The fostering of poetry and the creation of skilled poets who worked as bureaucrats of the imperial court or its subsidiaries (the micro-courts of princes or other lords) helped incorporate poetic production into the multi-layered path of imperial service, alongside scholarship and penmanship. When a patron recognized a poet, he gave him the means to survive and produce his works and provided him with a social space to connect with more powerful patrons, so a poet could ultimately reach the imperial court. The new system also created a distance between poet and sultan. The effect was to have the full system of bureaucracy incarnated in the more powerful subjects of the sultan, who mediated between the poet and the ruler.⁹³ By the fifteenth century, the system of patronage had become imperial, regardless of external features that were similar to previous periods such as the performance intrinsic to ceremonies of gift giving and the resulting registers. Biographers of this new era, like Latîfî and 'Aşık Çelebi, had no

⁹² See Sooyong Kim's analysis of the material conditions of patronage in the sixteenth century in relation to Zâfî's career. Kim, "Minding the Shop," 56–111.

⁹³ This distancing of the sultan from direct poetic patronage coincides with the process of the sultan's ceremonial isolation within the imperial palace, as documented by Gülrü Necipoğlu in her study of the imperial palace in Istanbul. Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Palace*, 3–30.

choice but to mourn the old times when poetry, patronage, and recognition were not yet another part of the massive machinery of imperial bureaucracy.

The Chancellor's Poets

While I include other poets and scholars in this study, I have mainly focused on poets who had contact with Ca'fer Çelebi. As I explain below, he was a prolific poet, a religious scholar, a member of the bureaucracy, a patron of poets, and an important political actor. More interestingly, he stands at the confluence of different classes of poets. He criticized Velīyüddīn Aḥmed Paşa (d. 1496), the paramount poet of the previous reign and a member of Bursa's elite, who was a scholar dependent on imperial favor. On the other end of the spectrum, he supported new poets as a patron, such as Mesihī and Zātī, who would become two of the most recognized poets of the sixteenth century. Ca'fer Çelebi positioned himself as the new poet laureate by diminishing Aḥmed Paşa's accomplishment, even though Aḥmed was considered one of the founders of Ottoman lyric poetry.

Aḥmed Paşa belonged to the generation of well-educated poets trained in the Ottoman capitals before Istanbul. Despite Aḥmed Paşa's literary renown, historians of Ottoman literature have never been able to establish a clear chronology of his life.⁹⁴ He was born to an influential family in Edirne and trained in Bursa. His father served as a military judge (*kazı-asker*), one of the most powerful positions in the empire, under

⁹⁴ See Karabey, *Ahmet Paşa*, 11-12; Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, 40-58. For Aḥmed Paşa's preeminent position among Anatolian poets in the fifteenth century, see Ali Nihat Tarlan, "Fatih Devri Şairlerinden Aḥmed Paşa" *Tohum* 61 (1971): 8-15. Every major survey of Ottoman literature devotes some attention to his poetry. See, for instance, Mehmet Fuad Köprülü, "Turks: Literature" *EII*; Günay A. Kut, "Turkish Literature in Anatolia," in Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (ed.), *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilisation* 2 (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2002), 25-45; Gonül A. Tekin, "Othmanli: Literature" in *EI2*.

Murat II (r. 1421-44 and 1446-51). At this time, he also aided the sultan in writing his correspondence and edicts.⁹⁵ Possibly thanks to his family's position, Aḥmed Paşa gained access to the court and eventually became Mehmet II's preceptor and boon companion.⁹⁶ Accused of immoral behavior and abuse of power, he was later deposed.⁹⁷ While the exact date of his dismissal is unclear, we know he spent some time in Istanbul's prison Yedi Kule and was subsequently exiled to Bursa. He remained in that city until his death in 1497.

In contrast to Aḥmed Paşa's roots in Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne, Ca'fer Çelebi came from the provincial elite of western and central Anatolia. His father was heir to an influential family of Amasya, and consequently was appointed tutor to Bayezid II, during the future sultan's 30 years as prince governor. Ca'fer Çelebi grew up close to the prince's circle before moving to Bursa to be trained in its madrasahs by some of the empire's most renowned scholars of the empire. He held various appointments as a madrasah teacher before reaching the court and becoming imperial chancellor, a position similar to that held by Aḥmed Paşa's father. He served both under Bayezid II and Selim I, becoming a highly respected scribe, an influential statesman, and a generous patron of poets. After

⁹⁵ Mecdî Mehmet Efendi, *Hadâyikü's-Şakāyik* (Istanbul: Darü't-Tabaatü'l-Amire, 1852), 216. This is the Ottoman translation of Tāşköprüzāde Aḥmet b. Muştafā's *Şaqā'iq al-Nu'mānīyah fī 'ulamā' al-Dawlah al-'Uthmānīyah*. Mecdî's translation sometimes expands on the biographical entries in Tāşköprüzāde; the information about the scribal responsibilities of Aḥmed Paşa's father appears only in the Ottoman translation.

⁹⁶ Our sources differ on Aḥmed Paşa's positions at court, yet all agree that he became the imperial preceptor. Nişāncı Mehmed Paşa gives a summary of his appointments. According to Nişāncı Mehmed Paşa, Aḥmed Paşa was first religious judge (*kaḍī*) in Bursa, military judge (*kaḍī'asker*), royal preceptor, and finally vizier. He was later appointed *sancaḡ begi* of Bursa. See Nişāncı Mehmed Paşa, *Tārīḥ-i Nişāncı Mehmed Paşa* (Istanbul: Tabhane-yi Amire, 1863), 178. Katip Çelebi also cites Aḥmed Paşa as one of Mehmet II's preceptors. For a transcription of his chronological tables, see Hazi Halife Mustafa, *Cronologia Historica Scritta in Lingua Turca, Persiana, e Araba*, trans. Rinaldo Carli (Venice: Andrea Poletti, 1697), 195.

⁹⁷ For Aḥmed Paşa's biography, see Elias John Wilkinson Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry* (London: Messrs. Lucac and Company, 1958), 2: 40-58, which used the major biographical dictionaries of poets of the sixteenth century to craft a composite portrait.

rumors spread of his involvement in a rebellion of the Janissaries against Selim I, he was stripped of his position and executed in 1516.⁹⁸

Ahmed Paşa, on the one hand, and Ca'fer Çelebi on the other, represent two different generations of imperial subjects struggling to remain influential at court during the second half of the fifteenth century. Bayezid II governed Amasya for almost thirty years, and so, when he ascended to the throne, members of his provincial court moved with him to the capital. The overlapping of his father's court and his own brought about a new and precarious balance of power. Local factions, such as the old families from Edirne and Bursa that had recently relocated to Istanbul and the burgeoning class of palace-educated bureaucrats, clashed with the newly arrived members of the Amasya court. This clash took the form of political rivalries, giving rise to discussions about the role of merit, education, and talent in the appointment of offices and the distribution of rewards. Poetry and literary composition became central tools in this struggle. At the turn of the sixteenth century, a new generation of poets came of age. This generation was completely dependent on their craft and the patronage it garnered, and mostly derived from the newly-formed class of bureaucrat-scholars.

A Generational Strife

Modern surveys of Ottoman literature have placed poets such as Şeyhî, Ahmed Paşa, and Ca'fer Çelebi within particular reigns. Ahmed Paşa, for instance, has always been considered a poet of Mehmet II's time.⁹⁹ The centrality of biographical dictionaries

⁹⁸ İsmail Erünsal, *Life and Works*, XXIII-XLVI.

⁹⁹ See Ali Nihat Tarlan, "Fatih Devri Şairlerinden Ahmed Paşa," *Tohum* 61 (1971): 8–15; Fuat Köprülü, "Turks: Literature," *Encyclopaedia of Islam I*, n.d.; Kut, "Turkish Literature in Anatolia," 25–45; Gönül Alpay Tekin, "Othmanli: Literature," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, n.d.

together with the historiographical tendency to chronicle the history of the Ottoman Empire by the sultans and their reigns has contributed to this approach. The intrinsic relation between the sovereign and the Ottoman elite has helped to establish a direct causality between projects of governability sponsored by the court and their cultural products, including the visual arts, the crafts, major architectural projects, and court literature.¹⁰⁰ The vision of a state-sponsored and centralized imperial project as the epicenter of the court and its politics has therefore produced a rigid periodization and an almost unidirectional dynamic between the sovereign and his subjects. Court poetry, and in particular panegyric, has consequently been considered as a direct product of this ruler-ruled relationship. However, literary works composed by statesmen and aimed at audiences other than the sultan suggest a much more dynamic network of communication. Practices such as writing imitative responses (*naẓīres*) or making subtle allusions to other authors within larger narrative works reveals the existence of a tight community of readers. Selim S. Kuru has shown how the availability of new tools for the standardization of Turkish as a literary language helped forge a new and distinct literary community that self-identified as the poets of Rum (*Şu'arā-i Rūm*).¹⁰¹

Aḥmed Paşa's prominence in contemporary sources such as Ca'fer Çelebi's *Book of Passion* (*Heves-nāme*) confirms the distinction he had already achieved by the end of the fifteenth century. The *Heves-nāme* refers to Aḥmed Paşa without any patronymic, title, or any other mark of identification, suggesting that it was already clear by that time which "Aḥmed" was the one considered a poet of renown. Nonetheless, the primacy of

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, Necipoğlu, "A Kanun for the State," 195–216.

¹⁰¹ In Kuru's analysis, the boom of diverse literary genres produced a series of possibilities for establishing new and flourishing local literary works, which in turn became the canon of Ottoman literature in the centuries to come. See Kuru, "The Literature of Rum," 548–92.

Aḥmed Paşa during the sixteenth century as the founding father of Anatolian Turkish poetry exemplifies the centrality of new textual tools in the making of an Anatolian literary identity. The main sources for reconstructing the impact of Aḥmed Paşa as a well-known poet are the biographical dictionaries of poets written in the fifteenth century, published at least fifty years after the latter's death. Contemporary anthologies of poetry preserve only sparse details. Aḥmed Paşa's poetry figures much less in Eğridirli Hacı Kemal's *Cāmiu'n-Nezāir* (1512) than it does in Edirneli Nazmi's *Mecmua'i'n-Nezāir* (1524). Similarly, Sehi Beg (d.1538) considers Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyḫī only briefly. By contrast, Laṭīfī (d. 1546) mentions them several times as exemplars of literary achievement.¹⁰² The role of Aḥmed Paşa was not yet fixed at the turn of the sixteenth century and his indisputable place, as one of the founders of the Ottoman literary canon is a sixteenth-century construction.

The vague, yet apparently intelligible reference to Aḥmed Paşa in *Book of Passion* also informs us of the beginnings of a community of literati who were able to recognize the work of their fellows, comment upon them, and criticize and attempt to surpass each other. These attempts are identified, at least in the anecdote summarized above, as the reason of composition for the *Book of Passion*. Significantly, the text mentions neither the court nor the sultan. This does not suggest an independence from court politics or patronage in terms of isolation, but rather an autonomy that resulted in a space of mutual interaction.

Ca'fer Çelebi's challenge to Aḥmed Paşa also betrays a generational difference between the two poets, and indeed the appearance of a new class of learned poets that

¹⁰² Laṭīfī mentions Aḥmed Paşa around twenty-five times in entries on other poets. Many of these passages link Aḥmed Paşa with Şeyḫī as exemplars of literary merit. Aḥmed Paşa, Şeyḫī, and Necāti Beg are the poets, beside the sultans, whose names are the most mentioned in Laṭīfī's biographical dictionary.

should be considered superior to the older generation of less capable poets. Indeed, Ca'fer Çelebi chooses to attack the representatives of two different generations and two different classes of poet. According to Çelebi, Şeyhî is the provincial doctor who became a court poet by coincidence, talented but uneducated; while Aḥmed Paşa is the poet without talent, attached to the court for his training and mastery of the technical aspects of poetry. Laṭîfî's entry for Ca'fer Çelebi gives a hint of the nature of this interpretative community, defined as a space of mutual awareness and communication. In the first edition of his work, Laṭîfî describes Ca'fer Çelebi as a chancellor whose equal has not yet been seen in the lands of Rum, eloquent both in verse and prose.¹⁰³ He praises Ca'fer Çelebi as the author of an excellent *divân*, in addition to the *Heves-nâme*, which, from beginning to end (*min maṭla' ilâ maḳta'*), is full of eloquent verses and new meanings.¹⁰⁴ In the second edition of his dictionary Laṭîfî further explains what he means in a revealing revision of the first edition. In the first edition, Laṭîfî had explained that:

Nesl-i 'Osmân vilâyet-i Rûm'a muṭaşarrıf olalı nişâncılık maḳâmına aña nazîr gelmemişdür.

Since the House of Osman took control over the land of Rum there has been no equal to him in the position of chancellor.¹⁰⁵

In the second edition, Laṭîfî adds the following words to the previous sentence:

Nesl-i 'Osmân vilâyet-i Rûm'a muṭaşarrıf olalı nişâncılık maḳâmına aña nazîr ü 'adîl bir münşî-i elfâz-ı belîğa ve mümlî-i ma'âni-i bedî'a gelmemişdür

Since the House of Osman took control over the land of Rum, no one has been appointed to the position of chancellor that is equal to him or just as him, or who is such an expert on letter writing of such eloquent words and full of new meanings.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ For the two editions of Laṭîfî's biographical dictionary, see Andrews, “*The Tezkere-i Şu'arâ* of Latîfî.” Aḥmed Cevdet's 1896 edition mostly follows the earlier version with some extraordinary additions, marked as such in particular cases. Rıdvan Canım's edition, in turn, seems to represent in most cases the second edition of Laṭîfî's work. I thus have followed Cevdet's edition for Laṭîfî's first rendition of his biographical dictionary, and Canım's edition for the second one. See Andrews, “Osmanlı Metin Çalışmaları,” 35–58.

¹⁰⁴ Latîfî, *Tezkere-i Latîfî*, ed. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (Istanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1896), 117.

¹⁰⁵ Latîfî, 117–18.

¹⁰⁶ Latîfî, 209–12.

The new version explains Ca'fer Çelebi's exceptional position as a result of his original thinking and literary eloquence. Further additions explain Ca'fer Çelebi's qualities in terms of his literary virtue, capacity for explaining subtle points, and skill at establishing new meanings. The most interesting addition comes in Laṭīfī's conclusion to his entry on Ca'fer Çelebi.

Esnā-i manzūmāt-ı lisān-i Türki'de 'acep nazm-i pākdür ve kaḏḏ ü ta'yīb nazariyle nazār iden merd-i bī-idrākdur. Ta'rīf-i āḥara mevķūf u muḥtāc degül.

Among the most exalted verses of the Turkish language his were admirably pure. Whoever vituperates or slanders those verses is a man without understanding. He does not need, nor is he dependent on, others' appreciation.¹⁰⁷

Laṭīfī's clarifications imply the existence of a critical community commenting on Ca'fer Çelebi's work. Two important elements are worth highlighting: Ca'fer Çelebi was a poet, and a good one; others had criticized his work and Laṭīfī was defending him. In a nutshell, he was part a shared textual community wherein poetic criticism occurred, and consensus was constantly shifting. More importantly, this commentary was also about the intersection between different classes and generations of Ottoman elite subjects.

The Power of Poetry

By the end of the fourteenth century, Ca'fer Çelebi had succeeded both as an imperial bureaucrat and as a renowned poet and stylist, and was finally appointed imperial chancellor to both Bayezid II and Selim I. From a poet receiving patronage, Ca'fer Çelebi had become a patron of the arts.¹⁰⁸ Around the first decade of the fifteenth century, the

¹⁰⁷ Latifi, 210.

¹⁰⁸ For a compilation of poems dedicated to Ca'fer Çelebi see Fatma Meliha Şen, "Tâcîzâde Ca'fer Çelebi'nin (ö. 921/1515) çevresindeki şairler ve onun için yazılmış şiirler," in *Kitaplara Vakfedilen bir Ömre Tühfe*, ed. Hatice Aynur et al. (İstanbul: Ülke Armağan, 2014), 2:881-914.

poet Zātī (d. 1546) presented Ca'fer Çelebi a panegyric known as *deryā kasidesi*, a thirty-seven couplet long poem with both repeating rhyming elements (*redif*) and imagery related to the sea (*deryā*).¹⁰⁹ In it, Ca'fer Çelebi is addressed as a famous and trustworthy lord who has earned the right to become a vizier and then depicted as a benefactor of oceanic features, whose power extended over the limits of the earth and whose patronage blew like a wind offering protection until the Judgment day.¹¹⁰ Around the same time, Mesihī (d. 1512) composed another panegyric for Ca'fer Çelebi, already using his official position at the court to address him, that is, Lord Chancellor (*Nişāncı Paşa*).¹¹¹ In contrast to Zātī's sea-panegyric, Mesihī highlights his patron's command of words and writing skills, calling him "Lord Chancellor, prince of the realms of speech (*mīr-i iklīm-i suhan* [...] *Nişāncı Paşa*)."¹¹² By using the word *iklīm*, which refers to the seven world-regions or climates, Mesihī implies universality to the mastery of language possessed by Ca'fer Çelebi. This is apropos, since Ca'fer Çelebi was renowned for his skill in diplomatic correspondence. According to a register of the imperial court, Bayezid II

¹⁰⁹ This panegyric is known as *Derya Kasidesi* (sea-panegyric). I have especially benefitted from Mehmet Çavuşoğlu's Modern Turkish translation. See Mehmet Çavuşoğlu, "Kaside," *Türk Dili. Aylık Dil Dergisi* 52 (57-61): 1986.

¹¹⁰ For instance, see the thirteenth and fourteenth couplets: "Emīr-i lāyık-ı şadr-ı vezāret Ca'fer-i şādık/cihānda görmedi anuñ gibi bir nām-ver deryā/ Ne fülke ismeti bādi olursa bir nefes hemdem/kopınca tā kıyāmet virmeye ana zarar deryā."

¹¹¹ Literally, "Lord imperial seal bearer." I have preferred here Gibb's translation of the term, due to its concision. See Gibb's entry for Ca'fer Çelebi in Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, 1:263–85. The term *nişāncı*, however, is much more complex than its practical translation as chancellor reflects. The *nişāncı* was in charge of signing documents and edicts with the imperial seal. He had the right to sit at the Imperial Council (*Dīvān-i Hümayūn*) together with viziers and *defterdārs*, other high administrators and ministers. He was also in charge of the office of the *Reis'ül-küttap*, head of the clerks. See Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, "Reis'ül-Küttap," *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 700 697); also Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Nişancı," *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1988), 209–302.

¹¹² Gibb has translated this as "Lord of the Speech's Climate, the Nishānji Paşa high." Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, 243. For a transcription of the full poem, see Murat Karavelioğlu, ed., *Mecmûa-I Kasâid-I Türkiyye* (Istanbul: Titiz Yayınları, 2011), 118.

rewarded him for having written an official communication to the ruler of Egypt in 1503.¹¹³

Both Zāī's and Mesihī's poems speak of a patron who was at the top of the era's political structure, a man with direct influence in the court and the capacity to reward poets. Zāī knows, however, that power is rarely stable, and sometimes the wind of fortune blows in the wrong direction. Thus the poet ends his panegyric expressing his hope for his patron's fortune to continue rising:

*Ziyāde ola bahr-i devletiñ günden güne arta
Anuñ her kıtrası ola bir ulu mu'teber deryā*

May your ocean of fortune surge and increase day by day, so that each of its drops becomes a substantial sea.

The waves of this "sea of fortune" are not only the flow of generosity bestowed by the chancellor upon the poet, but the chancellor's prosperity within the imperial court. Indeed, by this time Ca'fer Çelebi had already navigated the shifting tides of imperial power. His high status is not only attested by his appointment to one of the highest offices at the Ottoman imperial court, but also by the fact that during his time in office the position of *nişāncı* was raised in profile until it ranked after only the grand vizier's office. Yet, his fortune was meant to change, and after holding the positions of *nişāncı* and *kazı'asker* for almost eighteen years, he was abruptly deposed and executed in 1515.¹¹⁴

While Aḥmed Paşa was a well-known poet by the time of his imprisonment, the moments of dire necessity that he experienced at the nadir of his career, together with his subsequent exile to Anatolia, seem to have increased his poetic production. It is in these later years that Aḥmed Paşa's literary pursuits are more visible at Istanbul's court. First,

¹¹³ Erünsal and Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, *Life & Works*, XXXII.

¹¹⁴ Erünsal and Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, XXXI.

Bayezid II asks Aḥmed Paşa to write an answer or *imitatio* to a series of lyric poems written by ‘Alī Şīr Nevāī (d. 1501), the poet par excellence as well as vizier of Herat’s Timurid court.¹¹⁵ Aḥmed Paşa was also appointed to Bursa around this time. Aḥmed Paşa’s *divān* includes as many panegyrics dedicated to Bayezid II as dedicated to Mehmet II, thirty for each of them. Aḥmed Paşa clearly made every effort to consolidate himself as the poet of the age, probably with the hope of returning to Istanbul.

The waning of Aḥmed Paşa's political career thus corresponds to its literary zenith, which is neither ironic nor accidental. It also coincides with the early years of Ca’fer Çelebi's presence at the court, a period when also Ca’fer Çelebi seems to have been a more prolific writer. Ca’fer Çelebi published his *Heves-nāme*, with its critique of Aḥmed Paşa, in 1493, three years before the latter's death (1496) and four years before he was appointed *nişāncı* (1497). While it is possible that Ca’fer Çelebi and Aḥmed Paşa never met in person, they were, in a sense, competing to become the major poet-courtier of the time. Together with a series of responses to Aḥmed Paşa's poems, the *Heves-nāme* represents Ca’fer Çelebi's conscious effort to displace Aḥmed Paşa as the unofficial poet laureate of the Ottoman court.

The life story of Ca’fer Çelebi unfolds at the epicenter of Ottoman politics. The chancellor's interactions with poets, scholars, the bureaucracy and the Ottoman family illustrate the social dynamics that articulated the formation of a new class of Ottoman poet, scholar, and bureaucrat. Indeed, as we see later in chapters 3 and 4, Ca’fer Çelebi and his family were aware of the power of language and its role in the consolidation of Ottoman power. During his tenure as imperial chancellor, his position and office of *nişāncı* rose above the post of imperial record-keeper (*defterdar*).

¹¹⁵ Karabey, *Ahmet Paşa*, 11–12.

The categorization of poets in relation to their autonomy from the imperial court, their material means and educational backgrounds serves to map the transformation of the Ottoman poet into a class of subject that ultimately belongs to the hierarchy of the empire. More importantly, the incorporation of poets and experts on language into the bureaucracy translated into their holding a monopoly over the language and the production of an intellectual canon that placed the ideal Ottoman polity in terms of tradition into every textual representation of the empire. In the chapters that follow, I trace examples of the interactions that gave place to the primacy of an Ottoman imperial language in the late fifteenth century, the ramifications these textual and linguistic interactions had on the social dynamics at the imperial court, the configuration of an imperial city, and the codification of bureaucratic language.

CHAPTER 2

Spaces of Poetry: Inhabiting Istanbul through Poetry after the Conquest

In his *Book of Passion's* (1493) iconic depiction of Constantinople, Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi (d. 1515) portrays the city's transformation after the Ottoman conquest in 1453. The body of the sultan (*vücūd-ı şāh*) is at the center of the city's revivification. His very presence strengthens the city and turns it into an unparalleled and timeless beauty.

When [Constantinople] became the imperial throne,
the shah's crown and seat honored her
She became powerful with the body of the shah
Gate after gate, the sea surrounded her
Like a supplicant who prostrates at the door
every ship in the harbor resembled a wooden bowl in her hand...¹¹⁶

While the sea remains at bay, separated from the city by her walls, and thirsty for its beauty and wealth, the fields that extend to the south into the mainland flourish with "trees, cypresses, and boxwood" in such abundance that all the fields "resemble Paradise" (*ķamu Cennet mişāli ravzalardur*).¹¹⁷ Walls and crenels become living, protective lovers, whose rival is the sea prostrated at the beloved's doorstep. The emotional economy of the Ottoman poetic worldview is put into motion effortlessly, as Constantinople becomes the king herself, and the sea-lover is the mendicant (*şāh ü gedā*) hoping for the king's generosity. The dynamics of the city are fueled by the sultan's power. He appears in only a single couplet, yet it is clear that his very physical existence, his body in the city (*vücūd-ı şāh*), is what articulates the life of the metropolis. Constantinople became seat of

¹¹⁶ Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, 105-7. The sections describing Constantinople were also published in transcription by Agah Sırrı Levend as part of a larger compilation of Ottoman city thrillers (*şehrengiz*). See Agah Sırrı Levend, *Türk Edebiyatında Şehr-Engizler ve Şehr-Engizlerde İstanbul* (Istanbul: Fethi Derneği, 1957).

¹¹⁷ Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, 118b.

the sultan's throne (*şehriyāruñ tahtgāhi*) only after a long period of reconstruction and adaptation. The reconstruction required tremendous resources, as shown by the inventory of the first religious judge of Istanbul, Hızır Beg, who reported that approximately 13 kilometers (lit. 342x82 *dhiras*) of the walls had to be repaired.¹¹⁸ In Ca'fer Çelebi's romance, one couplet, at least, reminds us of the material realities in the remaking of the city.

Outside the land walls there was a profound dyke
The wealth of the entire world was spent to dig it!
And beyond this ditch, for miles and miles
Clay and stone would grow tulips and roses...¹¹⁹

The works ordered by the sultan focused on rebuilding the city's defenses, probably heavily damaged after the successful siege by the Ottomans, as well as on repopulating the city and adapting it to Ottoman needs.¹²⁰ The imprint of the sultan's power was left visually in the city's landscape through the destruction of Byzantine structures and the construction of key civil and religious buildings.

The reconstruction plan of Constantinople was not immediately clear to everyone and was plagued with errors and improvisations. The most renowned example of the improvised nature of Constantinople's rebuilding is the construction of the sultan's palace. The new imperial residence was built upon one of the former centers of Byzantine authority, Forum Tauri of Theodosius I (d. 395). The palace was rushed into completion, and then, before its rooms were even inhabited, it was discarded for a new location, now at the top of one of the city's eastern hills. The New Palace (Yeni Saray, today's Topkapı

¹¹⁸ The report has been published in facsimile and translated into English by Halil İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul 1455. The Text, English Translation, Analysis of the Text, Documents* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2012), 633–35. The *dhira* is equal approximately to 67.3 cm. For a discussion of the varying measurements for the *dhira* see Mehmet Erkal, “Arşın,” *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1991), 411–13.

¹¹⁹ Ca'fer Çelebi, *Hevesnâme*, 116a–117b.

¹²⁰ For the architectural program of the reconstruction, see Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*.

Palace), perched on the Bosphorus, possessed both a visual and strategic significance that the first palace (Eski Saray, lit. Old Palace) lacked.¹²¹

Scholars have argued that the Islamic city developed without plan and structure vis-à-vis European metropoleis. In the case of Constantinople, İnalçık has shown the opposite by pointing out the division of the city into commercial and residential areas, the proliferation of mosques and infrastructure, as well as the segmentation of the city into administrative units, namely, the city's quarters. I have referred to this form of urbanization as the Ottoman inheritance from Anatolian and Islamic urban history. While there were indeed urban and infrastructural expectations for a city to be inhabited by a Muslim majority, I have refrained from using the term Islamic city. The term has been subject to revision and criticism, showing the diversity of the urban experience in the Islamic world.¹²² Nonetheless, a vision of Islam, however much diversified, informed its architectural elements and infrastructural projects. This vision was adapted from concrete antecedents, namely, other cities in the Islamic world and Turkish/Ottoman urban experiences. The way the needs and expectations of the new Ottoman inhabitants of the city were woven into Constantinople's urban fabric was, to a certain extent, improvised, constantly revisited, and updated according to the circumstances. However, fully banishing the idea of an Islamic city from scholarship posits similar dangers to the

¹²¹ The Old Palace was built over the ruins of a monastery and a church. Today, the space is occupied by Istanbul University's main campus. The palace was built from 1454-1457, and was used as the residence of former sultans' female relatives. The original building was burned down during Süleyman I's reign and a new building erected in its place. Nurhan Atasoy and Seyit Ali Kahraman, "Eski Saray Garden," Dumbarton Oaks' Middle East Garden Traditions, n.d., <https://www.doaks.org/resources/middle-east-garden-traditions/catalogue/C138>. See also Nurhan Atasoy, *A Garden for the Sultan: Gardens and Flowers in the Ottoman Culture* (Istanbul: Aygaz, 2002), 229–35.

¹²² André Raymon, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994): 3–18. For the Ottoman context, see Halil İnalçık, "Istanbul: An Islamic City," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 7–13. For a recent discussion of İnalçık's model, see Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 107–78.

uncritical use of the term by erasing Islam and its practice as a central question in the production of the Ottoman urban space.

In this chapter, I focus on the process of rebuilding Constantinople and the central role that, I argue, literary spatial descriptions had in the making of an Ottoman imperial capital. I first examine the development of urban spaces in Anatolia during the fifteenth century in order to highlight by contrast the shortcomings of Constantinople immediately after the conquest in its function as capital. The state of the city after the conquest was marked by absences. Ottoman poets, scholars, and members of the court, forced to move together with the court and the sultan, re-inhabited the damaged metropolis by adapting it into the conceptual ethos produced and reproduced in the literary world of the Ottoman ruling elite. The material needs of the city were embodied both in the continuity of buildings inherited from the conquered past and the absence of spaces expected in the capital of an Islamic empire. By incorporating Constantinople into the mechanics that articulated the Ottoman poetic and spiritual worldview, poets and scholars rendered the new urban space meaningful, consequentially prescribing how to interpret it and, ultimately, how to inhabit it.

A Land of Cities

The tensions and dynamics between the rural and urban environments of Anatolia after the withdrawal of Seljukid power strengthened the role of cities and empowered local elites. The principalities known as *beylik* became practically independent city-states with some control over the surrounding areas. Rural lands served as extensions of the urban warlords' authority, as a source of cavalry and irregular troops, and also as a

flexible space that connected each city to other cities while at the same time reinforcing the distances between them.¹²³ The spatial structure of the Anatolian *beyliks* did not change much after the Ottomans incorporated them as administrative provinces. As new hubs of social urban life, cities both attracted and repelled individuals and groups who easily shifted their allegiance and sense of belonging from one city to another. The fluid nature of the local identity of individuals whose spiritual and professional choices forced them into a life of mobility, such as dervishes, religious scholars, merchants, advanced craftsmen, and members of elite families, transformed the social fabric of the city as well as its material landscape. Dervish orders moved between cities seeking adepts and patronage. The city opened space for their lodges, and in turn local Sufi sheikhs established public foundations (*vakf*).¹²⁴ Other organizations and groups, including associations of skilled craftsmen, military commanders, members of the local ruling families, and eventually imperial authorities also commissioned buildings for the public good, such as soup kitchens (*imāret*), fountains, and baths.¹²⁵

Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the development of infrastructure in Anatolia became a form of imprinting one's own political and social preeminence onto a city. Public buildings helped regulate the social relations that occurred within their premises through protocol, etiquette, or simply by providing or limiting access to public spaces. Such protocols strengthened class divisions and social hierarchies while addressing public needs and expectations. The buildings themselves

¹²³ Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey: A General Survey of the Material and Spiritual Culture and History C. 1071-1330* (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1968), 189–202.

¹²⁴ Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, 42–71.

¹²⁵ Amy Singer, “Imarets,” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2012), 72–85; Rachel Goshgarian, “Opening and Closing: Coexistence and Competition in Associations Based on Futuwwa in Late Medieval Anatolian Cities,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (2013): 36–52.

restructured the urban landscape, helping the city-dweller map the relations that happened within it, visually learn them, remember them, and make them part of the citizen's daily life.¹²⁶ The presence or absence of these buildings translated into the efficacy of the ruler's power and consequently his capacity to rule over a city's population.

The New Rome

The importance of Istanbul and Constantinople, once the New (and Christian) Rome and later a center of Islamic power, has been extensively explored. However, scholars have mostly focused either on the significance of Constantinople's fall as a world event or on Mehmet II's reconstruction as an Islamic enterprise. Interpretations either prioritize the significance of Constantinople in a European context (the menace of the Turks, the loss of a city of learning and faith) or vindicate the Ottoman victory as a renaissance for a city already in decadence. Looking at the role of the conquest in both European and Ottoman sources, all of them from Bayezid II's time, Boyar and Fleet argue that the conquest of Constantinople had no real political or strategic relevance to the Ottomans, or not more than any other frontier city.¹²⁷ They attribute the silence around the city's preeminence in the chronicles, written almost 30 years after the conquest, to its "lack of imperial significance."¹²⁸ In other words, its place in history is only the result of the "psychological impact of the conquest in the West."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, 42–71; Scott Redford, "City Building in Seljuq Rum," in *The Seljuqs, Politics, Society, and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 256–76.

¹²⁷ Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6–27.

¹²⁸ Boyar and Fleet, 12. In fact, they use this phrase to contrast Mehmet II's determination to conquer the city regardless of what they see as a lack of strategic importance. This helps them to introduce their argument for Mehmet II's economic interests behind the conquests, which I discuss below.

¹²⁹ Boyar and Fleet, 9.

In order to explain the revitalization process, Boyar and Fleet turn their attention to money. Ottomans, they say, and particularly Mehmet II, had an economic mind, and revitalizing Constantinople meant revenue, taxes, and a new commercial hub for the empire. Boyar and Fleet's novel analysis highlights the lack of attention scholars have paid to the Ottomans's apparent indifference towards the conquest. It does not explain Mehmet II's clearly intentional success in turning Constantinople into the undisputed capital. He constructed a new imperial learning center to rival Bursa's and Edirne's, two new imperial palaces, and a mosque of his own in addition to Hagia Sophia; and he saw to the appointment of some of the most renowned scholars to the city's madrasahs. However, Boyar and Fleet's intuition is on point. Why is there a silence around the city? Independent of the symbolic significance of the conquest as an act of victory of Islam and the fall of Byzantium, the city itself was damaged by the siege. The urban fabric was turned upside-down by the subsequent invasion, regardless of the diminished state of the city under the Byzantines. In order to understand the city to which the Ottoman elite was encouraged or forced to move, leaving behind urban centers with thriving Islamic cultural, social, and religious institutions, we need to reconsider the city in the light of the absence and trauma left by the conquest. To this end, in the section that follows, I narrate the reconstruction of Constantinople, trying to question the sources with a different eye. The focus here is not the trauma of the Ottomans or the Greek population, nor the laments of European observers, but of the city itself, for, I argue, it is this wounded and foreign city that Ottomans had to conceptualize as their own.

Absence

In 1453, when Constantinople succumbed to Mehmet II's siege, the Ottomans already had a well-developed urban tradition in Anatolia and the Balkans.¹³⁰ Major urban centers like Edirne, Bursa, Manisa, and Amasya had served as Ottoman capitals and princely governorships for close to fifty years, and not much later, the last independent major capital of the local Anatolian independent principalities, Konya, was incorporated into the empire after Mehmet II's campaign against the Karamanids (1468).¹³¹ The Ottomans had not only inherited the long urban history of Anatolia, but also developed a way of capitalizing on this history by adapting capital cities into local seats of provincial administration.

Despite Mehmet II's investment in the city and declaration of Constantinople as the new capital, its establishment as the undisputed imperial center did not really occur until the end of Bayezid II's reign. Nominally, Edirne succeeded Bursa as the Ottoman capital before the conquest of Constantinople, and afterwards Constantinople became the new and final capital of the Ottomans. The transition, however, was not linear as official historiography has it. Indeed, even during the years between the civil strife of 1404 and the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the preeminence of Edirne over Bursa was almost exclusively nominal. Bursa remained the center of learning.¹³² Influential scholars and advisors to the imperial court were trained within the walls of Bursa's religious

¹³⁰Yorgos Dedes, "Bursa," in *Europe: A Literary History*, ed. David Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 331–46.

¹³¹ Dedes, "Bursa." For a study on princely courts see Karataş, "The City as a Historical Actor: The Urbanization and Ottomanization of the Halvetiye Sufi Order by the City of Amasya in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries."

¹³² Repp, *Miifti*, 43.

schools. In an interesting turn, Bursa became the most common destination for high profile exiles.¹³³

Edirne's political elite resisted the transfer of administrative power to Istanbul. Particularly during the first years after the conquest it seemed possible that the sultan could decide to remain in Edirne. Indeed, during the period of Constantinople's reconstruction, the sultan did not immediately change his residence from Edirne where he had commissioned the construction of a new palace after his enthronement in 1451.¹³⁴ The hope that the sultan's enthusiasm for Constantinople could be diverted did not fade away during his long reign. While on campaign against the Akkoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan in eastern Anatolia, Mehmet II entrusted Edirne to his son Cem Sultan, then prince governor of Manisa.¹³⁵ While in Edirne, Cem Sultan visited the local Sufi lodges and became acquainted with the city's notables. He heard the story of the legendary hero, Sari Saltuk, and commanded one of the members of his retinue to collect all legends related to him and put them together in one single volume. In the work that resulted, Ebü'l Ḥayr Rûm recalls the gatherings that prompted the prince to commission the work and records the interest of the locals in emphasizing the spiritual, historical and political preeminence of Edirne vis-à-vis Constantinople, which was still recovering its former imperial glory.¹³⁶

¹³³ Dror Ze'evi and Buke Ilkim, "Banishment, Confiscation, and the Instability of the Ottoman Elite Household," in *Society, Law, and Culture in the Middle East: "Modernities" in the Making*, ed. Dror Ze'evi and Ehud Toledano (Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2015), 16–30.

¹³⁴ Kritouvous, *History of Mehmet the Conqueror*, trans. C. Riggs (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), 85. For a discussion on the Mehmet II's transition from Edirne to Constantinople, see Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 16–52.

¹³⁵ During this time, Bayezid II was prince governor of Amasya, seat of the province of Rum. Rum was a strategic region for the campaign, since it bordered with Akkoyunlu territory. In contrast to Cem Sultan, Bayezid II joined his father in the campaign.

¹³⁶ Ebü'l Ḥayr Rûm, *Şaltuk-Nâme: The Legend of Şarı Şaltuk*, ed. Fahir İz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 616a-b. Cemal Kafadar interpreted this incident as an example of the tension

The disputed status of Constantinople as the new capital derived from the absence of expected urban elements of the Anatolian urban tradition. The military siege, the attempt to remove symbolic elements that represented Byzantine imperial power such as major churches other than Hagia Sophia, former palaces and administrative buildings, and last but not least, the displacement of the local population, left the city a temporary ruin. In his history of Mehmet II, Kritovoulos, an eyewitness of the fall of Constantinople, recalls other major metropoleis that have been pillaged and laments their losses. In so doing, the Byzantine historian highlights the unprecedented scale of Constantinople's disgrace. According to him, when Scipio conquered Carthage there was great economic loss, but women and children were left unharmed. Similarly, Rome surrendered to the Celts, the Gauls, and the Goths, who put her under their temporary rule while disrupting economic prosperity. Jerusalem fell three times. Yet, Kritovoulos says, not in one of all these conquests had a city suffered more than short periods of tyranny and a standstill in economic success. Kritovoulos implies by association that Constantinople's horror during and after the conquest had had no equal:

[...] the City's possessions vanished [...] and it was deprived of all things: wealth, glory, rule, splendor, honor, brilliance of population, valor, education, wisdom, religious orders, dominion—in short, of all.¹³⁷

The dispossession of Constantinople's imperial splendor must have been tangible in the sudden transformation of the city's landscape. It is easy to imagine the material counterpart of Kritovoulos' inventory of losses. The city must have been in complete distress; the former population lined up in the streets to become slaves, their personal

between the ethos of the frontier lords and the centralizing and urbanizing policies of Mehmet II, represented here by Constantinople. See also Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 147–49.

¹³⁷ Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmet the Conqueror*, 80–81.

belongings scattered among the Ottoman troops, wealthy residences stripped of their possessions. Kritouvoulos uses traditional imagery of plunder and conquest in order to describe Constantinople, employing the fate of Byzantine maids as an example for the city's disgrace: "young and chaste women of noble birth and well to do, accustomed to remain at home and who had hardly ever left their own premises [...] till then unsullied by male eyes—some of these were dragged by force from their chambers and hauled off pitilessly and dishonorably."¹³⁸ This description derives its force from tradition, yet it helps one to imagine the traumatic act of possession and dispossession enacted by the Ottoman troops. War was not unfamiliar to Kritouvoulos' readers. Through accepted conventions, traditional imagery could quickly evoke the practices of conquest, displacing beauty and wealth from their protected sanctuaries, churches, mansions, or palaces, and reducing everything to its raw value: sacred chalices debased to gold and precious stones, women and boys to exploitable bodies, and buildings and streets—former symbols of Byzantine urban splendor—to mere stones.

Constantinople's trauma was experienced in the dispossession of the city both as a mythical stronghold of Christian and Roman might and as the home of immense material and human wealth. It is not surprising that Mehmet II's first action was directed towards repopulating the city. The absence of the necessary elements for a city to be an urban center, or in other words, for Constantinople to remain an imperial capital, must have been all too evident to her new masters. Mehmet II quickly commanded the city to be rebuilt, adapted, and populated based on the ideals of an Ottoman metropolis, established methods of conquest, and the urban expectations of fifteenth century Anatolia.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Kritouvoulos, 72.

¹³⁹ Halil İnalçık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954): 103–29.

Ottoman efforts to seed the city's repopulation were plagued with errors and uncertainty as much as the reconstruction of the city's buildings. Kritovolous explains that Mehmet II quickly conferred houses and gardens to soldiers and generals, but also to some Byzantine notables who were allowed to remain in Constantinople. Writing during Bayezid II's reign, Aşıkpaşazāde provides a detailed account of Mehmet II's population policies. The sultan offered lands and property to new settlers. When there was a lack of response to his offer, he promptly lifted all taxes attached to the new possessions within the city. People came from different corners of the sultanate and began inhabiting the city. Yet, according to Aşıkpaşazāde, the remaining Byzantines dreaded the newcomers and feared to lose the little possessions they still had. Consequently, they convinced a vizier who was a recent convert to intervene. Their plan was to have the sultan tax the settlers again, so that they would leave.¹⁴⁰ The taxes were reinstated but many settlers remained. Aşıkpaşazāde frames this incident as a plot concocted by local Christian political factions, a position probably informed by his own political opposition to Grand Vezir Rum Mehmet Pasha (d. ca. 1474), but his description also reflects the changing attitudes of the imperial administration as it repopulated and reconstructed Constantinople.¹⁴¹

A City in Ruins

Aşıkpaşazāde describes Constantinople as a ruin (*harabe*) after the conquest. However, he rushes to inform us that Mehmet II commissioned several important

¹⁴⁰ Aşıkpaşazade, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarihi*, ed. Kemal Yavuz and Yekta Saraç (Istanbul: Kitaplığı, 2003), 488–89.

¹⁴¹ Halil İnalçık, "How to Read 'Āshık Pasha-Zāde's History,'" in *Essays in Ottoman History* (Istanbul: Eren, 1988), 31–53.

buildings as soon as he had entered the city. Indeed, Mehmet II ordered the construction of a central mosque, a palace, a fortress and the main market place. The siege and the subsequent pillaging had left an immediate and visible scar in the city's landscape, and even if later accounts would focus on the significance of the conquest and Mehmet II's reconstruction plans, when Aşıkpaşazade is writing in the late 1400s, the memory of the city in ruins still appears in the first descriptions of Ottoman Constantinople.

Constantinople was at the center of many apocalyptic prophecies, fears, and anxieties of the time. The war had not only wounded the city by dislocating it from the splendor of its imperial past but also by bringing prophecies of the end of the world into the present. Apocalyptic prophecies were not exclusive to Constantinople, but they certainly determined the spiritual ethos of urban centers, not long before affected by plague and constantly submerged in high mortality rates.¹⁴² Major catastrophes like the fall of Constantinople became the mnemonic material of an era or its end. This apocalyptic sensibility was heightened by the proximity of destruction, death, and violence to the urban populace. The limited visibility of the ruling classes and the slow flow of information about foreign campaigns, victories and defeats, and relatives who had left for war made it seem like the end of the world was at hand.

The fall of Constantinople signaled the end of times in many Muslim and Christian traditions, both popular and learned.¹⁴³ The fear and expectation of an even

¹⁴² For an interesting description of the fear, violence, and constant threat of death latent in Istanbul, see Boyar and Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, 72–128. A similar case has been raised not for Istanbul only but for Anatolia in general during the fifteenth century by Uli Schamiloglu, “The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: The Black Death in Medieval Anatolia and Its Impact on Turkish Civilization,” in *Views from the Edge: Essays in Honor of Richard W. Bulliet*, ed. L.G. Potter Yavari, J.R. Oppenheim, and Richard Bulliet (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–79.

¹⁴³ See Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 317–54. For a compilation of some of the stories

more major change in the world, signaled by the city's conquest, informed the Ottoman reconstruction and repopulation plans and the reorganization of the empire as the sole master of Asia Minor and the Balkans. As Kaya Şahin has argued, Mehmet II's tutor Akşemseddin orchestrated a series of cultural policies that aimed at diminishing the impact and centrality of the apocalyptic connotations attributed to the conquest. In Şahin's opinion, Akşemseddin was motivated to reinforce the sultan's role and image, and thus inaugurated a new imperial legacy based on Mehmet II's conquest. Şahin does not explain how Akşemseddin's cultural policy, as it were, reached the city's inhabitants, given the limited forms of public media available at the time. His focus is, in turn, on Ahmed Bican's apocalyptic tones in his mystical works. While it seems hard to affirm whether Akşemseddin succeeded, aimed at, or even tried to re-signify the fall of Constantinople, it is certain that apocalyptic prophecies were an important part of contemporary spiritual works such as the Bican brothers' narrative poems (*mesnevis*), and that Constantinople was indeed the center of many of these prophecies. Furthermore, Şahin's study also points to a silence in most contemporary depictions of the city's spiritual and apocalyptic significance.¹⁴⁴ As mentioned above, the silence established around the city's fall and subsequent reconstruction betrayed a fear of the end of the world as much as the trauma of the conquest, both in its present, but also in relation to the city's past and future through the dislocation of the Byzantine and the city's relocation in Islamic and Christian teleology.

It follows from Şahin's conclusions that the silence surrounding the city's trauma was the direct effort of an individual at court who attempted to create a propagandistic

referred by Şahin, see Stefanos Yerasimos, *Türk Metinlerinde Konstantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, trans. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim, 2009).

¹⁴⁴ Şahin, "Constantinople and the End Time."

effort to re-signify the importance of his ruler's military achievement. On the contrary, I propose, the silence represented a space open for discussion wherein scholars could advance different accounts of the city outside time, thus providing it with a present significance as much as using it as prescription for future development. The ruins, erased from verbal representation in contemporary descriptions, became the possibility of discovering the true meaning of the city, and consequently their absence established an image that mirrored not the city as it was, but rather its current and future spiritual and practical significance. Symbolic meaning re-inhabited the city in a moment when, as Şahin points out, there was a widespread sense of eschatological urgency. In other words, beyond the traditional view of elite cultural production as propaganda planned by the imperial court, poetry was a spiritual exercise that aimed to prescribe how to live, in the sense of a prescription that dictated how to act like a good Muslim, however much that definition was also in the making. Indeed, as many Ottoman poems remind us, abandoned ruins (*harabe*, same word used by Aşıkpaşazāde) house fairies that guard the hidden treasure of the heart: the Truth.

An Imperial Mirror

After the physical conquest of Constantinople, the city had to be conquered symbolically and spiritually as well. The active and living elements of Byzantine and Christian authority had to be severed without fully destroying the city. As soon as Mehmet II entered the city, he ordered that the walls should be repaired and other elements should be built. The conqueror's buildings either adapted former Byzantine monuments or replaced them, all aligned in an axis that went directly from the former

Golden Gate—now Edirne Kapı, across the city and up to Aya Sofya, then already the conqueror's mosque.¹⁴⁵ The main road passed from the gate south of the new citadel straight into the market in front of the imperial palace, and ended in the old cathedral turned into a mosque. The appropriation of buildings and spaces continued in the following years. In 1457, the church of the Pantokrator was converted into a mosque, Zeyrek Camii, as well as St. Savior Pente into Eski Imaret Mescidi. Finally, in 1463, the conqueror established a major religious complex, known today as Fatih Külliyesi. The complex included the sultan's mosque, a hospice, a soup kitchen, a school and a library.¹⁴⁶

Constantinople had experienced a long period of austerity after the Latin occupation, possibly increased by its growing isolation from the surrounding rural land and neighboring urban centers, now mostly under Ottoman control. A city like Constantinople depended on the balance between urban trade and the distribution of produce from nearby rural areas. Reportedly, the city had increasingly become "ruralized, [with] vineyards and fields coming to spread over vast areas within the city walls."¹⁴⁷ The conquest and Mehmet II's subsequent population policy has been presented as a revitalization of the city that would not have been possible under Byzantine rule. Be that as it may, the main construction programs after the conquest had not only practical and economic implications. They were deeply symbolic acts aimed at making the conquest evident in the transformation of key infrastructure. Indeed, the plan of the city and the

¹⁴⁵ Selim S. Kuru, "Men of Istanbul" in Çidem Kafesçioğlu and Shirine Hamadi (ed.) *A Compendium of Early Modern Istanbul* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

¹⁴⁶ İnalçık, "Istanbul: An Islamic City"; Gülrü Necipoğlu, "From Byzantine Constantinople to Ottoman Kostantiniyye: Creation of a Cosmopolitan Capital and Visual Culture under Sultan Mehmet II," in *From Byzantium to Istanbul: 8000 Years of a Capital* (Istanbul: Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 2010), 262–78.

¹⁴⁷ Halil İnalçık, "The Rebuilding of Ottoman Istanbul by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror," *Cultura Turcica* 4, no. 1–2 (1967): 5–15. See also Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 117–232.

importance of its trading areas, including Galata, changed slowly over almost five decades. The city quarters developed gradually around social, religious, and economic institutions founded by the governing elite imitating the pious foundations established by the sultan. New mosques, soup kitchens, baths, religious schools, fountains, and the shops or workshops that opened in the nearby areas gradually developed into administrative units that became the city's quarters.¹⁴⁸ The reproduction in scale of the main urban elements expected in a city under Muslim rule, the compartmentalization of trades, crafts, and people into quarters, and the balance established between the different functions fulfilled by each of these administrative units echoes the imperial construction plan focused on turning Constantinople into a functional capital.

The first buildings sponsored by the sultan and the court were clearly aimed at appropriating the spaces formerly used by the Byzantines. The first plan of the Islamic elements of the city was crafted independently from the gradual transformation of the city and the economic aspects of her repopulation and re-distribution. Constantinople had been adapted to satisfy the expectations of the newly-arrived Muslim majority. Indeed, just across the Golden Horn, opposite and linked to the economic center of the city, the citadel of Galata had remained foreign. Galata housed envoys, traders, and subjects of Christian powers, yet was within the sultan's dominions, and remained intact thanks to her timely surrender—of course, with the exception of the demolition of its walls. The visual opposition of Galata and Ottoman Constantinople represented the dynamic balance of imperial power over the sultan's subjects. This dynamic is highlighted by the presence

¹⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of the formation of Istanbul's quarters and the role of economic institutions in the development of the city throughout the sixteenth century see Selma Özkoçak, "The Urban Development of Ottoman Istanbul in the Sixteenth Century" (PhD. Diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1997); Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 53–109, 178–207.

of diverse populations and the structured and well-maintained hierarchies between them, the spatial distance across the Golden Horn, and the intrinsic menace that Galata's population represented.

In Ottoman literary prose and verse, intellectuals translated the threat of the infidel city into imagery of love, using these images to represent relative proximity to the divine. Mehmet II, under his penname Avni, warns himself of the risks of falling into the seduction of his own subjects in an extraordinary lyric poem: "Oh Avni" he sings, "do not think he will yield to you. You may be the king (shah) of Istanbul, yet he is Galata's." The dangerous character in this line is a young Christian boy from the citadel across the Golden Horn. He is the king of beauty in the kingdom of the Franks, and his beauty is such that no true believer (*ehl-i imān*) can remain unaffected by it.

I saw a sun-faced angel, and the world was his moon¹⁴⁹
Oh, those dark hyacinths are the sighs of the lovers.

The couplet shows the intrinsic correlation between this-worldly beauty, the balance of the cosmos, and poetic imagery. The young boy is an angel. Avni gives him two attributes: namely, dark hyacinths/curls and his radiance. From these attributes it follows that the world is the moon of this beauty and the black curls are in fact the sighs of those who see his beauty, the lovers. The lovers, we learn later, are the people of faith (*ehl-i imān*). The moon has no light itself, but only carries the reflection of the sun's light. In the world the beauty of God is reflected. The beauty of the world is not its own, concludes Avni, but a mere reflection of the boy's light. In the second verse, the lovers'

¹⁴⁹ The Turkish is ambiguous here: "ki 'ālem mahıdur." The phrase can be translated as if the beauty is the world's moon, or as I have preferred, the world is indeed his moon.

sigh is a black curl/hyacinth.¹⁵⁰ The sigh is a dark spiral that burns out of love sprouting out of the lovers' liver up to the skies. In a famous line, Necati (d.1509), widely recognized as a master poet of Bayezid II's reign, explains how the heavens rotate due to the force of the sighs of the lover's burning liver—the heart, as it were.

Spiraling, the sparks of my sigh reach the skies
They lit the heart of the heavens' lamp, burning its liver in turning...¹⁵¹

Avni (Mehmet II) refers to the Ottoman poetic worldview wherein the believer should not ignore material beauty. Yet he must also not fool himself, and let this beauty lead him astray. As Ca'fer Çelebi insists, poetry makes meanings, unearths the Truth by making clear the dynamics that connect this and the other world. Mehmet places the city precisely within this poetic economy; the city is a mirror of traditional imagery that helps explain the believer's spiritual struggle. He reminds himself that he is the king of Istanbul and thus must remain distant from the king of Galata.

This instance is not isolated. Mehmet II wrote about Galata in two other poems. And indeed, the trope surfaces repeatedly in future poems throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Mehmet II's efforts, as well as those of his successors, to make Istanbul the city *par excellence* had its counterpart in the creation of an ideal version of the city in poetry. Poetry with urban imagery often alludes to Istanbul, even when the city is not named as such.¹⁵² The few examples where Istanbul is called by name and not

¹⁵⁰ I have greatly benefitted from Selim S. Kuru's reading of this poem. In a paper presented at the ACLA Annual Meeting 2015, Kuru interpreted this poem in relation to the Christian convert and the *zünhar*, the priest's belt. Kuru examined this and other poems in relation to traditional imagery in Ottoman lyric poetry. Selim Kuru, "The Belt of the Infidel: Adventures of Classical Gazel Topoi in Anatolia" (American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, 2015).

¹⁵¹ "Çıkalı göklere âhım şereri döne döne/Yandı kandil-i sipihrün ciğeri döne döne." For an English translation, transcription, and facsimile of this poem see Walter G. Andrews, Mehmet Kalpaklı, and Nejaat Black, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 43, 275, 308.

¹⁵² Oscar Aguirre Mandujano and Walter G. Andrews, "Istanbul Poetics," in *A Compendium of Early Modern Istanbul*, ed. Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu and Shirine Hamadeh (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

abstracted to the king's throne or garden establish the city even more clearly within the emotional and poetic economy of Ottoman poetry, and help explain the contradictions of her urban development. At this early time, apart from a few descriptions by foreign observers and some accounts in Turkish, no large narrative of Istanbul's conquest really existed. Galata served as negative mirror of Istanbul, even as both existed under the umbrella of the sultan's power. With the temporary erasure of Edirne and Bursa as objects of poetry, Istanbul's significance was built upon a silencing of other urban centers just as new buildings were erected upon the silenced trauma of Constantinople's former buildings.

The City as Ideal Space

Constantinople's dependence on networks of provisions included the city's water supply. After the conquest, Mehmet II entered a city whose water supply system had been heavily damaged by years of isolation and ruralization, and more significantly by the recent siege. Mehmet II ordered the reconstruction and maintenance of the Byzantine aqueducts and built fountains in order to distribute the water. The water supply was central to repopulating the city not only as a hygienic necessity but also as a means to articulate the now-Ottoman city's aesthetic and architectural program. Waterways delimited and shaped inhabited spaces from fountains and mirrors in the religious complex to gardens and aqueducts. Indeed, Bayezid II extended the water supply network across Istanbul, constructing new aqueducts and fountains to reach his imperial mosque and surrounding religious complex.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Kâzım Çeçen, *II. Bayezid Suyolu Haritaları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Su ve Kanalizasyon İdaresi, 1997), 17.

Repairing and expanding the city's water supply reflected a level of practicality, in economical or administrative terms, as well as a symbolic re-appropriation. Water was an expression of the sultan's capacity to provide, a tangible symbol of his duty to ensure and foster the lives of his subjects and the public spaces they inhabited, namely, gardens, fountains, baths. In the exordium to one of his famous panegyrics about Mehmet II's generosity, Aḥmed Paşa first addresses the sultan's kindness as a cloud that fills the garden of bounty (*bağ-ı cūd*) with his rain of generosity (*bārān-i kerem*). The sultan is the ultimate expression of munificence: the shadow of God (*Zill-i Hak*) whose largesse fills the world and the times (*dāver-i devrān*) with bounty (*kerem*).

The rose in the rose-garden of abundance opens up with his wind
And the sweet waters of grace nourish the rose-garden of generosity...¹⁵⁴

The sultan's power is a wind in the world-garden, the rose opens with wind's touch, which is in fact the influence of the sultan's authority. The bounty of the sultan's authority is materialized in the waters of his grace, which also nurture the garden where the rose opens in the "breeze" of the sultan's power. The expectations of the sultan as a provider, explained here as an ode to his magnificence, are evoked in the equation of the garden and the world. The poetic garden is itself a reflection of the material world and at the same time a symbol of the garden of heaven in the other world. The poetic garden stands as mediation between both spaces: the world and the world beyond.

The expression of space in poetic terms abstracts the space in a way that permits the convergence of both the spiritual and the material. It is in this poetic abstraction where both spaces, equally real for a believer, meet and become meaningful to each other. The poetic space of the garden, its waters, winds, and roses, as well as the presence

¹⁵⁴ Aḥmed Paşa, *Aḥmed Paşa Dīvānı* (Istanbul: Akçağ, 1992), 68.

of the sultan as a shadow of the divine that enables the cycle of life in this space makes the intersection of the spiritual and material worlds intelligible. The sultan's body is absent from the poetic space because it is abstracted to a force that provides life. In the world-garden, the poetic forces that bring the world alive are mirrored by the material extensions of the sultan's authority in the form of public works such as aqueducts that made water accessible to the population through fountains, baths, and gardens.

Urban Conquests, Imperial Histories

Descriptions of Ottoman Istanbul mostly began to appear almost thirty years after the conquest. Except for Kritovoulos's history of Mehmet II written in Greek, the Ottoman court did not begin to produce an official historiography until Bayezid II's reign. Indeed, it seems that Bayezid II was very interested in manufacturing more than just an official chronicle of the Ottoman dynasty's history. The imperial court encouraged, and sometimes sponsored, a series of dynastic histories aimed at a wide range of audiences within and beyond the empire. First, the new historical narratives of the Ottomans as an imperial dynasty were written in ornate language befitting the imperial court. Indeed, the works composed for the educated elite varied in their level of literary sophistication and complexity of language. Bayezid II also supported Persian renderings of the dynastic history, both through the work of the Persian chronicler İdris-i Bitlisi, and in the writing of letters in high prose composed as literary exercises (*münşeāt*).¹⁵⁵ The histories written in Persian were clearly aimed at two main audiences. On the one hand, the imperial court was positioning itself among neighboring Islamic courts such as the Timurid court in

¹⁵⁵ See chapter 4.

Herat. On the other, the imperial center was translating the dynasty's history in terms that were intelligible to local educated elites versed in the Timurid historiographical tradition.¹⁵⁶ Yet the history of the Ottomans was also told piecemeal in social gatherings, with a simpler language, vivid passages and colorful verses, very similar to the epic tales of the legendary heroes of Islam, such as Battal and Sarı Saltık.¹⁵⁷ The imperial court itself, of course, did not commission all histories produced during this period. Some important chronicles appeared by anonymous authors or independent scholars, Sufi sheikhs, and storytellers. Indeed, what seems to be the appearance of a historical consciousness, or at the very least, the emergence of a widespread preoccupation with recording the Ottoman dynasty's past in an intelligible and coherent narrative, became probably one of the most important debates in twentieth-century Ottoman historiography. What we have learned from these scholarly efforts is that the sudden rise of Ottoman historical writing was most likely multifactorial.¹⁵⁸ Yes, these histories resulted from the need to create a centralized discourse for legitimate rule once the empire grew bigger, yet they also answered geopolitical pressures. Ottoman historical writing also benefited from the rich Anatolian, Arabic, and Turkic narrative traditions. Ottoman history incorporated the ethos of a syncretic society that was experiencing the shifting state of religious balance in the region at a moment when the Ottoman state began to obtain the monopoly

¹⁵⁶For instance, see Markiewicz's discussion of Idris-i Bitlisi's usage of Persian titles and adjectives to refer to Ottoman rulers in Markiewicz, "The Crisis of Rule in Late Medieval Islam: A Study of Idrīs Bidlīsī (861-926/1457-1520) and Kingship at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century."

¹⁵⁷Aşıkpaşazâde's history was precisely composed in this way. See Ménage, "A Survey of the Early Ottoman Histories," 217–37.

¹⁵⁸The most widely recognized discussion of this debate is Cemal Kafadar's analysis of both the original sources, the way Ottomans discussed them, and how modern scholars of the early twentieth century made sense of them. See Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*. A brief and concise summary of the debate can be found also in Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

of religious institutions that had been traditionally independent from the central power structure of the sultanate.¹⁵⁹

In all these narratives, Istanbul is secondary to the act of conquering. The descriptions of Istanbul in the Ottoman dynastic histories of the fifteenth century mostly depict cities as spoils of war. Cities are enunciated only inasmuch as they are the outcome of conquest and serve as the material aspect of victory and success. Cities derive their importance only in terms of material profit and the reputation they provide. In other words, cities serve only to list the military victories that confirm the inevitability of the sultan's success and, by extension, the divine support that ensures his victory. The city, and more critically, the castle/fortress at its core, are the material expressions of the ruler's struggles and thus represent his capacity as ruler. In the first Ottoman Chronicle, Mehmed Neşri spends a considerable number of pages in narrating the preparation for war, the arrows, cannonballs, and army forces. The pace of the narrative speeds up after the conquest, almost anticlimactically glossing over the military aspects of the conquest. The chronicle concludes with a short summary of Mehmet II's new construction projects.

The honor, fame, and material riches derived from the conquered city flow from the sultan and enrich the empire. Expansion means wealth, and thus the distribution of the sultan's magnanimity. As a conclusion to the section of his chronicle about the conquest of Constantinople, Neşri reflects upon the infrastructure built within the newly conquered city and on the roads leading to it, and its caravanserais, public baths and other facilities meant to secure trade. He concludes that all these were benefits not only for Istanbul but indeed for the whole of Anatolia (*bi'l-cümle vilāyet-i Rūm bunuñ kudūmiyle m'amur*

¹⁵⁹ Consider for example the transformation of the office of the *müfti*, see Repp, *Müfti*, 64–67.

oldı).¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, he records that the sultan instituted the distribution of alms in Istanbul among the poor and those in need. The allocation of these benefits is at the center of the perception of the sultan's justice, which ensures the empire's wellbeing and the proper functioning of the whole state apparatus and of Ottoman society at large.¹⁶¹

In the early chronicles, the history and the role of Constantinople within the larger narrative of Ottoman expansion is used to comment on Ottoman rule. About the same time that Neşri produced his chronicle at the end of the fifteenth century, the Zeyni sheikh Aşıkpaşazâde composed his own rendition of the Ottoman chronicle, albeit for a different audience. Aşıkpaşazâde includes a commentary on the reconstruction of Constantinople after the conquest and uses the section focused on the repopulation of Istanbul to comment explicitly on Mehmet II's rule. Aşıkpaşazâde criticizes the sultan's grand vizier, using the mishaps of the vizier's first policies towards new settlers as an example of his collusion with the city's Byzantine inhabitants, and ultimately suggests the vizier's loyalty is not to the sultan but to his former coreligionists.

Similarly, Tursun Beg's history of the conquest is a commentary on rule which he first lays out fully in his introduction and then develops across various intersections of his history. Tursun Beg writes following the model of the Persian scholars Juvayni (d. 1085) and Tusi (d.1274). In point of fact, Tursun Beg's description of Constantinople is the closest to Kritovoulos in terms of its rich descriptions of the bounty found by the Ottoman troops after the conquest. Tursun Beg's dynamic style, full of poetic metaphors,

¹⁶⁰ Mehmed Neşri, *Kitâb-i Cihan-Nümâ. Neşri Tarihi*, ed. Faik Reşit Unat and Mehmed A. Köymen (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1957), 711.

¹⁶¹ Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

incorporates versified descriptions to elaborate on his images based on classical poetic imagery.¹⁶²

Scholars at Bayezid II's court like Tursun Beg, Idris-i Bitlisi, Mehmmmed Neşrî, and to certain extent Aşıkpāşāzāde, presented sultan Bayezid II with a political commentary, indeed, a reflection on rule. This reflection derived from the deeds of his predecessors, whether accurate or exaggerated. These multiple voices of political theory, as it were, echoed the long Persian and Islamic traditions of chronicles that provided a mirror of princes to rulers.¹⁶³ These scholars, borrowing mostly from Persian, adapted Western Turkish into a hyperbolic language that reflected the current status of the Ottoman dynasty. They inaugurated a new tradition of Ottoman high prose that developed throughout the next century and carried with it the capacity of scholars to discuss and comment on social and political matters. While Istanbul, discursively an archetypical city, is at the center of the transformation of the sultanate into an imperial power, the urban space remains a trope to trigger discussions, thoughts, or lessons about the ruler's capacity to provide, which was the cyclical motion propelling the circle of justice.

It is in poetry, rather than in prose, where Istanbul becomes first an inhabited urban space and not merely the booty of the sultan's campaign. The shift occurs already during Mehmet II's reign, during which as I have explained above, poets describe Istanbul in contrast to Galata. Through the references to the city's gardens, buildings, and

¹⁶² Tursun Beg, *Fetih Babası Fatih'in Tarihi*, ed. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2013), 54–95. Unfortunately, this section is excluded from İnalçık and Murphey's translation of Tursun Beg's history. See Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmet the Conqueror*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Rhoads Murphey (Minneapolis; Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978).

¹⁶³ Kenan İnan, "On the Sources of Tursun Bey's Târih-I Ebü'l-Feth," in *The Ottoman Empire Myths, Realities and "Black Holes"*, ed. Eugenia Kermeli and Oktay Özel (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2006), 75–109. For a discussion on the impact of Tusi on Ottoman historiographical tradition, see Marinos Sariyannis, "Ruler and State, State and Society in Ottoman Political Thought," *Turkish Historical Review* 4 (2013): 83–117.

dignity as the imperial seat, Avni (Mehmet II) presents Istanbul as an area wherein action occurs, a contained space that symbolizes a series of expected activities, that is, the pious life of Muslims in Istanbul, or the contained and always tempting life of infidels cohabiting with Muslims in Galata.

Two Sides of an Urban History: the Ode and the Romance

Near the end fifteenth century, Ca'fer Çelebi produced almost simultaneously two different descriptions of the city. The first one, the *Book of Conquest of Istanbul* (*Mahrūse-i İstānbūl Fethnāmesi*), seems to be part of his collection of high prose, surviving today in only two manuscripts.¹⁶⁴ It is a prose description focused on the conquest and the sultan's central role in the sultanate's expansion, similar to previous prose renditions of the Ottoman dynastic history. The other description prefaces Ca'fer Çelebi's famous romance, the *Heves-nāme* or *Book of Passion*, a long versified story of his own love pursuit. The first few hundred couplets describe Istanbul as a result of the sultan's majesty at the same time that they offer an overview of the city as an inhabited space wherein Ca'fer Çelebi experiences his own love story. The difference here is striking in that the city is not merely another example of conquered territory, as is the case in most contemporary descriptions. On the contrary, Ca'fer Çelebi carefully

¹⁶⁴ The text survives in two manuscripts, one in Vienna and one in Istanbul University. In 1912, an Ottoman script edition was published in Istanbul. I have mostly used this version of the text. The text is supposed to be part of Ca'fer Çelebi's collection of letters, which, as I mention below in chapter 4, is lost to us. Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, *Mahrūse-I İstānbūl Fethnāmesi* (Istanbul: Aḥmed İhsan ve Şirkāsi, 1331). In addition to the Ottoman edition, I have also benefitted from Kayboğazi's translation into Modern Turkish. See Tāci-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, *Mahrusei İstanbul Fetihnamesi*, trans. Şeref Kayaboğazi (Istanbul: Gün Basımevi, 1953).

describes Istanbul as a city, the imperial space in which the sultan's subjects live under his majesty and protection.

The innovation of Ca'fer Çelebi's description is the more evident in its contrast with previous poems and in its focus on material elements. Mehmet II's poems on Istanbul do not contain any references to Istanbul itself as a city, but rather as the presumed space of a specific type of subject, that is the Muslim vis-à-vis the Christian living under Muslim rule. Another poem written by an homonymous Avni, found only in the sixteenth century anthology *Cami'ü'n-Nezāyir*, spends most of its verses describing the might of the city to emphasize the contrast between Galata and Constantinople. Similarly, Ahmed Paşa writes about Istanbul in a 35-couplet panegyric composed for the construction of the New Palace (Berāy-i Sarāy-i Cedīd, i.e. the Topkapı Sarayı).

Ca'fer Çelebi's two descriptions of the city, the *Book of Passion* and the *Book of the Conquest of Istanbul*, despite being contemporary, are strikingly different. Ca'fer Çelebi's *Book of the Conquest of Istanbul* devotes almost thirty folios of ornate prose to describing the sultan's centrality in the spiritual and moral dimension of the conquest. The story develops around the tension between the sultan's orders and the subjects' doubts, interests, and ultimate duty to follow the sultan's commands. The sultan's determination shows them the centrality of the personal struggle towards God in every aspect of their life (*ghaza/jihad*), and in the last instance the conquest is the materialization of the sultan's wisdom and the victory granted by God. The tale, similar to the chronicles, revolves around the idea of a sultan capable of acting justly, being a provider for his subjects, and having a tight yet just control of his army.

In the *Book of Passion*, by contrast, Ca'fer Çelebi is more conscious of the urban space. He invokes the city and its fortifications and the new infrastructure such as public baths and kitchen soups. The description of Istanbul is divided into sections that highlight exactly the same construction program recorded in the chronicles: namely, Aya Sofya, the New Palace, the imperial mosque, the seven madrasahs, the fortress of Yedikule, and the mosque of Eyyup Sultan. Ca'fer Çelebi, however, carefully depicts the spaces. For example, the description of the gardens surrounding the palace occupies seventeen couplets. Even more striking is the detail he accomplishes when narrating the creation of the educational complex of the eight madrasahs. Ca'fer Çelebi mentions by name four of the main teachers assigned to each of the new imperial educational center.

In the chronicles of Neşri and Tursun Beg, the description of the new buildings is tied to a construction project clearly reflecting the chronology that followed after the conquest. This chronological arrangement suggests the priorities of the sultan in reconstructing the city. The description of the reconstruction as a sequence indeed echoes the commentary on rule, that is, it exemplifies the wisdom of the sultan and provides a material counterpart to the hierarchy inherent in the urban elements of an Ottoman metropolis, and thus implies the activities they regulate or make possible, such as protecting the city and its subjects, praying, making ablutions, trade, etc.

Ca'fer Çelebi's versification of the construction project abstracts the buildings from their temporality, with no obvious sign of the priority of one site over the others. Apart from the impossibility of mentioning all of these places at once, and thus having to describe them one after the other, there is no element within the story itself that focuses on the priority of each building. Rather, the description is based on geographical position,

starting from the city walls on the sea, the harbor, Galata on its opposite side, the palace with its bath and surrounding gardens, and then it moves inland towards the mosque, madrasahs, the fortress, and other infrastructure. This spatial order puts the imperial palace at the forefront. The center is the sultan and his body, curiously expressed through its very absence. The order is, I shall insist, deprived of its temporality, thus presenting the city under a completely new light: as the imperial space.

Istanbul, in the moment that is not treated within the context of a specific point in time, that is to say, the conquest, stops being merely another bounty of Ottoman military expansion and the sultan's bellicose pursuits. Istanbul becomes an Ottoman space, not as snapped up from the Byzantines, but as an extension of the sultan's magnificence. Indeed, Ca'fer Çelebi's poems describing Istanbul as a setting for love, normalize the imperial space, its buildings and its landscapes. Istanbul becomes fully Ottoman, the imperial seat instead of the sultan's spoils of war.

The Cities Reborn

At the turn of the sixteenth century, scholars began to write descriptions focused on the former seats of Ottoman power, namely Edirne and Bursa. The appearance of the erstwhile rivals of Istanbul as cities worthy of the sultan's attention suggests a shift in the balance of power in Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire at large during the fifteenth century. Scholars have recently revisited the emergence of the Ottoman adaptation of city-thrillers (*şehrengiz*) as a form of newly crafted poetic topographies drawn by scholars and poets in the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁵ The rebirth of Edirne and Bursa at the end

¹⁶⁵ Selim S. Kuru, "Naming the Beloved in Ottoman Turkish Gazel: The Case of İshak Çelebi (D. 1537/8)," in *Ghazal as World Literature II. From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition. The Ottoman Gazel in*

of Bayezid II's reign hints at Istanbul's place as undisputed capital, which in turn inaugurates a new interest in urban needs, paired with the change of visual representations of cities and urban planning that occurred during the reigns of Selim I and Suleyman I.¹⁶⁶

The conquest of Constantinople at the beginning of Mehmet II's reign was not the axial moment of his rule. The conquest was first understood as part of a larger series of events, a bounty of war that signaled the sultan's success. As Boyar and Fleet noticed, the conquest of Constantinople was not presented first as act of "unprecedented proportions."¹⁶⁷ Constantinople's transformation into the center of imperial power, accompanied by the investment and bureaucratic effort this required, was a process rather than a *fait accompli*. The shift of imperial recognition and attention produced tensions within the already-established loci of empire, namely, Bursa and Edirne, which were increasingly silenced, narratively, throughout much of the second half of the fifteenth century.

Scholars trained in the prestigious schools of the former capitals moved to Istanbul, as well as families and members of the old Anatolian provincial elite who had to migrate with the court to the new city and compete with newly trained pages in the palace institutions. It is in the poems of the sultan, his courtiers and imperial chancellor that, as we have seen, the city takes a life of its own, and this life is built upon the silencing of its

Context, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2006); B. Deniz Çalış-Kural, *Şehrengiz: Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); *idem*, "Review of B. Deniz Çalış-Kural: *Şehrengiz: Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul*," *Bulleting of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79, no. 1 (2016): 190–92. Also, Kuru presented on Lami'i's narrative description of Bursa, first capital of the Ottomans. *Idem*, "Looking Through a Mirror of Verses."

¹⁶⁶ Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*; Necipoğlu, "A Kanun for the State"; Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, "Viewing, Walking, Mapping Istanbul, CA. 1580," *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 56 (2014): 16–35.

¹⁶⁷ Boyar and Fleet, *Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, 11.

temporal transformation. The poetic Istanbul concatenates the process of construction into one non-temporal space that focuses on the spiritual dimensions of the city, the true meaning of the urban space as a reflection of the sultan's munificence, or in other words, his justice. The dynamics inherent in chronology, the movement implied in the serializations of events, that is, in the progressive line attributed to events as if linked by a logic of construction from nothing to something, from a beginning to an end (the conquered/destroyed city, Ottoman Istanbul), is replaced by the emotional economy, the phases of lyric love of the Ottoman poetic tradition. In that sense, the city is articulated by the mirroring of the circular relation between the lover and the beloved, the believer and his path to God, and the city-dweller and the city. The action, contained within both the poetic space (garden, doorstep of the beloved, the world below the heavens) and reproduced into the actual city landscape (walls, gardens, buildings) provided a self-contained world wherein Istanbul is indisputably Ottoman, an extension of the sultan's grace, justice and magnificence, and indeed the center of all possibility of action. Ultimately, the city in its textual manifestations is a replication of the sultan's body and his court, which in turn encapsulate the cosmology of a world that reflects the world beyond.

CHAPTER 3

Networks of Poetry: Poets, Statesmen, and Mystics

Velīyüddīn Aḥmed Paşa (d. 1496, hereafter Aḥmed Paşa), paramount poet of Mehmet II's court, wrote the following poem in praise of the Sufi sheikh Şeyh Vefā (d. 1491), head of the Zeyniye order in Istanbul:

You are that mirror of God's light
 For you display the sense of every ideal form
[...]
You extend the Hand of Power to every disciple
 The magic carpet of Hızır, the staff of Moses
[...]
You are the greatest of shahs, think, oh Shah, of me
 For the shah, master of favors does not forget his beggar.¹⁶⁸

Aḥmed Paşa elevated the place of the Sufi sheikh to that of a master, a true source of generosity, wisdom, and power. In Aḥmed Paşa's short panegyric, Şeyh Vefā holds the keys to the Truth. The poem follows the traditional structure, starting with God, moving quickly to the patron, and finishing with a request. The particularity of this poem is the nature of the reward. Aḥmed Paşa asks for spiritual, non-material, favors. The exalted position of the sheikh expressed at the beginning of the poem is conditioned to his generosity, determined by his capacity to extend his power towards his disciples. He is a true king (*shah*) inasmuch as he bestows favors to those in need, in this case, the poet in the figure of the beggar. Aḥmed Paşa, poet and scholar, is looking for Şeyh Vefā's support and protection, hoping the sheikh's generosity will enable him to achieve what his heart desires,

¹⁶⁸ Aḥmed Paşa, *Dīvān*, 40.

Ignite the candle of my desire, for heartache
Has made sad the pleasures of this gathering
Either let me, your disciple, attain his desire
Or take from my breast this infatuation with the world¹⁶⁹

The sense of urgency in Aḥmed Paşa's words speaks to the poet's desire for spiritual redemption as much as his desire for the support of the Sufi sheikh. What did it mean for a poet of Aḥmed Paşa's renown to write with such earnestness to a Sufi sheikh at Mehmet II's court (r. 1451-1481)? I answer this question by tracing the connections between scholars and their literary works in order to show how poetic composition served as a vital space and medium for political debate. To this end, I discuss a series of panegyrics written in praise of Şeyh Vefā by Aḥmed Paşa and Sinān Paşa (d. 1486). These poets present a normative description of the role that the Zeyniye order had at the Ottoman court during Mehmet II's reign as well as the central role played by the sheikh's personal charisma. Aḥmed Paşa used panegyric poetry as a means to negotiate political support from the sheikh and his order, while Sinān Paşa deployed verses to support and further develop the sheikh's teachings. To put the relation between the two poets and Zeyniye order in perspective, I contrast Ca'fer Çelebi's response (*nazīre*) to Aḥmed Paşa's poems for Şeyh Vefā, both in its political context as well as in relation to Ca'fer Çelebi's larger literary rivalry with Aḥmed Paşa. In conclusion, I argue that the composition of a poem in praise of a contemporary political figure other than the sultan represented a public act of allegiance, which in turn allows us to map the creation of support networks at the imperial court. Consequently, I focus on the tensions between the various descriptions of the dervishes and imperial bureaucrats' social virtues within these poems, and show how

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

poetic composition could be a strategic political act with the capacity to establish networks of mutual support between religious scholars, statesmen, and dervish orders.

A Sheikh's Network of Poets

The Zeyniye order of dervishes, founded in Herat in the early 1400s, held a position of considerable influence in the early modern Ottoman world.¹⁷⁰ During the reign of Mehmet II (1444-46, 1451-81), several leading poets crafted verses in praise of the order and one of its chief sheikhs, Muslihüddin Mustafa (d. 1491), better known as Şeyh Vefâ.¹⁷¹ Modern scholars have used biographical dictionaries and references in the poems to document the literary and social bonds that connected Şeyh Vefâ to prominent religious scholars of the same era, including Veliyüddin Ahmed Paşa (d. 1497), Sinân Paşa (d. 1486) and Molla Lütî (d. 1494).¹⁷² Nonetheless, there has not yet been any systematic effort to explore how and why members of Sultan Mehmet II's court used their written works to praise Şeyh Vefâ and his order. In this section, I explore Ahmed Paşa and Sinân Paşa's versified tributes to Şeyh Vefâ as strategic attempts not only to affirm and enhance the sheikh's status at the court, but also to gain leverage by associating themselves with his order. Indeed, by composing poems in praise of a contemporary figure other than the sultan, these poets aspired to create invaluable allies at the imperial court. Their descriptions of the dervishes and Şeyh Vefâ's social value and

¹⁷⁰ Reşat Öngören, "Zeyniyye," in *TDVİA* 44 (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 2013), 367-71. See also Reşat Öngören, *Tarihte bir Aydın Tarikatı Zeyniler* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2013).

¹⁷¹ Muslihüddin Mustafa was also known as İbnü'l-Vefâ or Vefâzâde. For an example, see Sinân Paşa's praise quoted below.

¹⁷² See Mertol Tulum's introduction in Sinân Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, ed. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserleri Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2014), p. 15-20; see also Reşat Öngören, "Muslihüddin Mustafa" in *TDVİA* 31: 269-271; Reşat Öngören, *Zeyniler*, 130-158; Aylin Koç, "Sinan Paşa", 230.

their recognition of his spiritual stature in these poems show how poetic composition was an active political act with the capacity to establish a link, both doctrinal and pragmatic, between religious scholars, dervish orders, and statesmen.

The Zeyniye order rose to prominence in Anatolia during Mehmet II's reign. The order entered Anatolia mainly by two disciples of Zeyneddīn-i Hafī, namely, Abdūllatif-i Ẓudsī (d. 1452) and Abdürrahim-i Merzifonī (d. 1465). Abdūllatif-i Ẓudsī spent most of his time in Anatolia teaching at Konya, then capital of the Karamanid principate. In 1451, he moved to Bursa and established a Zeyni lodge in Ottoman lands. Tacüddīn Ibrahim-i Karamanī (hereafter Şeyh Tacüddīn) succeeded his master in 1452 and became the sheikh of Bursa's Zeyni lodge. In the second half of the fifteenth century Bursa was still a center for religious learning, offering Sufi sheikhs the chance to interact with young scholars. Some of the scholars who studied with Şeyh Tacüddīn included Veliyüddin Ahmed Paşa and Mehmet II's tutor Bursalı Mevlā Ayās. Şeyh Tacüddīn died in 1468, the same year in which Şeyh Vefā, also one of Abdūllatif-i Ẓudsī's disciples, moved to Mehmet II's court after meeting the sultan during his campaign against the Karamanid principate. Thus, from the early stages of Mehmet II's reign, the Zeyniye order had founded several lodges in the metropolitan centers of the Ottoman Empire and established a close relation with members of the intellectual and religious elites of the empire.¹⁷³ Despite his reported reluctance to allow dervish lodges within the city walls, Sultan Mehmet II patronized the construction of a Zeyni lodge in Istanbul and gave permission for the construction of three other lodges.¹⁷⁴ His *sui generis* attitude towards the Zeyniye empowered the order

¹⁷³ Hakan Karataş, "Amasya," 86-9.

¹⁷⁴ The Zeyni order was the only Sufi order with as many as four lodges in Istanbul during Mehmet II's reign. See Ömer Tuğrul İnançer and Baha Tanman, "Zeynilik" in *Dün Būgüne Kadar İstanbul*

to prevent other dervishes from setting in the new imperial capital. Though operating from Bursa, Şeyh Tacüddîn orchestrated the expulsion from Istanbul of Alaeddin-i Halvelti (ca. 1462), sheikh of the competing Halvetiye order.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, Şeyh Vefâ successfully urged a Nakşibendi disciple, Emir Buhari (d. 1516), to leave the city just after three days of his first arrival. The sheikh's request made clear that Nakşibendi order and sheikh, Abdullah-ı İlahi should not come either.¹⁷⁶

The Zeyniye's preeminence in Istanbul and Bursa, together with Şeyh Vefâ's proximity to the sultan, earned the sheikh a number of followers among influential political figures of the court.¹⁷⁷ This may be why Ahmed Paşa attempted to present himself as one of Şeyh Vefâ's disciples. As noted above Ahmed Paşa was the son of one of Murat II's military judges (*kazı'asker*). He was educated within the madrasah system and rapidly advanced through the ranks of the religious hierarchy (*'ilmiyye*). Ahmed Paşa was eventually appointed to a military judgeship, a vizierate and finally to the position of imperial tutor (*h^wace-yi şehriyye*).¹⁷⁸ According to Sehî Beg and Aşık Çelebi's biographical dictionaries, Ahmed Paşa's fast rise to the entourage of the sultan shortly after his appointment earned him rivalries within the imperial court. Known for being a boy-lover, he was accused by his enemies of becoming too close to one of the young male slaves of the royal household. The sultan decided to corroborate the rumors before

Ansiklopedisi (DBİA) 7 (Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı/Tarih Vakfı, 1994) 552-53. See also Baha Tanman, "Aşık Paşa Külliyesi" in *DBİA 1* 364-68; idem, "Şeyh Vefa Külliyesi" in *DBİA 7*: 173-6.

¹⁷⁵ The Halvetiye order became an important ally for Bayezid II during his governorship in Amasya (1455-1481). Consequently, after his enthronement, Halveti sheikhs and disciples were able to settle in Istanbul. In addition to Karataş's study on the Halvetiye order in Amasya, other scholars have charted the order's development and role in Anatolia during the sixteenth century. See Reşat Öngören, *Osmanlılar'da Tasavvuf* (Istanbul: İzayıcılık, 2000), 27-110; also F. de Jong, "Khalwatiyya" in *EI2*, 1960.

¹⁷⁶ Karataş, "Amasya," 91.

¹⁷⁷ Öngören, "Muslihuddin," 270.

¹⁷⁸ According to Mertol Tulum, during Mehmet II's time, following a ruling in the sultan's compendium of law or *kanūnnāme*, imperial preceptors had a stature in the state similar to that of the Şeyhül-İslam, the highest religious office. See Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nāme*, p. 15.

taking any action against the poet and hence ordered the young boy to meet the poet in a public bath (*hammam*). Seeing the naked boy serving him a drink (*şerbet*) in the bath, Aḥmed Paşa could not but improvise a couplet in his honor, and in so doing he betrayed his infatuation for the boy. The sultan disapproved of Aḥmed Paşa's flirtation and immediately commanded his imprisonment and execution. Yet, while in prison, the poet composed and sent to the sultan what probably is one of his most famous panegyrics, the *kerem-kaşīdesi* (favor-*kaşīde*), named after the poem's repeating rhyming element or *redif*), thus saving himself from death.¹⁷⁹

The biographer Laṭīfī, writing in the sixteenth century, provides an alternative explanation for Aḥmed Paşa's imprisonment. Laṭīfī suggests that the boy of whom Aḥmed Paşa had grown fond committed a fault and was consequently locked in Yedi Kule. Aḥmed Paşa, then in a vizierial position, suggested through a poem that he would free the boy in exchange for his affections. When the sultan learned of the missive, he ordered Aḥmed Paşa's punishment.¹⁸⁰ In both versions of Aḥmed Paşa's life, the vizier commits a moral fault, which leads directly to his expulsion from the imperial court. All accounts concur that it was the poem that saved Aḥmed Paşa's life.

Modern scholars often cite Aḥmed Paşa's ties to Mehmet II as evidence of the Ottoman sultan's appreciation for poetry.¹⁸¹ According to the biographical dictionaries, Aḥmed Paşa secured an appointment as a madrasah teacher and a regular pension at the end of his life. None of them explain how Aḥmed Paşa managed to send a poem to the

¹⁷⁹ Sehī Beg, *Heşt Bihişt: Sehi Beg Tezkiresi*, ed. Günay Kut (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 111-115; and 'Āşik Çelebi, *Meşāirü'ş-Şuarā' İnceleme-metin*, ed. Filiz Kılıç (Istanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2010), 1: 287-294.

¹⁸⁰ Latif and Canım, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 155-159.

¹⁸¹ Günay Kut, "Ahmet Paşa, Bursalı," in *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 2 (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1989), 111-112.

ruler who had just commanded his execution and imprisoned him in a dungeon on the outskirts of Istanbul, nor how he succeeded in receiving financial support from Bayezid II. Scrutiny of Aḥmed Paşa's *divan*, or compendium of his poems, offers what may be the missing piece of the puzzle. Just before his panegyrics to sultans and viziers, Aḥmed Paşa's *divan* includes four short versified praises to dervishes, Şeyḫ Vefā and Şeyḫ Tacüddīn.

In a fifteen-couplet poem, Aḥmed Paşa praises the extraordinary knowledge of the esteemed Zeyni sheikh at Bursa, Şeyḫ Tacüddīn, evoking his wisdom by embedding the titles of revered Persian Sufi treatises in the poem's verses. Aḥmed Paşa hints at Şeyḫ Tacüddīn's mastery of Neẓāmī Ganjavi's *Treasury of Secrets (Makhzan al-Asrār)*, a philosophical and ethical work discussing universal justice in Persian.¹⁸² Similarly, he makes explicit Şeyḫ Tacüddīn's knowledge of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *The Conference of Birds (Manṭiq-i Ṭayr)*, a clear sign of the sheikh's position at the summit of mystical learning.¹⁸³ Indeed, the *Manṭiq-i Ṭayr* is an allegory of the path for self-annihilation or *fanā*, a central aspect in the Sufi path towards the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wucūd*).¹⁸⁴ Aḥmed Paşa thanks the sheikh for having alleviated his pains and sorrows. The poem appears to refer to both the spiritual and material peril in which Aḥmed Paşa found himself after being dismissed from Mehmet II's court. In order to resettle in Bursa,

¹⁸² Neẓāmī Ganjavi composed this didactic *mesnevi* of around 2260 couplets ca. 1184. See P. Chelkowski, "Nizāmī Gandjāvī" in *EI2*.

¹⁸³ The *Manṭiq-i Ṭayr* or *The Conference of Birds* is Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's adaptation of Ḡhazzālī's *Risālat al-Ṭayr*. In it, the conference of birds decides to go on a quest to find the king of all birds, or Sīmurḡ. They select a leader and travel through seven vales. Except for thirty birds, all of them die. The survivors find the Sīmurḡ just to recognize that they are the deity (a play of the Sīmurḡ's name with the Persian *sī morḡ*, lit. thirty birds). See Hellmut Ritter, "Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār" in *EI2*; Reinert, "'Aṭṭār, Farīd-al-Dīn" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3: 20-21. For an analysis of 'Aṭṭār's mystical thought, see Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

¹⁸⁴ On the concept of *fanā*, see Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam" in *Creation and Timeless Order* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1994), 1-37.

Ahmed Paşa needed the support of a strong social and political network such as the one represented by the Zeyni sheikh. This poem, however, not only reveals Ahmed Paşa's desired connection with the Zeyniye order, but also provides a valuable map of the foundational texts a Sufi sheikh of Şeyh Tacüddîn's stature was expected to know and teach.¹⁸⁵

The cluster of panegyrics dedicated to Mehmet II and Bayezid II in Ahmed Paşa's *divan*, twenty-nine in total, highlights his determination to return to the imperial court.¹⁸⁶ As a scholar and royal preceptor who had been dismissed after a scandal of pederasty, Ahmed Paşa's best hope for redemption was to present himself as a reformed religious scholar and a talented poet. He became a teacher (*müderri*s) in Bursa and eventually built a madrasah right across from the Muradiyye, one of Bursa's royal religious complexes. Establishing a religious school in such a privileged position represented a clear public demonstration of political power and proximity both to the court and the religious establishment of the city. Indeed, according to Richard Cooper Repp, up until Bayezid II's reign the Muradiye complex ranked among the most prestigious institutions of learning, even above the *Sahn*, a series of madrasahs in the center of Istanbul founded by Mehmet II as an attempt to create a new center for higher learning in the empire and the Islamic world.¹⁸⁷

Şeyh Tacüddîn's death in 1468 left Ahmed Paşa in need of a new patron. Building on his well-established connection to the Zeyniyye, Ahmed Paşa began to present himself

¹⁸⁵ Ahmed Paşa, *Dīvānı*, 22-23.

¹⁸⁶ Of the thirty seven poems in the panegyric section, nine are dedicated to Mehmet II, nine to Bayezid II, two for Cem Sultan, three for Şeyh Vefâ, one for Şeyh Tacüddîn and one for prince Abdullah. The rest of the poems included do not name a patron, yet eleven of them are clearly panegyrics for the sultan. See Ahmed Paşa, *Dīvānı*, 1-120.

¹⁸⁷ Repp, *Müftü*, 43.

as a disciple of Şeyh Vefâ. In poem after poem, he attributed his own reformation to the sheikh, thus strengthening his own case and acknowledging Şeyh Vefâ's authority. In two poems with the repeating rhymed element (*redif*) "dervishes," Aḥmed Paşa praises the power and knowledge of the mystics.¹⁸⁸ In both poems, he establishes a series of images that connect the dervishes and their ways, such as the practice of seclusion, with the public good. The dervishes are the only means to connect with God and thus their presence is needed for understanding divine knowledge.

At the very end, the poet speaks directly to Şeyh Vefâ:

*Himmet-i Şeyh Vefâdan meded irmezse dîrîg
Aḥmedüñ ḥaddi degül midḥati dervîşlerün
Her ümîdüm gülini dirmege her şubḥ umaram
Açıla bâğçe-i rahmeti dervîşlerün
Ola ki islâh ide hicrândaki ḥayranluğum
Dem-i vuşlatda olan ḥaşreti dervîşlerün*

Alas, if Şeyh Vefâ's blessing would not arrive to aid [him], Ahmed could not praise the dervishes. May the garden of the dervishes' mercy open up and blossom, for I hope to pluck the rose of my hopes in the morning. May the dervishes' yearning be the longing for the moment of reunion, so that it reforms me, for I am confounded in the darkness of separation.¹⁸⁹

Selecting concepts applicable to both the qualities and activities of the dervish orders, like *himmet* or service/blessing, *rahmet* or mercy, and *ḥaşret* or yearning, Aḥmed Paşa honors the spiritual power of the sheikh and his order. At the same time he relies on the

¹⁸⁸ In the printed edition the first poem is entitled "In Praise of Şeyh Vefâ" and is followed by the expression "May God's mercy be upon him," which implies that Şeyh Vefâ was already dead by the time of its composition. But this title only appears in one of the manuscripts, being most likely a scribal addition that was later preserved by the editor of the modern Turkish transcription. In addition, these two poems are recorded only in three manuscripts, including the oldest one. While it can be argued that these poems are spurious, there is also no reason to believe that a copyist added these poems later. In point of fact, it is possible that the poems were left out of later recessions of the *divan*, which would clearly point to the political nature of the poems and their consequent suppression upon the decline of Zeyni influence at the court. I am thankful to Bill Hickman for this suggestion. See Aḥmed Paşa, *Dîvânı*, 19-20.

¹⁸⁹ Although the original is in verse, I have opted for a prose translation of all poems in this chapter in order to convey each poem's narrative dimensions. While prose inevitably obscures the formal characteristics of the original, it communicates the story and meaning intended by the author.

second meaning of the words to intimate a plea for assistance. With the compound *himmət-i Şeyh Vefā* (the service/spiritual blessing of Şeyh Vefā), Aḥmed Paşa suggests that the sheikh's support, which are simultaneously his spiritual deeds and teachings, are what brings praise to the dervishes. Şeyh Vefā's feats inspire and enable the poet to recognize and understand the dervishes' actions and practices. It follows then that the spiritual and social value of dervishes is revealed by the sheikh's deeds. At the same time, emphasizing his spiritual service or blessing (*himmət*) and aid (*meded*) the poet expresses the sheikh's eminence, which hints of his need of Şeyh Vefā's help. Aḥmed Paşa's use of the word *himmət* is suggestive. While in contemporary mystical works it has the connotation of a blessing, *himmət* also points to the attention needed to perform a service. In this sense, Şeyh Vefā's *himmət* implies that the sheikh has recognized the poet's spiritual reformation.

In the last two couplets, Aḥmed Paşa transfers the poem's focus to his own suffering and need for redemption, thereby positioning himself as an ardent follower of the order and its sheikh. He first links the dervishes' mercy to a garden and explains his hope to pluck a rose in the morning. Consequently he pleads to have another day of life, promising to dedicate his remaining days to the dervishes. Aḥmed Paşa signals the devotional function of his poem by placing the couplet's action in the morning (*şubḥ*), the most propitious time for prayers. Confusion and intoxication have left him in the darkness of separation. He has trusted the sheikh with his own reformation, and reiterates that it is his reunion with the sheikh and his order that he anticipates as the moment of his salvation. Aḥmed Paşa requests Şeyh Vefā's intervention and promises his support in return, announcing his intention to reform himself. In sum, Aḥmed Paşa attempts to

improve his current situation by pledging allegiance to the sheikh and his order. He accepts his wrong and emphasizes his desire to be reformed. His use of religious imagery should not be disregarded as purely pragmatic. On the contrary, the poem's deeply troubled tone, language of repentance, and appeal to Şeyh Vefâ's benevolence are all essential for its political goal, placing the poet's praise within a larger ethical and moral ethos that informed contemporary political decisions at the court.

Ahmed Paşa's second poem in praise of the dervishes has similar form and content, though it avoids any explicit references to Şeyh Vefâ. Its imagery focuses on the power of the dervishes, their religious preeminence, and their unique role as mediums between world and the next. The poem concludes:

*Umaram hâliş ola zer gibi bu kalb-i siyâh
Kîmyâdur bilürem şohbeti dervîşlerüñ
Ahmedâ âb-ı hayât-ı ebedî ister iseñ
Gel gör uş hâk-i der-i halveti dervîşlerüñ
Bu şenâ murğı uçarsa ne 'aceb Sidreye dek
Bağludur şeh-perine midhat-i dervîşlerüñ*

I hope for this black heart to become pure like gold. I know the dervishes' conversation is alchemy. Oh, Ahmed, if you want to drink from the eternal water of life, come and see the dust at the door of the dervishes' devoted seclusion! It is not a surprise if this bird of praise flies all the way to the Sidre, for the praise of the dervishes is tied up to its wings.¹⁹⁰

Here again, as in the previous poem, Ahmed Paşa employs the last three couplets to make explicit his own relationship with the dervishes. The poet hopes for his heart, black with longing, to become pure like gold. By the dervishes' intervention, his chest will become the treasure box of a pure heart. His friendship with the dervishes is like an elixir for him. As if by alchemy, their proximity could free him from his suffering, both physical and

¹⁹⁰ Ahmed Paşa, *Dīvānı*, 20.

spiritual. Thus he pledges allegiance once again. If he wants to drink from the water of life, he must look to the dervishes and their devotion. The particular devotional form practiced by these dervishes, according to Aḥmed Paşa, is seclusion. In the Islamic tradition, the water of life is closely associated with Hızır or Khidr, a mystical figure of great knowledge, who accompanied Alexander in his quest for the water of life and reached the source himself after great peril.¹⁹¹ Aḥmed Paşa implies that he has found eternal salvation at the dervishes' abode only after going through darkness. Finally, he confirms their divine influence, insisting that if his praises reach the heavens it is because of them. Aḥmed Paşa evokes Paradise as the Sidre, which the Qur'an identifies as being the last tree in the seventh heaven: "the Lote-tree of the furthest boundary (*sidretü'l-müntahi*) [...] near is the Garden of Refuge (*'aindahā cennetü'l-māvaī*)." The Sidre marks the end of the world revealed to men and angels, and also the end of human knowledge and understanding. The dervishes' stature brings the poet's words, as worthy as prayers, to the very limits of Creation, beyond which not even angels can go. They lead ultimately to the garden of heaven, the ultimate refuge (*cennetü'l-māvaī*). In a game of mirrors between this and the other world, the protection granted by the dervishes is in fact a refuge for Aḥmed Paşa in this world.

Aḥmed Paşa used his poetry to negotiate Şeyḫ Vefā's intervention on his behalf, calling upon one of the most powerful men in Istanbul at the time. Aḥmed Paşa was a renowned scholar and an excellent poet, yet it was not only the beauty of his poetry but

¹⁹¹ For the popular Anatolian cult of Hızır, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *İslâm-Türk İnançlarında Hızır Yahut Hızır-İlyas Kültü* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1985). For Hızır and Ottoman mystical literature, see Sibel Kocaer, "The Journey of an Ottoman Warrior Dervish: the *Hızırname* (Book of Khidr), Sources, and Reception" (PhD Diss., SOAS, 2015). Kocaer deals specifically with the poems of Egirli's Zeyni sheikh Meḥmed Çelebi, a contemporary of Aḥmed Paşa and Sinān Paşa, and the son of another of Abdüllatif-i Kudsi's disciples, namely, Pīrī Ḥalife (d. 1460).

indeed his capacity to communicate through his verses that helped him to position himself within a larger group of religious scholars and mystics. At the end of Mehmet II's reign, the court was divided mainly in two groups of religious scholars with different approaches to Islam and religious practices as well as varying degrees of orthodoxy.¹⁹² Under Bayezid II, religious training and interpretation was further institutionalized and assimilated into the imperial bureaucratic system.¹⁹³ Charismatic leaders such as Şeyh Vefâ were under constant scrutiny, for heresy was both reason and excuse for political disgrace. Alongside Aḥmed Paşa's exile under the charge of pederasty, another of Şeyh Vefâ's followers, Mollâ Lütfi, was dismissed from his position in Bayezid II's court and publicly executed for heresy.¹⁹⁴

In the few couplets that constitute these poems, Aḥmed Paşa builds an image of the dervishes as the sole intermediary between this world and the other. He also confirms the charisma and teachings of its order and his sheikh, a powerful group of mystics who aggressively defended their position of power in the Ottoman capital. Aḥmed Paşa's praises are not empty phrases, but a personal accounting of the Zeyni dervishes' public qualities. In both asking for help and expressing his gratitude for having received it, Aḥmed Paşa drew upon his renown as a poet to support the dervishes' charisma, and therefore their influence at court.

Sinân Paşa (d. 1486), scholar and member of the imperial court, composed a similar panegyric (*kaşîde*) for Şeyh Vefâ. Sinân Paşa was son of the first religious judge in Istanbul and at an early age he became a madrasah teacher (*müderris*). Around 1470,

¹⁹² Sinân Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 18.

¹⁹³ See, for instance, Repp, *Müfti*, 64-67 on the transformation to the appointments of *müderris* and *müfti* during Bayezid II's reign.

¹⁹⁴ For a biographical study of Mollâ Lütfi and his works, see Orhan Şaik Gökay, *Molla Lûtfi* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1987).

he became royal preceptor and in 1477 he was appointed Grand Vizier after his predecessor lost his position and was imprisoned in Rumelihisarı.¹⁹⁵ Little is known of Sinān Paşa's tenure as vizier, since he was quickly dismissed that same year and incarcerated. The sultan pardoned him soon after, in response to the pleas of most scholars and religious men close to the court. It appears that some of the leading figures pushing for his release included Şeyh Vefā and Mollā Hüsameddin. Thus, Sinān Paşa was freed from prison and appointed to a religious judgeship (*kađılık*) and madrasah post (*müderislik*) in Sivrihisar in central Anatolia.¹⁹⁶ Re-appointed to the office of vizier by Bayezid II in 1481, he later moved to Edirne to teach at the Dar'ül-Hadis, one of the most prominent educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth century. He passed away in Gallipoli in 1486.¹⁹⁷ One of the leading scholars of the mid-15th century, Sinān Paşa has also been credited with writing the first work of rhymed Ottoman prose, his *Tazarru'nâme* or *Book of Orations*, completed circa 1482.¹⁹⁸

Sinān Paşa foregrounds his relationship with Şeyh Vefā in two of his works, the *Tezkiretü'l-Evliyā*, a biographical dictionary of saints, and the *Tazarru'nâme*, a book of prayers and praises to the prophet Muhammad. While his *Tezkiretü'l-Evliyā* was loosely based on Attar's homonymous biographical dictionary, Sinān Paşa transformed his model into a new and original work by adding explanatory notes and new biographical entries, and by rendering it into Turkish rhymed prose. His success in producing eloquent sentences whose elements paralleled each other both in meaning and form was later

¹⁹⁵ Hedda Reindl Kiel, "Gedik Ahmed Paşa," *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 1996), 543–44.

¹⁹⁶ Aylin Koç, "Sinan Paşa," 230.

¹⁹⁷ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1964), 2: 658–60.

¹⁹⁸ *Tazarru'* can also be translated as a supplication. Mertol Tulum, however, points out that the meaning used within the text is closer to orations or prayers. See Tulum's introduction to his edition of Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 29.

recognized by referring to rhyming prose as Sinān's style (*Sinān tarzı*). In this innovative work, Sinān Paşa also responds to criticism against mysticism, most likely of some relevance at the time, thus turning this book into a defense of Şeyh Vefā and dervish orders in general.

The *Tazarru'nâme* dwells on issues of religious practice and the role of dervishes in the Muslim community through a series of orations and praise poems to the prophet. While it lacks a dedication or any explicit reference to a patron, Sinān Paşa indicates in another of his works, the *Ma'arifnâme*, that the *Tazarru'nâme*'s "essence is founded upon the ways of the sheikhs of Truth (*meşāyih-i haḳḳikat*) and built upon the precepts of the mystics (*ehl-i tarikat*)."¹⁹⁹ Sinān Paşa dedicates a sixty-three couplet section of the *Tazarru'nâme* to community's need for sheikhs; he also concludes his work with an extended panegyric of Şeyh Vefā written in rhymed prose.²⁰⁰ The *Tazarru'nâme* can be divided into two sections. The first section is constituted by orations, divided into nineteen subsections called for the most part *işāret*. The topics of these subsections include God's oneness, religious knowledge and sciences, the role of sheikhs, as well as religious duties of praying, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, among other things. The second section provides a series of praises for the prophet Muhammed (*na't*), the six mayor prophets preceding him, the Caliphs, and Muhammad's family. The book ends by praising first the mystics of Islam and finally Şeyh Vefā.²⁰¹

Sinān Paşa's three Turkish works, namely, the *Tazarru'nâme*, the *Ma'arifnâme*, and the *Tezkiretü'l-Evliyā*, seem to closely relate to each other as a tripartite project

¹⁹⁹ This sentence is taken from the *sebeb-i telif* section (reason for composing the book) of Sinān Paşa's *Ma'arifname*. Quoted in Aylin Koç, *Sinan Paşa*, 230; see also Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 29-36.

²⁰⁰ Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 875-880.

²⁰¹ Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 7-8.

aimed at defending a particular approach to religious practice and knowledge, a project where the role of the dervish sheikh, the guide (*mürşid*), is indispensable for whoever hopes to follow the path. Sinān Paşa warns the reader:

*Sālike mürşid gerek bilgil anı
Mürşid olmayınca azar yolını*

Know that the devotee needs a spiritual leader, for if he has no such a guide, he would lose his path.²⁰²

In the section of the *Tazarru'nâme* entitled "A praise on the sheikh of sheikhs Ibnü'l-Vefā," Sinān Paşa presents Şeyh Vefā not only as a man of knowledge and a guide in religious matters, but almost as a peer of prophets. The section begins by describing the sheik as a champion who has conquered the self and undone the chains of desire. Once the figure of the hero is at the forefront of his praise, Sinān Paşa uses the names of prophets to announce the sheik's spiritual victories. Like Abraham, Şeyh Vefā has become a king, like Joseph he has conquered the heart (represented by Egypt), and like Moses he has drowned Pharaoh, in this case an allegory for the self. All this serves to introduce Şeyh Vefā's true significance: he is the guide in the path of virtue and piety, the man who can lead his disciples to the Truth, a man of learning and religious knowledge.²⁰³ Sinān Paşa's praise culminates with a twelve-couplet poem:

*Şeyh-i 'ālem āfitāb-i evliyā
Mürşid-i Haq muḳtedā-yi aşfiyā
Şeyh-i heft iḳlīm ü ḳuṭb'ül-'ālemīn
Vāşıl-i ḥazret cemālū'- 'ārifīn
[...]
Sālikān-i dīne ustād olmuş ol
Ḳıdve-i abdāl ü evtād olmuş ol
Ab-i ḥayvān ḳatre-i baḥr-i dili
Ḥızr-veş 'ilm-i ledünnī ḥāsılı*

²⁰² Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 169 and 1228.

²⁰³ Sinān Paşa, *Tazarru'-nâme*, 169; 876-80.

[He is the] sheik of the world and sun of God's friends (saints), a spiritual teacher who guides through the right road of Truth and is a model for saints. [He is the] sheikh of the seven climes and the axis of saints in the two worlds, [he] has reached the highest station [and] beauty of the wise. He became the master of the devotees who follow the path, and the model for dervishes and the four sheiks of the world. Just a drop of water from the sea of his heart is the Water of Life, for like Hızır, he has gathered divine knowledge.

The couplet universalizes Şeyh Vefā by carefully positioning him above all hierarchy in the Sufi path. He is not only one of God's friends (*evliyā* and *aşfiyā*), often translated as saints, but indeed a role model for them.²⁰⁴ The penumbra of his influence is extended to the whole earth by the reference of the seven climes. He is also the most important sheikh in this and the other world. Having reached all realms and levels of existence, he establishes a connection between the material and the spiritual.²⁰⁵ In the third couplet, Sinān Paşa asserts that Şeyh Vefā is not only a guide and master for disciples who are at the earliest stages of the Sufi path, but for all dervishes (*abdāl*) including the four greater sheikhs of the world (*evtād*).

To convey the scale of Şeyh Vefā's wisdom, Sinān Paşa returns to Hızır, the mystical figure who accompanied Alexander the Great in his quest for the water of life. Şeyh Vefā has acquired religious knowledge, becoming a master in this world just like Hızır, guide and helping figure to prophets and saints.²⁰⁶ His heart is so full of divine knowledge that even the most miniscule part of it would reveal the secrets of the world

²⁰⁴ On the "friends of God" in medieval Islamic thought, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī* (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Bern Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). For a discussion of how a person becomes a friend of God (Ar. *walī*/Ott. *velī*), see Ahmet Karamustafa, "Walaya According to al-Junayd (d. 298/910)" in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, ed. Todd Lawson (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 64-70.

²⁰⁵ For the use of *ḳutb* (axis) in mystical literature as the highest rank among the friends of God (*velī*), see Süleyman Ateş, "Kutb" in *TDVİA* 26: 498-9.

²⁰⁶ Hızır is an ambiguous figure in Islamic tradition, sometimes considered a prophet or a saint (*walī*). He is identified with the servant that helps Moses in the Qur'an. See Qur'an, 18: 59-81. In popular tradition, Hızır also helps the Prophet and other heroes such as Battal Gazi and Sarı Saltık.

and the ultimate Truth, just as the water of life did for Hızır. The image of the water of life also implies the struggle to reach it and its prize, which is ultimately unity with God. The darkness that surrounds the water of life is ignorance, the multiplicity of existence that we see with our senses. The guide, Hızır/Şeyh Vefā, shows us the path to the light, which is ultimately the unity of existence. Sinān Paşa reminds us that it is thanks to the sheikh, and in fact only through him, that we can reach unity with God and not get lost before reaching it.

Sinān Paşa's praise of Şeyh Vefā in the *Tazarru'nāme* differs from Aḥmed Paşa's panegyrics in its length and scope. Sinān Paşa's monumental work on the Sufi path and the role of the Sufi sheikh places Şeyh Vefā at the core of a larger discussion, namely, who is best suited to advise the king and lead the community of believers. Nonetheless, reading both praises side by side suggests the intimate relation between different literary expressions at the court. Both Aḥmed Paşa and Sinān Paşa construct careful images of Şeyh Vefā as the most adequate medium to understand and establish a connection between this world and the other. Similarly, Aḥmed Paşa describes the dervishes as that element needed to link this world with the other world, and by implication suggests the necessity of their advice and teaching in experiencing this world.

Aḥmed Paşa's verses seem to respond to a moment of need, and thus include a request for the sheikh's intervention. By contrast, Sinān Paşa's work presents a more expansive commentary on the social significance of dervishes and the Sufi path. These examples show how scholars and members of the imperial court used poetry, either as self-standing praises or as part of larger prose works, in order to position themselves within a larger network of religious scholars and dervishes: those following the Zeyniye

order and the teachings of Şeyh Vefâ. Indeed, the poems suggest some of the benefits that this act of public allegiance brought to both the poets and the sheikhs.

A Poem for Another Sheikh

Not long after Aḥmed Paşa's exile to Bursa, Mehmet II died in Istanbul in 1481. At the time of his death, there were two possible heirs to the Ottoman dynasty, namely, Bayezid II and Cem Sultan. During Mehmet II's reign the balance of power between palace-educated bureaucrats and the old Turkish Anatolian families had leaned towards the urban bureaucracy of Mehmet II. Turkish notables saw their power and riches diminished, seized by a state in need of cash for the sultan's constant campaigns. Mehmet II's death represented a new opportunity to regain their old privileges, so Turkish notables rallied behind Cem Sultan, including the grand vizier Karamanî Mehmet Paşa.²⁰⁷ Imperial servants educated in the palace, including the Janissaries, supported Bayezid II instead. Bayezid II had also made alliances during his long period of governorship in Amasya, and the local nobility of northern Anatolia supported him to succeed his father. After a short period of civil strife, Cem Sultan was exiled to Europe, and Bayezid II became the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul. Members of his princely court moved from Amasya to the imperial capital. By the time of Bayezid II's enthronement, the Halveti dervishes had established themselves as an important political actor in Amasya. It was time for them to move towards the capital, with the support of the sultan now with them and not the Zeyniye.

²⁰⁷ McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks*, 72-75.

Among those who came to Istanbul were the sons of one of Bayezid's early tutors, Tācī Beg: Tācī-zade Sa'di Çelebi and Ca'fer Çelebi. The former became an eminent religious scholar, keeping himself away from the court. Ca'fer Çelebi instead built up a career in the imperial service. He was educated in Amasya and moved to Bursa to continue his training. Soon after completion of his studies, he was appointed to Simav's madrasah and served as religious judge or *kāḏī*. He was then appointed to Bayezid's *imaret* in Edirne and later to the madrasah of Mahmud Çelebi, also in Edirne. As a member of the ruling elite, he commissioned several buildings at the places where he held office, namely, a mosque in Simav together with a Turkish bath, another mosque in Balat, a caravanserai in Bergama, and a primary school (*sıbyan mektebi*) in Edirne.²⁰⁸ Finally, Ca'fer Çelebi was appointed *nişāncı* or imperial chancellor around 1497. He was deposed at the end of Bayezid II's reign, but Selim I re-appointed him upon his enthronement. In 1515 Ca'fer Çelebi was executed.²⁰⁹

Ca'fer Çelebi composed a poem responding to Aḥmed Paşa's praises to the Zeyni dervishes, possibly before reaching his position at the imperial council. In a twenty-one couplet poem, Ca'fer Çelebi emulates Aḥmed Paşa's compositions in form and structure. Using similar imagery, Ca'fer Çelebi attempts to resemble and surpass Aḥmed Paşa's originals.

*Himmet itse kara toprağı kızıl altun ider
Kimyā oldı meger himmeti dervişlerüñ*

If the dervishes perform their service, the black soil turns into red gold. Certainly the dervishes' service has become alchemy.

²⁰⁸ İsmail Erünsal, "Tâcîzâde Câfer Çelebi," in *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 39 (Istanbul: Türk Diyanet Vakfı, 2010), 353-356. For a biography and description of his works, see Erünsal, *Life and Works*, XXIII-CV.

²⁰⁹ Erünsal, *Life and Works*, XLII.

Echoing Aḥmed Paşa, Ca'fer Çelebi praises the spiritual attributes of the dervishes, developing images for each of them in order to highlight their relation to the divine. Service (*himmət*), sacredness and reverence (*hürmet*), power and strength (*kudret*), praise and stature (*midhat*), each of them echo in the form and content Aḥmed Paşa's poems. Nonetheless, Ca'fer Çelebi addresses the dervishes not in a moment of need or debt, and thus his poem is an erudite ode rather than a plea for life.

Ca'fer Çelebi ultimately composed dozens of responses to Aḥmed Paşa's poetry, imitating his style and form. In this poem, Ca'fer Çelebi improves Aḥmed Paşa's images, adding balance and lowering the hyperbolic tone of his predecessor's poems. His message is in the content of the poem as much as it is in its form. By this time, Şeyḫ Vefā was no longer the undisputable dervish sheikh of Istanbul, yet with the renewed presence of the Halvetiye, dervishes remained crucial players at court. It is probably this shift that most clearly hints to the capacity of these poems to express and establish connections with larger political and religious factions at the court. Ca'fer Çelebi had the freedom to update the poems written for Şeyḫ Vefā, praise the influence and power of dervishes, at the same time that he attempted to surpass Aḥmed Paşa, who was still the undisputable master of verse. However, Ca'fer Çelebi transferred the praise originally composed for the Zeyni sheikh to his rival, Çelebi Halife, the powerful Halveti sheikh based in Amasya. Indeed, Çelebi Halife played a crucial role in Bayezid II's accession to the throne. Just as the religious preeminence formerly held by the Zeyniye, a mystical order with its base power in Edirne and Bursa, had been seized by its rival order, the Halvetiye, with its base in Amasya, so too the court poets and intellectuals praising dervish sheikhs

were no longer the members of Bursa and Edirne's elite families (Aḥmed Paşa and Sinān Paşa), but their newly arrived counterparts from Amasya (Ca'fer Çelebi).

Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi and the Poets of the Turkish Language

Ca'fer Çelebi became a prolific poet and a renowned stylist. According to a register of the imperial treasury, Bayezid II's court rewarded Ca'fer Çelebi on two occasions. He received payment for composing a panegyric to Bayezid II and for crafting a diplomatic letter addressed to the sultan of Egypt.²¹⁰ He compiled a large *dīvān* or compendium of poems, consisting of more than three hundred poems. In addition to his *dīvān*, he also produced other works in prose and verse, among which a lengthy rhymed story about his pursuit of love stands out: the *Heves-nāme* or the *Book of Passion*, completed in 1493, just before he reached the peak of his political career.²¹¹ While the chronology of his other poetic production remains murky, it is suggestive to consider whether his appointments at the court and elsewhere had a direct impact on his work. It is quite possible that Ca'fer Çelebi was interested in portraying himself as a master of verse right before being appointed imperial chancellor.

In the preface to his *Heves-nāme* or *The Book of Passion*, Ca'fer Çelebi explains his reason for composing the book by remembering a night when his friends contended that two of the most famous poets of the Turkish language, namely, Şeyḥī (d. 1431) and Aḥmed Paşa (d. 1497) were not really poets.²¹² According to these friends, Şeyḥī failed to

²¹⁰ Erünsal rightly emphasizes the relationship between literary and diplomatic language. See *Life and Works*, XXXII.

²¹¹ The online edition of the *Heves-nāme* includes a total of 3732 couplets.

²¹² Ca'fer Çelebi, *Hevesnāme*, 476-534. See appendix 1.

apply the rules of rhetoric, while Aḥmed Paşa lacked eloquence.²¹³ Ca'fer Çelebi claims that this discussion prompted him to write a book in order to take his rightful place above his overrated predecessors.

*Şular kim Türki dilde şöreti var
Biri Şeyhî biri Aḥmeddür ey yâr
[...]
Hayâl-i hâşa çün kâdir degüller
Haḳîkatde bular şâ'ir degüller*

Oh lover, of those who have earned renown in the Turkish language, one is Şeyhî and the other Aḥmed [...] yet these two were not really poets, for they had no power of imagination.²¹⁴

He elaborates his concerns about Şeyhî's work by explaining that although the poet understood the beauty of words, he was deficient in his rhetorical training.

*Feşâhatde velîkin kârı yokdur
Kelâmuñ garîb elfâzı çokdur*

In his words, there is no efficient use of the rules of rhetoric, yet new and original expressions are abundant.²¹⁵

Aḥmed Paşa, on the other hand, Ca'fer Çelebi insists, has no eloquence at all. His words are written according to the rules of rhetoric, but are devoid of expressiveness.²¹⁶ Placed

²¹³ This instance is already noted and quoted by Laṭîfî in his biographical dictionary. Interestingly, Laṭîfî quotes the entire passage in Ca'fer Çelebi's entry, a total of eight couplets. He then repeats one couplet in Şeyhî's entry, namely, that in which Ca'fer Çelebi explains that in Şeyhî's poems "there is no efficient use of the rules of rhetoric." No mention of this criticism, however, is to be found in Aḥmed Paşa's entry. See Laṭîfî and Canım, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 210; 340. Turkish literary scholars have focused on this section to comment upon Aḥmed Paşa's influence on Ca'fer Çelebi's poetry. See Necati Sungur, "Divan Şairlerinin Birbilerine Yönelik Tenkitlerinin ilk örneklerinden biri: Cafer Çelebi'nin Şeyhi ve Ahmed Paşa'yi Tenkidi" *Bilig: Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 17 (2001): 71-77.

²¹⁴ Erünsal quotes this and the following couplet in his critical edition of Ca'fer Çelebi's poetry collection in which he identifies the famous and widely quoted couplets of Ca'fer Çelebi's *Heves-nâme* regarding Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyhî. See Erünsal, *Life and Works*, LII.

²¹⁵ Ali Emre Özyıldırım has pointed out that the use of the word *garib* for describing a particular style in literary composition implied originality and the establishment of new meanings. Erünsal, however, has interpreted *garib elfâzı* as "archaic words." See Ali Emre Özyıldırım, "Garîb Ma'nâlar, Acîb Hayâller. Laṭîfî ve Âşık Çelebi Tezkirelerinden Hareketle Belagat Terimi Olarak 'Garîb' Sıfatı" in *Âşık Çelebi ve Şairler Tezkiresi Üzerine Yazılar*, ed. Hatice Aynur and Aslı Niyazioğlu (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 147-165; Erünsal, *Life and Works*, p. LIII.

side by side, these couplets represent a coherent and simple critique, and in fact, a widely accepted maxim of Ottoman aesthetics: for a poem to be worthy, it has to be both written in accordance to the complex rules of rhetoric and be eloquent at the same time. According to Ca'fer Çelebi's friends, his more famous predecessors each represented just one side of the coin. Şeyhî was the poet capable of producing beautiful words but who paid no heed to the rules of rhetoric, while Aḥmed Paşa illustrated the mechanical use of writing according to the requirements of rhetorical rules but without eloquence.

Ca'fer Çelebi continues his critique by elaborating on his own ideas about proper poetic composition in the following section. Significantly, he chooses not to discuss another contemporary and possibly more famous poet, Necātī Beg (d. 1509), known for his eloquence and talent. Why does Ca'fer Çelebi give the names of two well-established court poets as examples of failed poetic composition instead of citing unsuccessful contemporary poets? Why did he decide not to include or discuss Necātī Beg's poems, whose works had been equated to Aḥmed Paşa, even in his own time?²¹⁷ In the introduction of his critical edition to Ca'fer Çelebi's poetry collection, Ismail Erünsal offers us a clue: Necātī Beg was never a poet established at the imperial court.

Ca'fer Çelebi's couplets critiquing Aḥmed Paşa, were incorporated into the biographical dictionaries of the sixteenth century, thus ensuring their popularity.²¹⁸ Modern scholarship has often cited these couplets when assessing Aḥmed Paşa's impact on the next generation of poets, that is, those poets belonging to the reigns of Bayezid II

²¹⁶ "Belāğatda velī māhir degüldür/ Kelāmuñ rabṭına kâdir degüldür (He has no eloquence. He is unable to connect words!)." Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nāme*, 519.

²¹⁷ According to the biographical dictionaries, Necātī Beg composed a response couplet or *naẓīre* to Aḥmed Paşa during a poetic gathering (*meclis*) which both attended. In his verses, Necātī Beg acknowledged that people had been comparing him to his senior, Aḥmed Paşa, and excuses himself by highlighting his respect for the veteran poet. See Latifî and Canım, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 520-21.

²¹⁸ The first biographer who mentions this critique is Laṭifî, followed by Aşık Celebi. Sehi Beg's fairly brief entries on Aḥmed Paşa and Ca'fer Çelebi do not discuss the content of the *Heves-nāme*.

and Selim I. The critique centered on Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyḫī represents only a very small part of Ca'fer Çelebi's *Book of Passion*. Most scholars cite its passages about Istanbul, which constitute one of the first Ottoman descriptions of the city.²¹⁹ On the other hand, this work has attracted the attention of literary scholars thanks to the author's claims to be presenting a completely original work in contrast to the more established tradition of re-working models from the Persian literary canon. In this context, the dismissal of Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyḫī must be seen first and foremost as a rhetorical device used to signal the innovative nature of Ca'fer Çelebi's *mesnevi*.²²⁰ This is obvious when considering the position of this discussion in relation to the rest of the work. This section begins just before the author's exposition of his own views on originality and literary merit which constitute an innovative approach to the *mesnevi* genre. This exposition is included in the form of an anecdote wherein his close friends ask him to compose a *mesnevi*. Nonetheless, the selection of these poets, and in particular of Aḥmed Paşa, supports the central role of intertextual communication in the making of a tight community of scholars, courtiers and poets, an interpretative community that used literary works for entertainment, but also as means to assert their position within the hierarchy of the Ottoman court.

The selection of Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyḫī was not random, as Erünsal rightly suggests when noting the absence of Necātī Beg. Şeyḫī was considered one of the chief

²¹⁹ See, for instance, Gülrü Necipoğlu's use of the *Heves-nāme* to reconstruct the layout of the Topkapı Palace; Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, xii, 85, 124, 132, 143 and 217. See also Agah Sırrı Levend, *Türk Edebiyatında Şehr-engizler ve Şehr-engizlerde İstanbul* (Istanbul: Fethi Derneği, 1957).

²²⁰ *Mesnevis* are long narrative poems written in rhyming couplets. In the Turkish tradition, *mesnevis* can extend to thousands of couplets. There is no exact translation for this term in English. Although the word *mesnevi* has been translated as romance, I have preferred to keep the Turkish term in this section in order to avoid the historical implications of "romance" in European history and literatures.

poets at the era.²²¹ Associated with the Ottoman court under Mehmet I and Murad II, his work was also widely read during Bayezid II's time, particularly his *mesnevi Hüsrev ü Şirin*, judging by the number of copies produced during this period.²²² Another indication of Şeyhî's importance is the use of his verses for divination even up to the eighteenth century, similar to the way Hafez's *Divān* was employed in the search for omens. Reportedly, Selim I used verses from Şeyhî's *mesnevi* in this a way when waging war against his father, Bayezid II.²²³

While there will be eight months of trouble,
Fortune and prosperity will follow, oh friend.
The age will set up its bow,
and the arrow of desire will reach its target.
The world will surrender its position,
and the seven climes will prostrate at your feet.²²⁴

Both Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyhî were at some point the main poets of the Ottoman court, later to fall from grace due to rivalries at court. Nonetheless, Aḥmed Paşa was certainly of much relevance to Ca'fer Çelebi, as he was the most renowned court poet of the immediately preceding reign, that of Mehmet II, and was still revered well into the reign of Bayezid II.

Aḥmed Paşa's supremacy as a poet was already well established by the end of his lifetime. Contemporary biographical dictionaries make this clear. The number of his

²²¹ Şeyhî was not a contemporary poet in strict sense, as he was attached to Murad II's court, two reigns before Bayezid II's. Yet, if we consider a period of time not in only relation to a king's reign, then even though they were not coetaneous they could be said to have been contemporary to a certain extent. The image and relevance of Şeyhî had not seemed to fade just two generations after him. Furthermore, as I discuss later, we should consider Ca'fer Çelebi's interest in quoting the two major poets of the two previous reigns, that is, Murad II's (Şeyhî) and Mehmet II's (Aḥmed Paşa). By referring to both of them, it almost naturally followed that he was their equivalent in Bayezid II's reign.

²²² Ayşin Yoltar-Yildirim, "A 1498-99 Khusraw va Şirîn: Turning the Pages of an Ottoman Illustrated Manuscript," *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 55-109.

²²³ See Faruk Timurtaş "Şeyhî'nin Şöhreti ve Tesiri," 86-87.

²²⁴ "Velikin on sekiz ay zahmetün var/Pes andan baht u devlet olısar yar/Kurısardur kemanını zemana/Eriserdür murad okı nişana/Kılısardur cihan cahini teslim/Geliser ayagina yidi iklim." Transcription as quoted by Timurtaş, "Şeyhî'nin Şöhreti," 87. Translation mine.

poems is high in relation to other contemporary poets. In a preliminary survey of published *divāns* of the time, the number of Aḥmed Paşa's *kasides* and *gazels* places him among the three most prolific writers among the poets associated with the court. The other two are Necātī and Ca'fer Çelebi, and Aḥmed Paşa seems to have been widely read. For instance, the anthology of Eğridirli Hacı Kemāl, compiled at the end of Bayezid II's reign (1512), suggests that Aḥmed Paşa was one of the leading poets of the time.²²⁵ He is also the poet with the most poems (51) in Edirneli Nazmī's *Mecma'u'n-Nezāir*, completed by 1524. His poems represent almost fourteen percent of the compiled poems, which were written by sixty-one different poets. Consequently, his poems have the most responses (*naẓīre*), up to a total of 1035.²²⁶ The poets who figure most prominently in this anthology are Necātī Beg, Ca'fer Çelebi, Cem Sultan, and Şeyḫī.²²⁷

Ca'fer Çelebi's critique of Aḥmed Paşa and Şeyḫī is presented as an argument advanced by his friends and not by himself. This may purely a rhetorical device. In any case, Ca'fer Çelebi sufficiently agreed with these criticisms to use them as a preface to his own work. The argument between the poet and his friends oscillates within a series of dilemmas, ultimately pushing towards two opposite poles: to write or not to write. On a first instance of the discussion, the binomial element of the argument is phrased in terms of talent (*tab'*), a certain particular capacity of men to compose eloquent verses.

Biographical dictionaries of the next generation would employ talent versus education as a trope for literary criticism. Laḫfī's biographical dictionary offers a striking

²²⁵ Eğridirli Hacı Kemāl, *Kitāb-i Cāmiu'n-Nezāir*, Bayezid Library, 5782, Istanbul. See folio 454b.

²²⁶ Edirneli Nazmī, *Mecma'u'n-Nezāir*, ed. Fatih Köksal (Istanbul: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012), 42.

²²⁷ While these anthologies do not represent an infallible source to assess the impact of particular poets, they do give some sense of the gradual coalescing of an Ottoman literary canon. See Selim S. Kuru, "The Literature of Rum: The Making of a Literary Tradition" in *The Ottoman Empire as a World Power, 1453-1603. The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi and Kate Fleet, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 548-592. See in particular p. 580-581.

example of the tension between talent and education in its entry on the poet Fānī, whose biography is used to provide extensive advice to those aiming to compose good poetry.²²⁸ Fānī's case is particularly suggestive because we possess two different renditions of this entry by Laṭīfī. In both cases it is possible to see a central preoccupation for the training of poets in the sciences of rhetoric and representation. However, the second rendition differs from the earlier version in that each piece of advice is enriched by an extended list of particular expectations, that is, areas of knowledge in which the poet is meant to attain mastery.²²⁹ There is almost a twenty-year difference between the two renditions of Laṭīfī's biographical dictionary.²³⁰ The rivalry between Aşık Çelebi, author of another biographical dictionary, and Laṭīfī was central to the modification of the first version of the dictionary.²³¹ Following this, it is possible to argue that the debate about the training of poets and the literary elite was very much active in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and that it produced a vivid debate that required more specific advice, as given in the second edition of Laṭīfī's dictionary. Consequently, one of the most important manuals of rhetoric of the time, written in 1549 by Sürūrī for Şehzade Mustafa, *Bahrü'l-ma'arif*, starts with such a discussion, arguing that poets have forgotten education, and instead boast about their natural talent:

*Man na-dānam fā'ilāt fā'ilāt
Şi'r guyam behter āz āb-e ḥayāt*

I may not know of this or that meter, yet I compose poems that are better than the water of life.²³²

²²⁸ Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 257-258.

²²⁹ See Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, Kayseri Raşid Efendi 1160, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul; Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, Nuruosmaniye 3725, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul.

²³⁰ See Walter Andrews, "Osmanlı Metin Çalışmaları," 54-58.

²³¹ See Andrews, *Tezkire*, 9-11.

²³² Through this Persian couplet, Sürūrī insists that some poets neglect formal training, and instead boast about their natural talent. Sürūrī, *Bahrü'l-ma'arif*. Hamidiye 1051, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul. Folio 2b.

This disregard of education among new poets, Sürūrī believes, has only led to faulty poems.

The discussion in the *Heves-nāme* moves forward to religious education and virtue. Ca'fer Çelebi argues that talent is not the only necessary quality of a poet, and in fact poetry is a dangerous enterprise, for it distracts men of learning. This dilemma is only understood if we consider that most court poets were not professional poets, but learned men who also composed poetry alongside their other intellectual activities. Furthermore, the role of poetry within the Muslim community was not a novel concern. Ottoman poets were well aware of the Qur'an's criticism of poetry. Poetry is considered unbefitting of the Prophet, thus explaining his lack of mastery of it (Qur'an 36:69). In every instance in which poetry or poets are mentioned in the Koran (Qur'an 52:30 and 69:41), the word "poet" (*shā'ir*) seems to be consequently used as a synonym for a charlatan, a false prophet, or a magician. Similarly, in the *Sura of the Prophets*, Muhammad is accused by his enemies of having invented the revelation, and thus being "a poet" and not messenger of God (Qur'an 21; 5; also 37:36). Ca'fer Çelebi hints of this tension by invoking Moses in his verses. One of Moses' miracles was turning his own hand white. Moses used miracles as proof against the magic tricks of Pharaoh's priests. The allegory is evident: poetry can be both falsehood and truth, but just as Moses proved himself a true prophet, Ca'fer Çelebi is a true poet, a poet of true meanings. Thus his friends win the argument by showing that poetry is not a matter of frivolous spontaneity,

Nurullah Ataç identifies this same couplet as belonging to Jelaleddin Rumi. See Nurullah Ataç, *Günlerin Getirdiği; Sözden Söze* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008), 181.

but rather the result of spiritual knowledge, thus resolving Ca'fer Çelebi's apparent conflict as a man of learning and a poet.²³³

Ca'fer Çelebi advances three clear arguments by means of a fictional dialogue between himself and some friends. First, poetry requires talent and education. It must comply with the rules of rhetoric, but at the same time it must show power of imagination. This synthesis is the only way that the poet can use pleasant words while at the same time producing new meanings. Second, the meaning of poetry comes from the spiritual knowledge of the poet, and thus it reflects the virtue as much as the skill of the one who writes it. Last but not least, Ahmed Paşa and Şeyhî, who have been rewarded with fame and renown, do not deserve their place as literary models. Ca'fer Çelebi's work will show that he is the one who should be acknowledged as the most skilled poet.

In this chapter, I show how intellectuals and scholars associated with the courts of Mehmet II and Byezid II used poetry in order to create networks of support that linked them to other members of the Ottoman ruling elite including mystics, statesmen, and other scholars. I have demonstrated the value of panegyric poetry as a means of negotiating political allegiances. These negotiations took the form of prescriptive statements that argued both for the way which other individuals should be seen, as well as the influence and importance that poets and scholars should have at the imperial court. Poems also served as commentaries on contemporary political anxieties and societal ideas, such as the role of dervish sheikhs in Ottoman society, the curricula mastered by a religious leader, and the intellectual skills of a scholar, which included both poetry and religious knowledge.

²³³ "Dağı şî'r ü gazelden kesb-i 'irfân/ müveccehdür gerekmez aña burhân (It is acceptable to acquire divine knowledge from poetry. There is no need to provide a proof for that)." Ca'fer Çelebi, *Heves-nâme*, 504.

As shown through the works of Aḥmed Paşa, Sinān Paşa, and Ca'fer Çelebi examined in this chapter, poets, scholars, and imperial bureaucrats were not yet distinct professions. In fact, Ca'fer Çelebi's transition from court poet and scholar to imperial chancellor and patron of poets illustrates the incipient process of professionalization of court poets at the Ottoman imperial court. Furthermore, it exemplifies the intrinsic relation between poetic composition, intellectual skill, political power, and social renown.

CHAPTER IV

Bureacracy's Poetry: the Politics and the Poetics of Ottoman Administrative

This chapter offers a study of how Ottoman intellectuals and bureaucrats provided models for social and political behavior through the creation of a new literary language for official correspondence and diplomatic letters. It shows how Ottoman bureaucrats created a corpus of *exempli* for the training of diplomatic and official writing, and in so doing advanced their own models for a new Ottoman imperial society. It demonstrates that the literary language *ex professo* created for imperial and personal communications allowed Ottoman intellectuals to make a series of social prescriptions for the ruling elite. By attempting to standardize bureaucratic procedure, Ottoman scholars aimed to create an authoritative manual for letter writing that would become the canon of model responses to social problems like corruption in the provinces, declarations of war, and oaths of peace and friendship with neighboring states. In what I call the politics of bureaucracy, scholars used the constraints of diplomatic and official language in order to argue for the ideal Ottoman society they believed in. Here I examine the works of two members of the court and two midlevel bureaucrats, namely, Tācī Beg and his son Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi, as well as Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi. The lives of these four scholars intersected at different levels of the Ottoman imperial court in Istanbul and their works were aimed at diverse audiences within the ruling elite, from the sultan to the provincial secretary. Each of them produced a large corpus of models for writing that would become a canon for Ottoman prose until the sixteenth century.

From the earliest stages of Islamic statecraft, bureaucrats and scholarly men compiled diplomatic correspondence and exemplary specimens of literary prose to instruct new trainees in the art of writing and the proper use of written communication.²³⁴ In both Arabic and Persian, high prose had been developed into a science, *'ilm-i inṣā*, based on the construction of elegant discourses that were understood to be a proper and effective means of communication.²³⁵ In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Anatolian scholars at the service of local rulers translated and adapted Persian models for diplomatic correspondence into Western Turkish. In the fifteenth century, personal correspondence, literary epistles, and diplomatic communications were brought together in larger miscellanies (*mecmua*). Indeed, Ottoman miscellany tradition dates back to the fifteenth century. Previous scholarship has largely treated these compilations either as personal archives or literary manuals for future generations. Yet, when studied comparatively, these compilations reveal striking differences. Texts that most scholars have tended to organize under the larger umbrella of "compilations" or *mecmua* in particular genres—for instance, poetry collections, epistolary collections, or compilations of text with no apparent relation to each other—are in fact distinct products that required different reading practices among the early modern Ottoman intellectual elites. Composed as parts of larger compilations, model letters had specific audiences, and thus should be considered as serious works of the author that aimed to advance the writer's political, moral, and societal ideas. As I argue below, we must read compilations of

²³⁴ The Islamic tradition of compiling model letters can be traced to Umayyad secretarial practices (and possibly back to Meccan antecedents), but was much influenced by both Persian and Byzantine models. See Roemer, "Inshā" in *EI2* (1960), 1241-44.

²³⁵ See, for instance, the description of the secretary's basic qualities in Niẓāmī-i 'Aruẓī's *Chahār Maqāla*, where each anecdote illustrates the effective use of words. Niẓāmī's compilation also suggests a very particular understanding of clarity and efficiency based on the assumption that both reader and writer are well versed in the Koran and the hadith. Niẓāmī-i 'Aruẓī. *The Chahār Maqāla: The Four Discourses*, trans. Edward Granville Browne (London: the Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, 1978), 22-44.

letters as prescriptive models for writing as well as examples detailing how to respond to particular social scenarios.²³⁶

In this chapter, I argue that the development of new forms of literary prose in the form of compilations of model letters provided a dynamic medium for authors to spread their social theories among Ottoman scholars and courtiers during a pivotal phase of the Ottoman Sultanate. With the conquest of Constantinople and the rapid expansion of the sultanate's borders, the Ottoman ruling elite need to position Ottoman rule as a legitimate Islamic and Mediterranean empire. To illustrate this, I focus on four major compilations of model letters (*münşeāt*). Two of these collections were written mostly in ornate Persian, with some sections in highly persianized literary Turkish. These two miscellanies were compiled by Tacī Beg and his son, Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi (hereafter Sa'di Çelebi). The other two miscellanies examined in this chapter belong to middle-rank bureaucrat scholars, namely, Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi, who wrote in the emerging literary style of Ottoman high prose.²³⁷ Tacī Beg and Sa'di Çelebi allegedly compiled letters composed by sultans, princes and other figures of the court. Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi, by contrast, compiled mostly their own letters as models for Ottoman functionaries faced with similar challenges. By comparing these two groups of roughly contemporary collections of letters, I argue that the production of models for letter writing gave bureaucrats of different ranks at court the opportunity to advance their own political agendas and social projects for the emerging empire.

²³⁶For different approaches to Ottoman miscellanies, see Hatice Aynur et al., ed., *Mecmûa: Osmanlı Edebiyatının Kırkambarı* (Istanbul: Turkuaz, 2012).

²³⁷ Before Mesīhī and Lāmi'ī Çelebi's model letters in high literary prose, the first manuals of letter writing produced in Western Turkish had a more didactic style, and were produced in simple Turkish sentences accompanied with many Arabic formulae. For an overview of the development of manuals for letter writing, see below.

In my study of the four collections mentioned above, I have identified two different scenarios in which the production of exemplary letters provided a model for constructing an ideal society. On the one hand, Tācī Beg and Sa'di Çelebi's miscellanies of diplomatic writings focus mostly, but not exclusively, on the relation between Cem Sultan and Bayezid II before their struggle for the Ottoman throne (1481). Placed in conjunction with the poems composed and exchanged by the two princes and their biographies, the letters seem to frame Cem Sultan's ambitions as a betrayal against his brother and his people. The publication of letters speaks of the fraternal love between both princes before Mehmed II's passing, and, I believe, passes a moral judgment on Cem Sultan's ambitions. By exposing the words of unconditional love and admiration professed by the princes before the succession crisis, the narrative of these letters suggests the limits between a legitimate struggle for the throne and the selfish rebellion of a defeated prince.

Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi's letters focus instead on the daily management of bureaucratic procedure by providing a large range of possible answers to common situations faced by clerks and bureaucrats, such as complaints of corruption, missing payments, or the sighting of spies in a city, etc. Most of the letters contained in these two collections are signed by the compilers themselves, thus Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi's compilations constitute first and foremost a portfolio of the compilers' work as scribes. Generally, these letters have been approached individually, either as sources for particular historical events or as examples of Mesīhī and Lami'ī Çelebi's literary style. Yet, if considered as a whole, they offer a mirror for an ideal bureaucracy, and thus suggest that these letters were the compilers' attempt to craft a comprehensive manual of

action within the state apparatus. I call this project the politics of procedure, for I argue that these fragmented examples of past office cases attempt to provide a comprehensive collection of possible future cases for scribes and bureaucrats. The letters center on the quotidian actions and administrative procedures that shape society and the state. In this sense, the miscellanies represent the practical counterpart of a social project, an alternative for what otherwise would focus on the abstract elaborations of a social theory.²³⁸

Models for Prose: Manuals and Miscellanies

Turkish rulers in Anatolia sponsored the translation and adaptation of Persian diplomatic manuals into Western Turkish during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. The need for a structured style of imperial communication became important to the sultan's advisors because the Ottomans were still a burgeoning frontier principate. Consequently, Ottoman literati had been creating compilations or manuals of high prose (*inṣā*) since the early fifteenth century. After the fall of the Seljukid rule in Anatolia in the thirteenth century, whose primary administrative language had been Persian, scholars at the service of local Turkish principalities began emulating their Persian counterparts and produced miscellanies of diplomatic letters in Turkish. The prefaces of these manuals claim that they were written to provide Turkish stylistic models for bureaucrats whose command of Persian and Arabic was insufficient to use the existing manuals. The earliest surviving example of such manuals in Western Turkish was written by Aḥmed-i Dā'ī (d.

²³⁸ As I prepare this dissertation, it has come to my attention that a new book on language and the Ottoman administration is scheduled to be published in June 2018. Unfortunately, I was unable to consult it before submitting this dissertation. Heather L. Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, [forthcoming]).

ca. 1421), a court poet residing first in the principality of Germiyan in Western Anatolia and then in the Ottoman princely courts of Emir Süleymān (d. 1411) and Meḥmed Çelebi (d. 1421).²³⁹ Unfortunately, we only possess the introduction of this book in an incomplete manuscript consisting of five folios in which Aḥmed-i Dā'ī provides us with different types of letters and the ten rules of thumb for their composition.²⁴⁰

The expansion and consolidation of Ottoman power in fifteenth-century Anatolia increased the need for skilled bureaucrats. Another handbook, also titled *Teressül*, was compiled by Kırımlu Hafız Hüsam and copied in 1427 by one Şeyḥ Mehmed. This manual seems to share some characteristics and even documents with Aḥmed-i Dā'ī's. The only available manuscript constitutes the earliest surviving example of an entire Turkish manual for scribes. The text is divided into four sections, each of which deals with a different category of letter writing: the proper styles for writing, the titles for addressees, the rules for answering letters, and the way in which official edicts were to be composed.²⁴¹

An obscure imperial bureaucrat named Yahya bin Meḥmed compiled the third Ottoman manual of diplomatic correspondence, the *Menāhicü'l-İnşā*, or manual of prose composition.²⁴² This book compiles a series of formal edicts and letters for diverse occasions. It is divided into three sections: the rules of epistolography, a section

²³⁹ Günay Kut, "Ahmed-i Dai" in *TDVIA* 2: 56-58. For an overview of Aḥmed-i Dā'ī's works, see Gönül A. Tekin, *Aḥmed-i Dā'ī and his Çengnāme: An Old Ottoman Mesnevi* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University, 1973) 15-21.

²⁴⁰ For a transcription of Ahmed-i Dai's *Teressül* together with an index of terms used in the letters, see Halil İbrahim Haksever, "Ahmed-i Dai'nin Teressülü," *Turkish Studies* 6 (2011): 1265-1273.

²⁴¹ Şinasi Tekin has provided a facsimile for this text together with transcriptions and notes. Tekin also provides a comparative discussion between this manual and the *Menāhicü'l-İnşā*. See "Ottoman Manual I" (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 2002), 1-9, 61-68; and "Ottoman Manual II" (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 2002), 1-43.

²⁴² Şinasi Tekin, ed., *Menāhicü'l-İnşā, The Earliest Ottoman Chancery Manual by Yahyā bin Meḥmed el-Kātib from the 15th Century* (Roxbury, MA.: Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures, 1971).

concerning titles, and examples of official documents. Previous scholarship has focused on this last section for its assumed historical value since it contains eleven documents allegedly written by Karaman ruler Ibrahim Beg (d. 1454) and the Ottoman sultans Murad II (r. 1421-51) and Mehmed II (r. 1451-81). The documents include a friendship oath by Karamanī İbrahim Beg, entitled *Sevgend-nāme*, and a series of letters of appointment for a qadi, a professor, preacher, and other positions in the state administration.

Almost fifty years later, the contents of these compilations shifted to comprehensive compendiums of examples and models. The abstract rules of letter writing illustrated by a handful of examples were replaced by a combination of diverse letters and original epistles. The most renowned example of this shift is the sixteenth-century poet Mesīhī's *Gül-i Şād-Berg*.²⁴³ The original composition is believed to have contained a total of one hundred letters. The *Gül-i Şād-Berg* is also different in that it combines verse compositions with prose, including them as part of letters, such as letters of friendship.²⁴⁴

The development of epistolography in Western Turkish did not stop the production of Persian epistolary collections in Ottoman lands. In fact, we possess three compilations of diplomatic letters composed by contemporary political elites, including the sultan, his brothers and sons, and other Muslim rulers of the fifteenth century. The majority (around 80 percent) of these letters are in Persian. Tācī Beg, tutor of Bayezid II while the latter was prince governor of Amasya, probably compiled the first of these.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ A critical edition of this text was presented as a doctoral dissertation by Çetin Derdiyok. "XV. Yüzyıl Şairlerinden Mesīhī'nin Gül-i Sad-Berg'i" (PhD diss., Çukurova University, 1994).

²⁴⁴ Derdiyok, *Mesīhi*, 163.

²⁴⁵ Necati Lugal and Adnan Erzi, *Fâtih Devrine Âit Münşeât Mecmuası* (Wien, Nationalbibl. H. O. 161), (İstanbul: İstanbul Matbası: 1956). This compilation consists of seventy-three letters, mostly written by Mehmed II's sons Cem Sultan and Bayezid II while still princes. Letters by the mothers of the princes,

According to Necati Lugal, his signature on one of the letters suggests that Taci Beg at the very least compiled the letters and possibly embellished them.²⁴⁶ The second compilation belongs to his son, Sa'di Çelebi, a minor scholar of the time and brother of Ca'fer Çelebi, imperial chancellor to Bayezid II and Selim I, who also compiled a series of letters issued by the sultan.²⁴⁷ The letters contained in these compilations are presented as a series of correspondences between renowned political figures of the era. It is more likely that many of the letters were composed by the compilers themselves in order to display their literary skills. Written in an ornate and complex form of Persian and Turkish prose, the letters are an example of what could be considered as Ottoman Persian literature.

Due to the apparent similarity between archival documents, the first group of compilations has been assumed as offering historical examples of bureaucratic communication, and thus they have received more attention than the Persian compositions of high prose by Tācī Beg and Sa'adi Çelebi.²⁴⁸ Modern critical editions privilege only a few particular documents for their historical value. In turn, the primacy of the important sixteenth-century compilation of letters by the imperial bureaucrat Ferūdūn Beg, known as *Münşeātü's-Selatīn*, has left the fifteenth-century collections

letters to and from Uzun Hasan, as well as Lala Mahmud Bey, Hızır Hasan, and Mehmet II, among others, are also included. The manuscript is incomplete. According to the editors it is missing around ten folios.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi, *Münşeāt*, ed. Necati Lugal and Adnan Erzi (İstanbul: İstanbul Maatbası, 1956). Sa'di Çelebi's miscellany is shorter than that assumed to have been written by his father, consisting only of fifteen letters. Apart from a commemorative letter for the conquest of Modon and Koron and a letter between Mevlana Sirāç and Mahmud Paşa, the other thirteen letters were allegedly written by Cem Sultan, Bayezid II, and Uzun Hasan. For a detailed description, see below.

²⁴⁸ See Halil İbrahim Haksever's article on Ahmed-i Dāī mentioned above as well as his "Münşeāt Mecmuaları ve Edebiyat Tarihimiz için önemi" *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 1 (1988): 73-86. See also Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Münşeāt Mecmualarının Osmanlı Diplomatığı Bakımından Ehemmiyeti" in *Tarih Boyunca Paleografya ve Diplomatik Semineri: 30 Nisan-2 Mayıs 1986 Bildirler* (İstanbul: 1988), 169-176; András J. Riedlmayer, "Ottoman Copybooks of Correspondence and Miscellanies as a Source for Political and Cultural History," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 61 (2008): 201-14.

mostly ignored. Similarly, studies of other literati, such as Fuzūlī and Nergīsī, have tended to focus on how their epistles follow or diverge from Ferīdūn Beg's model. Some compilations of letters by poets beginning in the seventeenth century vis-à-vis the sixteenth-century works by Lami'ī and Mesīhī mentioned above were of a completely different nature than the manuals that led up to Ferīdūn Beg's *Münşeātī's-Selatīn*. The seventeenth-century compilations of a poet's own letters made by the poets themselves seem to have focused on the creation of the poet's own literary persona for public consumption.²⁴⁹ We might argue that by the seventeenth century Ottoman readership had changed and readers were eager to consume the literary works of their favorite authors in addition to their poetry, thus leading not to the need of displaying literary skill as much as producing a personal and somehow autobiographical "complement" to one's own public persona in the literary marketplace.²⁵⁰

The general assumption has been that these compilations were manuals for letter writing. Yet the scarcity of surviving manuscripts makes it hard to believe that they were indeed intended solely for that purpose. As noted before, we only possess an incomplete copy of Aḥmed-i Dā'ī's *Teressül*. Kırımlu Hafız Hüsam's *Teressül* and Yahya Beg's *Menāhicü'l-İnşā* survive in one manuscript each. The compilation by Tācī Beg survives in only one manuscript, while we possess three copies of his son Sa'di Çelebi's

²⁴⁹ This hypothesis derives from conversations with Nir Shafir (UCSD) and Aslıhan Gürbüz (McGill) about the nature of miscellanies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I am thankful to them for having shared their impressions on the miscellanies of high prose (*münşeāt mecmuaları*) that they have encountered during their research on seventeenth century Sufi poets and scholars. Beyond the encyclopedic articles that recognize the emergence of new themes and forms in later miscellanies, there is no study that examines the impact of high prose miscellanies on the transformation of the Ottoman literary space during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

²⁵⁰ Although the role that collections of personal letters played in the emergence of public authorial voices and personae in the Ottoman cultural sphere is yet to be studied, recent work has shown how the new material conditions of book production and the availability of books to a larger audience transformed reading practices in Ottoman lands during the seventeenth century. Meredith Quinn, "On Yedinci Yüzyıl İstanbulu'nda Ucuza Okumalar," in Aynur, *Mecmûa*, 144-167; Nir Shafir, "The Road from Damascus."

miscellany. Mesîhî's manual, by contrast, has been preserved in seven manuscripts. While one could argue that these were particularly unsuccessful or unlucky examples, the overall pattern points to the limited extent of manuscript production and impact on contemporary reading practices. Indeed, these fifteenth-century texts were known and often mentioned throughout the sixteenth century, yet were not necessarily widely read. One example of this may suffice: the influential biographer of poets Latîfî (1491-1582) compares the prose style of another contemporary manual, Edhem's *Gülşen-i İnşâ*, with Mesîhî's *Gül-i Sad-Berg*.²⁵¹ Latîfî contends that Mesîhî's style is plain and simple, emulating Edhem's prose. However, Mesîhî's prose is consistently complex in its syntax and full of parallel enumerations—a characteristic of Ottoman high prose. Noting Latîfî's erroneous comparison, Victor Lois Ménage suggests that Latîfî did not actually see Mesîhî's book. For his part, Çetin Derdiyok insists that due to Latîfî's incorrect description, Mesîhî's prose style has been misrepresented as simple prose in later sources. While these works were renowned among contemporary intellectuals and were mentioned and praised in sixteenth and seventeenth century sources, it is safe to assume that the actual readership of these texts was very limited, and that people were content to repeat the information about them given in the available biographical and encyclopedic sources.

Two assumptions have governed the scholarship of miscellanies of diplomatic letters. First, it has been assumed that these were coherent units with a common historical theme vis-à-vis isolated archival documents; second, that these are all examples of the

²⁵¹ As far as I am aware, there is no critical edition of this work. Yet, it seems to have been a popular work, as Latîfî used it to clarify the nature of Mesîhî's collection. In point of fact, it seems that Latîfî did not have access to the "popular" work by Mesîhî, and thus assumed it was of the exact same nature as the *Gülşen-i İnşâ*. See Victor Lois Ménage, "The Gül-i Sad-Berg of Mesîhî," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 6 (1988): 11, 19.

same literary phenomenon, namely, the appearance of Ottoman manuals for prose writing. Both of these assumptions have led to an attempt to integrate these compilations within the larger and teleological narrative of the formation of an Ottoman literary language.²⁵² Alternatively, historians have selected the letters with apparent historical relevance while ignoring the context in which they were produced or compiled.²⁵³ When considering the contents and the authors' intention to provide an accessible manual for new scribes, we must take into account what seems to be a lack of material evidence for a wide readership as well as the seemingly contradictory textual evidence of these texts' fame and renown among sixteenth century Ottoman scholars. What are the differences between these literary endeavors? Why are some groups written in Persian while others are composed in Western Turkish? Who were these compilations presented to? Was there a discrepancy between the intended audience and the claims of the author in his introduction? Were these manuals circulated among scribes and read by members of the imperial bureaucratic system? How were they read and studied? Why were scholars and members of the court interested in compiling the sultans' words in book format? Why would some scholars produce examples of their personal correspondence?

Regardless of the prolific production of Ottoman letters in high prose, the study of *münşeāt* collections and miscellanies containing examples of *inşā* letters is still surprisingly limited vis-à-vis the study of poetry, chronicles, and other prose texts such as

²⁵² See Mustafa Uzun, "Münşeāt" in *TDVİA* 32: 18-20. Mustafa Uzun also elaborates on the development of Turkish high prose in Mustafa Uzun, "İnşa" in *TDVİA* 22: 334-339

²⁵³ See, for instance, Şinasi Tekin's approach in *Ottoman Manuel* (sic), 2002. See also V. L. Ménage's work on Ottoman diplomacy: Ménage, Gül-i Sad Berg, 11-32; Ménage, "Seven Ottoman Documents from the Reign of Mehmed II" in Jean Aubin *et al.*, *Documents from Islamic chanceries first series* (Oxford: B. Cassirer, 1965), 81-118. Also, particularly important are the publication of letters as official documents in source books for historians. See especially Halil İnalçık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler Ve Vesikalar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1954); and Turan, Osman, *Türkiye Selçuklulari Hakkında Resmî Vesikalar: Metin, Tercüme ve Araştırmalar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1958).

advice literature and religious works. The scholarship can be divided into four main themes: general studies, critical editions, studies of scribal practices and prominent individuals, studies of Ferīdūn Beg's *münşeat* collection or editions of sections derived from it. Studies of Ottoman diplomacy could be considered as a fifth category however these tend to fall into categories three and four.

Possibly the most concise discussion of the study of Ottoman *münşeat* is András Riedlmayer's review article "Ottoman Copybooks of Correspondence and Miscellanies as Source for Political Cultural History."²⁵⁴ Riedlmayer maps the development of the scholarship written about Ottoman *münşeat* collections, as well as some works focused on related topics that somehow touch upon Ottoman diplomatic correspondence. Riedlmayer first approaches *münşeat* collections as part of the larger phenomenon of the compilation of texts in the form of miscellanies (*mecmua*). He then discusses the uses of the word *inşā* and the rules of rhetoric before listing the most renowned examples of *münşeat* collections, including Ferīdūn Beg and Nefī'i. Probably of even more importance is his extensive annotated bibliography. This study, albeit here categorized as a general study, is unique in that it is not focused on giving information about the *münşeat* per se as much as on considering the scholarly attention given to these Ottoman sources.

Studies centered around *inşā* collections mostly summarize the development of a "genre" in encyclopedic overviews organized by centuries. For instance, Roemer's entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, surveys the developmen of *inşā* from the seventh century onwards, yet only briefly comments on the Ottoman case, and therein refers mostly to renowned examples.²⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Mustafa Uzun provides an overview in the *Türl*

²⁵⁴ Riedlmayer, *Ottoman Copybooks*, 201-214.

²⁵⁵ Roemer, "Inshā."

Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi's entry for *münşeât*. Uzun mostly focuses on the Ottoman case. The various articles on *inşâ* by İsmail Durmuş, Mehmet Kanar, Rıza Kurtuluş and Mustafa Uzun offer comprehensive outlines for the development of high prose in Persian, Arabic, and Turkish. These articles provide a context for the emergence of various genres of bureaucratic, diplomatic, and literary writing.²⁵⁶ Other studies include Kütükoğlu's discussion of the value of *münşeât* collections for the study of Ottoman diplomacy, mostly based in late sixteenth and seventeenth century compilations;²⁵⁷ Levend's assessment of *münşeât* collections in Ottoman Literature;²⁵⁸ and Ferrard's article on "The Development of an Ottoman Rhetoric."²⁵⁹ Rich bibliographical studies, catalogues, and general introductions have been produced in German. These include Matuz's "Über die Epistolographie un Inşâ'-Literatur der Osmanen" which provides a list of 137 collections, including the names of compilers and existing manuscripts; and the more general works on Turkish and Persian prose by Flügel and Sohrweide. Similarly, Adnan Sadık Erzi published studies on two Seljuk *inşâ* works by Hasan bin Abdi'l-Mumin el-Hoyi and Muhammad bin Abdi'l-Halik el-Meyheni. Köymen has also provided us with an appraisal of Seljukid *münşeât* in his study of historical sources for the Seljuk period.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ See Uzun, *Münşeât*, 18-20.

²⁵⁷ Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Münşeât Mecmualarının Osmanlı Diplomatiği Bakımından Ehemmiyeti" in *Tarih Boyunca Paleografya ve Diplomatik Semineri: 30 Nisan-2 Mayıs 1986 Bildirler* (Istanbul: 1988), 169-176.

²⁵⁸ Aga Sırrı Levend, "Münşe'ât Mecmuaları" in *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, I: Giriş* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1973), 113-116.

²⁵⁹ Christopher Ferrard, "The Development of an Ottoman Rhetoric up to 1882" *Osmanlı Araştırmaları 4* (Istanbul: 1984): 19-34.

²⁶⁰ Adnan Sadık Erzi, *Selçukîler Devrine Âid İnşâ Eserlei, I: Muḥammed b. 'Abdi'l-Hâlik el-Meyhenî: Destûr-i debiri* (Ankara, 1962) and *Selçukîler Devrine Âid İnşâ Eserlei, Ia: Ḥasan b. 'Abdi'l-Mu'min el-Hôyî: Gunyetu'l-kâtib Ve Munyetu't-Ṭâlib, Rusûmu'r-Resâ'il ve Nucûmu'l-Fa'Â'il* (Ankara: İlâhiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1969).

Some manuscripts of *inşā* letters have attracted enough attention to be edited either in printed Arabic alphabet editions or as critical editions. As I mentioned earlier, Şinasi Tekin produced two facsimile editions of the earliest *inşā* manuals known in Western Turkish apart from Aḥmed-i Dai's incomplete manuscript, namely Kırımlu Hafız Hüsam's *Teressül* and Yahya Bey's *Menahicü'l-inşā*. Similarly, some letters contained in court poet Mesîḥî's *Gül-i Şād-Berg* were first published in a selection by Victor Lois Ménage in the form of an article about provincial diplomatic writing. This includes a detailed description of available manuscripts and vocabulary. Almost a decade later, in 1999, Derdiyok produced a full transcription of this text as a doctoral dissertation together with an introductory study dealing with manuscript differences, contents, and literary form.²⁶¹ In addition to these, other later examples of *münşeāt* have been published. This includes Sarı Abdullah Efendi, author of *Düstürü'l-Inşā* and *Münşe'āt-i Fārsī*. The editions of these *münşeāt* have also produced studies on these particular examples, most of the time of interest because the renown of their authors and the political history reconstructed from their works. Last but not least, Ferīdün Beg's *Münşeātü's-selatīn* was published twice in Ottoman times.²⁶²

Histories of scribal practices as well as biographical studies of famous scholars have furthered our knowledge of *inşā* collections. However, studies on scribal practices are limited, and other than general introductions to the offices of imperial chancellor or head secretary, we have few comprehensive studies of Ottoman diplomatic language.²⁶³

²⁶¹ See below.

²⁶² Ferīdün Beg, *Mecmu'a-i Münşe'āt-i Ferīdün Bey* (Istanbul: Darü'ttibatil'âmire, 1848-1857).

²⁶³ See, for instance, Halil İnalçık, "Reis-ül-Küttâb" in *İA* 4: 671-683.

Probably the most important text is Reychman and Zajączkowski's *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats*.²⁶⁴

John Walsh's edition of the *münşeāt* collection by poet Mehmet Nergīsī Efendi²⁶⁵ and the work of his students İsmail Erünsal and Christine Woodhead on renowned scholars and scribes, namely, Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi and Okçu-zāde, have provided not only a context for the importance of *inşā* in the career of Ottoman scholars, but also shown their importance as autobiographical texts.²⁶⁶ Nonetheless, they focus on obtaining historical information from the letters that fill a biographical void in the lives of scholars such as Okçuzade. Probably the most recognized work on *inşā* is by Ferīdūn Beg, compiled and written in the late sixteenth century. Due to the apparent historical accuracy and richness of this collection, its letters have been selected, edited, and published several times in Turkish, English, and German.²⁶⁷

Most of this scholarship rests upon the assumption that miscellanies of high prose belong to a coherent literary genre, and thus it is possible, nay, it is necessary to study its development. This study departs from such interpretation in that it considers high prose not as a genre but rather as a means of communication. Indeed, the compilations of isolated examples of prose or poetry serve as medium by which people expressed their own intellectual agendas. In this sense, the diversity of miscellanies does not represent

²⁶⁴ Jan Reychman, Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz and Ananiasz Zajączkowski, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968).

²⁶⁵ "The Esālibū'l-mekātib (Münşe'āt) of Mehmed Nergīsī Efendi," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 1 (1969): 213-302.

²⁶⁶ Erünsal, *Life and Works*; Christine Woodhead, "Ottoman *Inşa* and the Art of Letter Writing. Influences upon the Career of the Nişancı and Prose Stylist Okçuzade (d.1630), *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 7-8 (1988): 143-137.

²⁶⁷ For a detailed bibliography, see Riedlmayer, "Ottoman Copybooks." See also Cihan Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); idem, "Ottoman-Mamluk Relations and the Complex Image of Bāyezīd II" in Benjamin Lellouch, ed., *Conquête Ottomane de l'Égypte (1517)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 49-76.

shifts from an original version of a literary genre. Instead, it illustrates the communicative potential of a medium with flexible parameters and almost no formal limitations.

Contemporary miscellanies of letters had drastically different messages and audiences. The diplomatic letters between Bayezid II and Cem Sultan provided a personal insight to the succession struggle in the public sphere, and offered an emotional rendition of the resulting political tension that dominated the court during the fifteenth century that was not fully represented in contemporary historiographical accounts. The legitimacy of Bayezid II's succession to the Ottoman throne remained a political anxiety among the Ottoman elite during his reign, and this anxiety became even more pressing after his dethronement by his son, Selim I. Providing this insight into the personalities of the succession struggle seems to be one function of the compilations by Tācī Beg and his son Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi.

In contrast, the compilations of Lāmi'ī and Mesīhī examined later in this chapter are of a totally different nature, inasmuch as they attempted to prove each author's value as both scribe and poet. These letters were not a demonstration of the compiler's capacity to hold a political office at court, but rather a display of his practical skills for success in a bureaucratic appointment. In fact, we know that Mesīhī looked for patronage from Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, then imperial chancellor at the Ottoman court, and son and brother to the compilers mentioned above.²⁶⁸ In a panegyric aimed at securing Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi's patronage, Mesīhī decides to focus on Ca'fer's literary skills and his value as imperial chancellor. Mesīhī's does not claim knowledge of international politics, like the letters of his patron, his father Tācī Beg and his brother Sa'di Çelebi, but rather demonstrates his mastery of daily bureaucratic procedures.

²⁶⁸ See chapter 1.

While both cases may seem like attempts at the display of one individual's education as a means to secure a position at court, the differences between these positions should not be obviated, for it is this difference that points to the drastically singular natures of contemporary forms of political communication. In the case of the Tācī Beg and Sa'di Çelebi's compilations, the production of "voices" for the sultan demonstrates the necessary skills for advising in international politics and matters of the state. At the same time, I argue, they imply the creation of moral limits of succession and rebellion for the imperial heirs, and most importantly, for the different factions within the court that supported them. By providing insight on the relationship between the two princes contesting for the throne, these letters portray political dissent as an act of self-interest, greed, and hypocrisy. It is ultimately an act of treason both to the dynasty and the community. In other words, the crafting of these letters, whether fictional or real, or even both fictional and real at the same time, puts the ethical limits of the personal pursuit of power by a prince in the forefront of the succession struggle. By extension, they instruct readers about the limits that should have applied to the court and to the elite members who instigated rebellion on behalf of the various possible heirs to the throne. The scholar-bureaucrats producing these "voices" for the sultan were not only displaying their education in the form a literary language, but also posing a moral question to their readers. Mesīḥī's letters, by contrast, are more pragmatic in emphasis, dealing with questions of procedure (appointment, dismissal, punishment, friendship). His letters are not a discussion of international politics so much as a guide to the daily procedural questions faced by scribes. Nonetheless, I would insist that Mesīḥī's compilation of appropriate forms of writing is also a compilation of exempla, that is, of accepted forms

of responding to particular situations that claimed to be based on experience and precedence, and thus, they represent a suggestion for both how to write a letter for a particular social issue and how one can, or even must, respond to the issue in question.

A Treasurer's Prose: Tācī Beg

In 1956, Necati Lugal published a miscellany of letters for Mehmed II's reign in both Persian and Turkish, including letters from and to the sultan, as well as letters signed by the princes Bayezid II, Cem Sultan, and other members of the royal household. Necati Lugal identified the miscellany as the work of Tācī Beg, father of the imperial chancellor Ca'fer Çelebi and the scholar and stylist Sa'di Çelebi.²⁶⁹ Tācī Beg was born in Amasya, and he became the bookkeeper and treasurer (*defterdār*) of Bayezid II while the latter was the prince governor of Amasya.²⁷⁰ According to Beyanī, Tācī Beg was also a poet.²⁷¹ Beyanī cites one of Tācī Beg's couplets as example of his poetry. Mustafa Ali quotes exactly the same couplet, and indicates Tācī Beg, in addition to being Bayezid II's treasurer, was a renowned stylist at the imperial court.²⁷² However, it seems that Tācī Beg did not compile a divan of his own, and in fact, his biography is not included in the earliest biographical dictionaries. We learn about him only as part of his sons' biographies.

²⁶⁹ Necati Lugal and Adnan Erzi' assumption about Tācī Beg's authorship derives from having identified his signature in one of the letters. See Lugal and Erzi, *Münşeât Mecmuası*, VII.

²⁷⁰ The office of bookkeeper (*defterdār*) was similar to a minister of finance in charge of the tax registries and treasury. Imperial bookkeepers at the sultan's court ranked amongst the highest offices in the Ottoman Empire. There were also bookkeepers serving in provincial courts, such as those of the prince governors in Amasya and Manisa.

²⁷¹ Beyāni Mustafa Bin Carullah, *Tezkiretü'ş-şuarâ*, ed. İbrahim Kutluk (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, 1997), 38.

²⁷² Mustafa Ali, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr'ın Tezkire Kısmı Metin*, ed. Mustafa İsen (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, 1994). I have used the electronic edition housed at the Ottoman Text Archive Project (OTAP) of the University of Washington. URL:

http://courses.washington.edu/otap/archive/data/arch_txt/texts/a_kunhul.html

While some of the letters included in the miscellanies were indeed written by the historical figures they cite, the letters may have been embellished, transformed, and sometimes even invented by the author of the miscellany in order to display his knowledge of Persian and Turkish.²⁷³ As a bureaucrat at the prince's provincial court, Tācī Beg would have certainly been interested in producing a portfolio of his skills as scribe. Furthermore, Tācī Beg's miscellany bears striking similarities in content and style to those of his sons, Sa'di Çelebi and Ca'fer Çelebi, who became famous not only because of their poetry and education, but also for their talent in composing works in high prose (*inşā*). Indeed, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, almost one hundred years later, the three miscellanies by Tācī Beg and his sons are unique in form and content. Contrary to other miscellanies of letters of the time, which were mostly produced in the fashion of manuals for scribes, the three miscellanies compiled by Tācī Beg, Sa'di Çelebi, and Ca'fer Çelebi focus mostly on narrating two specific moments of external and internal conflict in the empire, namely, the war with the Aqqoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan and the succession of Bayezid II to the Ottoman throne. More importantly, these letters were fashioned as personal correspondence between family members of the imperial household, and not as formulaic examples for reproduction in the various offices of scribes and bureaucrats. These three miscellanies are unique. Even the closest parallel, Ferīdūn Beg's miscellany, differs from them both in scale and intent.²⁷⁴ Ferīdūn Beg's comprehensive attempt to produce a major compilation of letters and high prose for elite

²⁷³ Embellishing and compiling historical epistles seems to have been a common and respected authorial practice. For a succinct discussion of this practice in the case of renowned scholar Ferīdūn Beg and the reliability of his letters, see Muslu, "Language of Diplomacy," 253-258. For a summary of the letters in Tācī Beg and his son's miscellanies, see Lugal and Erzi, *Münşeât Mecmuası*, VII and Sa'di Çelebi, *Münşeât*, V-VII.

²⁷⁴ Abdülkadir Özcan, "Münşeâtü's-Selâtīn" in *TDVİA* 32 (2006): 20-22

communication certainly benefitted from these three miscellanies, yet departed from them in that it does not provide a commentary on a particular set of events, but rather is fashioned as an encyclopedic source for future reference.

Tācī Beg's miscellany speaks to the question of legitimate rule and succession. Its contents seem to coincide with the years of Mehmet II's reign, and thus Necati Lugal's edition is titled *A Miscellany of Letters Belonging to the Period of Mehmet II*, but the miscellany was more likely fashioned during Bayezid II's reign. It narrates the friendly relations that existed between the sultan and his rebellious brother before the war of succession began. Why would Tācī Beg, a bureaucrat under Bayezid II's service, produce a compilation of letters making public the personal communications between his patron Bayezid II and his seditious brother, Cem Sultan? And more important, why would his sons, both of them close to Bayezid II as well, take up their father's work and expand it, each one producing an independent work with very similar content and scope? Were Tācī Beg and his sons using their superiority in language and education, rhetoric and style, in order to provide an alternative representation of the relation between the two princes? And if so, why would they do so? It is precisely during the second half of the fifteenth century when Bayezid II's court was invested in producing an official historiography that narrated the origins of the Ottoman house, the achievements of the sultan's ancestors, and the wars and victories of Bayezid II's early years as sultan.²⁷⁵ Ottoman historiography almost silenced Cem Sultan's rebellion and mostly ignored his exile and fate.

²⁷⁵ The large scale of the imperial historiographical project can be appreciated in the survey done by Victor Lois Ménage as his doctoral dissertation. See Victor Lois Ménage, "A Survey of the Early Ottoman." For a discussion on the intellectual and cultural context of the production of Ottoman classical historiography and a discussion of the prevalent debates about it see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*. For a detailed discussion of the Ottoman interest in building a heroic genealogy for the sultans, see Barbara Flemming, "Political Genealogies in the Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 8 (1988): 123-137. For a consideration of omissions and exclusion in Ottoman Chronicles, see Baki Tezcan, "The Memory of the

The narrative marginalization of the succession struggle in the chronicles left a void in the official discourse of the Ottoman genealogy. Tācī Beg and his sons' compilations of the sultan's personal correspondences filled the gap in the history of the Ottoman sultanate and the life of Bayezid II. Tācī Beg's miscellany of letters contains a total of seventy three epistles between Cem Sultan and Bayezid II, Uzun Hasan, Lālā Maḥmūd Bey, Rumeli Beylerbeyisi Murad Bey, Alī Bey, Jihānshāh Mirza, Sultan Mustafa, Karamanoğlu İbrahīm Bey, Zū'l-Ḳadırlı Süleymān Bey, Şehsuvar Bey, Mevlānā Fetullah, Karaca Bey, Hızır Bey, Şeyḫ Ḥasan Bey's son Sultan Hüseyin, and the mothers of Cem Sultan and Bayezid II, among others. In his edition, Necati Lugal divides the letters into eight groups, namely, communications between Mehmet II's sons Mustafa, Bayezid II and Cem Sultan; communications between the mothers of Cem Sultan and Bayezid II; letters informing or celebrating the victories of Mehmet II's campaigns; letters for Bayezid II sent by Uzun Hasan; communications between the people under the service of the princes and other senior officials of the sultanate; a series of imperial edicts of Mehmet II aimed at dissuading people from pursuing diverse courses of action; letters of Mehmet II's viziers; and letters sent by Mehmet II to various contemporary rulers. The letters exchanged between Uzun Hasan and Bayezid II which are reproduced in Tācī Beg's miscellany are different from those included in Sa'di Celebi's miscellany. It is noteworthy, as I mentioned earlier, to see the complementary nature of these three miscellanies.

Mongols," Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, ed., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 22-38. For the thematic trends and influences of this historiographical corpus see, Halil İnalçık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," 156-167; and Victor Lois Ménage, "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography," 168-179.

A Son's Prose: Sa'di Çelebi

Sa'di Çelebi's miscellany adds new material to Tâcî Beg's, rather than overlapping, copying, or simply reproducing it. Sa'di Çelebi's deliberate expansion of topics, historical events, and specific conversations between two or more political figures deriving from his father's miscellany is crucial for understanding the specificity of these two works of high prose. If one considers the central position of Tâcî Beg and his sons within the court apparatus of Bayezid II and their primacy in the development of the office in charge of imperial communication, the attempt of Tâcî Beg and his sons needs to be considered in its totality.

Sa'di Çelebi's intellectual and literary success translated into position of renown and prestige from which he constantly benefitted both economically and socially. Although he did not pursue a career within the official ranks of Ottoman bureaucracy, as did his father and brother, Sa'di Çelebi was consistently supported and consulted by the court. Born in Amasya and trained in the schools of Bursa, he first became professor at the Ğazi Murad Madrasah, before moving to Istanbul around 1503-1504.²⁷⁶ He was then offered a professorship at the Ali Paşa Madrasah and eventually appointed to one of the eight madrasahs of Mehmet II's complex.²⁷⁷ He remained close to the palace throughout these years, presenting to Bayezid II a series of panegyrics, and receiving rewards for his poems.²⁷⁸ After Ca'fer Çelebi's execution, commanded by Selim I in 1515, Sa'di Çelebi buried his brother's body in Fener. Sa'di Çelebi remained in Istanbul, where he retired

²⁷⁶ İsmail Erünsal, "Tâcizâde Sâdî Çelebi," *TDVİA* 39 (2010): 356.

²⁷⁷ The *Draft* shows that Sa'di Çelebi was bestowed various gifts and rewards for his panegyrics. In the first entry, in January 1506, he is recorded as the teacher of Ali Paşa madrasah. Four years later, in January 1509, he is recorded as a teacher at Mehmet II's imperial madrasah complex, one of the highest academic positions at the time. *Draft*, 17, 254. For a transcription of entries regarding poets and their rewards see İsmail Erünsal's transcription of a register of the imperial treasury in İsmail Erünsal, "In'amat "i," 303-342.

²⁷⁸ See *Draft*, 17, 164, 254, and 314.

after returning from pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and was given a pension of eighty *akçes* a day. He was buried in Balat, in a primary school he himself had commissioned.²⁷⁹

Despite political changes and his brother's disgrace, Sa'di Çelebi's skill as a stylist secured him a comfortable position at court, his means of sustenance, and social recognition. He wrote poetry and high prose in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish, and his command of these languages was well known and appreciated in the palace. Even after his brother's execution, he was recalled by the court to produce a letter to Kansu Gavri, then sultan of Egypt, for which he received thirty thousand *akçes* in a single payment and a salary increase of thirty *akçe*. In addition to being a poet and a stylist, Sa'di Çelebi was also a renowned scholar, as evidenced by the positions he held at the most prestigious madrasahs of the time. Indeed, some of his works were used in madrasah education as textbooks.²⁸⁰

Sa'di Çelebi's miscellany is similar to that of his father's in both content and form. His miscellany contains a total of fifteen letters by Bayezid II, Cem Sultan, Uzun Hasan, and Mevlānā Siraç. It contains one letter written by his own father and addressed to the people of Bursa. In it, Tācī Beg informs Bursa of the sultan's victory in Modon (1500). In total, twelve of the fifteen letters belong to Bayezid II's tenure as a prince. These are mostly friendly communications and news from neighboring lands. Three of these letters are of friendship and love and were exchanged between Cem Sultan and Bayezid II. Two inform their recipients of Bayezid II's victory at Akkerman and Kili (1484), which is one of the most common topics of contemporary historiography and the ending point of all chronicles of the Ottoman Empire produced under Bayezid II. Thirteen of the letters are

²⁷⁹ İsmail Erünsal, "Tâcîzâde Sâdî Çelebi," 356.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

produced either by the sultan, a prince, or another Muslim ruler, the exceptions being the two letters by Mevlānā Siraç and Tācī Beg. It is not clear to whom this miscellany was presented or whether the author himself compiled it. Indeed, it is assumed that the authorship of Sa'di Çelebi referred in the original title of the miscellany points to his role as compiler and not as the original author of the letters. Nonetheless, the true authorship of these texts remains ambiguous; for it is indeed possible that Sa'di Çelebi produced this miscellany in order to prove his skills as stylist and his capacity to produce official missives.

The fifteen letters included in Sa'di Çelebi's miscellany have mostly been considered in relation to their relevance as sources for the political events they narrate or refer to.²⁸¹ In other words, they have been considered as historical sources only in as much as they provide specific data that either completes or confirms the larger narrative of the political history of the Ottoman Empire. This has been particularly the case since its contents deal with major historical characters such as sultan Bayezid II, his brother Cem Sultan, and the last Aqqoyunlu ruler, Uzun Hasan. Interestingly enough, the series of communications between Uzun Hasan and Bayezid II when the latter was still a prince governor of Amasya have barely been explored in the literature. These few communications are an exchange of intelligence regarding local politics in the Eastern frontier of the Ottoman Empire between the two courts. For most of his reign, Uzun Hasan remained antagonistic yet cordial to Mehmed II, who was the father of Bayezid II

²⁸¹ Sa'di Çelebi's compilation of letters is found in three manuscript copies, all of them held at the Beyazıt Devlet Library in Istanbul. In 1956, Necati Lugal and Adnan Erzi produced an edition of selected letters included in the original manuscript in Arabic script. The edition reproduces fifteen letters in their entirety and a series of chronograms. Lugal and Erzi also provide an index and a short summary of each letter in modern Turkish. See Sa'di Çelebi, *Münşeāt*, V-VIII; 87-91. Lugal and Erzi's edition is based on Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi, *Münşeāt*, MS Veliyüddin Efendi 3558, Beyazıt Devlet Library, Istanbul. For other manuscript numbers see the bibliography. References in this chapter are made to Lugal and Erzi's 1956 edition unless otherwise noted.

and sultan of the Ottoman Empire and Uzun Hasan's contemporary. Indeed, Uzun Hasan lost his life during Mehmed II's campaign against the Aqqoyunlu sultanate in 1478. During this campaign Bayezid II and the military support of the eastern provinces were instrumental in securing the ultimate Ottoman victory. This campaign also seemed to have played a role in the construction of Bayezid II's image as a military commander. Cem Sultan was instead sent to Edirne during the campaign, which prevented his participation in the war.

Both Sa'di Çelebi and his father Tācī Beg were close to Bayezid II since his governorship in Amasya, and both dedicate quite a good number of pages and letters to record the friendly terms in which Bayezid II and Uzun Hasan interacted during the sultan's governorship in Amasya.²⁸² It is worth noting their decision to reproduce Bayezid II's personal communications with his seditious brother, who had died in exile, and with Uzun Hasan, a rival Muslim leader defeated by his father during a campaign in which Bayezid II himself had taken part. Why did the former treasurer of Bayezid II together with his sons, a renowned scholar and the future imperial chancellor, put together three compilations of letters, mostly in Persian, reproducing the intimate relation and personal communications between the Ottoman sultan and his previous rivals? Why were these particular examples chosen to produce a compilation of diplomatic letters dealing with

²⁸² Ca'fer Çelebi, also famous for being a skillful stylist, is supposed to have produced a series of letters for the sultan. Indeed, he held the position of imperial chancellor from 1497-1511. To my knowledge, the only copy of his collections of letters is preserved in a seventeenth century manuscript book kept at Istanbul University's manuscript library. Erünsal, in his edition of Ca'fer Çelebi's divan, dismisses this and other collections as "misnomers." He indicates that only the first three letters of the miscellany held in Istanbul University's Library may have been written by Ca'fer Çelebi, since the other letters belong to Suleiman I's period. I have seen the manuscript, and the themes and style of the first three letters seem to coincide with his father and brother's miscellanies. Indeed, many letters belong to Suleiman I's period. Nonetheless, I was unable to confirm the authenticity of these three letters, mostly due to lack of information or sources beyond internal stylistic elements. See Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, *İnşā'-i Tācī-zāde*, MS T 5723, Istanbul University, Istanbul. For Erünsal's discussion on Ca'fer Çelebi's miscellanies, see Erünsal, *Life and Works*, LXVI.

state politics? Why re-produce these particular incidents exactly at a time when the court is sponsoring the major historiographical projects of the Ottoman dynasty up to that moment?

A Sibling's Lyric: Cem Sultan

The succession struggle between Cem Sultan and Bayezid II created a legitimacy crisis in the Ottoman Empire in the last two decades of the fifteenth century. It also became a controversy in the creation of an official historiography that culminated in Bayezid II's few military victories. In 1481, Mehmet II, Ottoman sultan and conqueror of Constantinople, passed away. He had ascended to the throne years before by successfully eliminating his brothers and triumphing as the sole heir of his father Murat II's throne. The disastrous results of his grandfather's struggle to win over the divided lands of the Ottomans may still have been fresh memories. Mehmet II was aware of the chaos brought by civil war and allegedly legalized fratricide as the only means of legitimate succession, as is recorded in most histories of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, ironically enough, his sons did not quite comply with these rules. Mehmet II's passing was followed by a short, yet intricate civil strife. At the time of his death two of his sons were still alive: Bayezid II and Cem Sultan. The former was ruler of the province of Rum and held court at Amasya, an important city in the Eastern lands of Anatolia. Cem Sultan was governor of Karaman, based at the princely court of Manisa. Both Manisa and Amasya were seats of local power long before the Ottoman conquests, and thus carried with them important local notables, the control of crucial commercial routes, and manpower. Following the Sultan's death his sons began a race to the throne that did not entirely end until years later with

Cem Sultan's mysterious death. He was poisoned near Naples after the French king Charles XII marched upon the Vatican and took Cem Sultan from Borgia Pope Alexander XIX's custody on his way to Naples.

Bayezid II's accession to the Ottoman throne before successfully eliminating the only other contending heir called his right to the sultanate into question and became a threat to its stability. Thus, Ottoman dynastic histories and chronicles portrayed Cem Sultan's claims to the throne as rebellious, regardless of his father's rules about succession.²⁸³ Following the example of Tacī Beg and his two sons, Sa'di Çelebi and Ca'fer Çelebi, letters from both princes were reproduced in compilations of letters up to the end of the sixteenth century.²⁸⁴ These letters, written in Persian and Turkish high prose, helped giving a personal and detailed narrative of the struggle for the throne, adding to the position taken by the official chronicles.²⁸⁵ While the chronicles emphasized the victories of Bayezid II and downplayed Cem Sultan's right to the throne, these letters were able to expand on the personal relation of two princes, and suggest that Cem Sultan's continuous attempts to seize the sultanate were a betrayal of his brother.

The communications between both princes explained the contradiction of Bayezid II's succession. In the sixteenth century, biographical dictionaries interpreted the sultan and his brother's poetry to fit the betrayal narrative. Cem Sultan's rebellion was not only a revolt against his brother's authority, but an act of personal betrayal. Lyric poems (*ğazel*, pl. *ğazaliyāt*) within the miscellanies and in the biographical dictionaries were used as

²⁸³ See, for instance, the limited section given to Cem Sultan's rebellion in the chronicles of Mehmed Neşri, Tursun Beg, and Aşıkpaşazāde.

²⁸⁴ See Muslu, "Language of Diplomacy," 247-266.

²⁸⁵ In addition to the biographical dictionaries and the miscellany titled *İnsā'-i Tācīzāde* mentioned above, there is a collection of "conversations" held in the Topkapı Palace Library, which reproduces in the same fashion the series of communication between Bayezid II, Selim I, and Suleiman I with their sons and brothers, as well as with other Muslim rulers. See *Bāyezīd-i Şānī ve Selīm-i Evvel Zamānna Āit Muḥabāt*, MS R 1958, Topkapı Sarayı Library, Istanbul.

"voices" for the princes, personal interventions into the state's history that capitalized on the emotional economy of the poems. Tropes of love and suffering, common in Ottoman lyric poetry, translate into a model of authority and social order whereby the lover unconditionally and selflessly loves the beloved, just as the imperial subject subsumes his whole existence to the sultan's will.

The poems selected by fifteenth century biographical dictionaries do not always coincide with those cited in the miscellanies, yet the principles of selection are similar. The two brothers loved each other, Cem Sultan betrayed this love, and selfishly refused to give up his claims to the throne. Cem Sultan also lied, leaving for Egypt with the pretext of performing the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, but using this as an excuse to gather an army to challenge Bayezid II. Both Sehī Beg and Latīfī briefly note that Cem Sultan, when in exile, sent some poems to Bayezid II and then proceed to quote a few couplets.²⁸⁶ 'Āşık Çelebi instead prioritizes Cem Sultan's couplets that speak of his exile in Europe, his religious pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and his misery while in exile.

Copies of Cem Sultan's divan are held in Bursa and Istanbul. Most of the poems must have been written while Cem Sultan was in exile in Egypt, Rhodes, and finally at Rome. We learn from 'Āşık Çelebi that his boon companion Sa'di (homonymous to Tācī-zāde Sa'di Çelebi) travelled to Istanbul to mediate a possible solution to the fraternal conflict with Bayezid II. As part of Sa'di's mission, gifts were given to the sultan, among which was a copy of the prince's divan.²⁸⁷ His poems, though, seem to have been popular, or at least already known by the Ottoman literary establishment by the end of the

²⁸⁶ Latīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 145-146; Sehī Beg, *Heşt Bihışt*, 15b.

²⁸⁷ 'Āşık Çelebi, *Meşāirü'ş-Şuarā'*, 1:490.

fifteenth century. Some of his Turkish poems were widely cited both in the miscellanies and in the biographical dictionaries written around fifty years after his death.

Laṭīfī and Sehī Beg give the most direct reference to the brothers' dialogue. In his biographical dictionary, Laṭīfī quotes Cem Sultan asking to his brother:

*Sen pister-i nāz içre yatıp gül gibi her-dem
Cem derd-ile bālīn idine hāri sebab ne?*²⁸⁸

Always, like a rose, you lie on the bed of coquetry. [Instead,] Cem, with pain, makes of its thorn a cushion. What is the reason for this?

Immediately, Laṭīfī cites Bayezid II's response, which directly attacks Cem Sultan for his apparent hypocrisy.

*Çün rüz-ı ezel kısmet olunmuş bize devlet
Taḳdīre rıza virmeyesin böyle sebab ne
Haccü'l-Haremeynüm diyüben da'vī kulursın
Bu salṭanat-ı dūnyeviye bunca taleb ne?*²⁸⁹

Since the beginning of time, it was destiny that prosperity and empire would be mine. What is the reason then why you did not yield to destiny? You raise your claim by saying: "I am a pilgrim to the two sacred cities." But what is then this claim you have for this worldly sultanate?²⁹⁰

According to Sehī Beg, Cem Sultan's verses were a response to Bayezid II's reproach.

Whatever the order of the exchange may have been, these verses comply with the

²⁸⁸ Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 146. Sehī Beg's gives a different version: "*Sen pister-i gülde yatasın şevkıyla ḥandān/ Cem hicr ile bālīn idine hāri sebab ne?*" translated as "With delight, you lie on a bed of roses. With pain, Cem makes of its [the rose's] thorn a cushion. Why is it so?" See Sehī Beg, *Heşt Bihışt*, 15b. I have used Laṭīfī's version because it coincides with the full poem as found in Cem Sultan's Turkish divan. See Halil Ersoylu, ed., *Cem Sultan'ın Türkçe Divanı* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1989), 198. Gibb quotes and translates an alternative version of the couplet which I have not been able to find in the biographical dictionaries or the divan:

سن پستر کلده یاته سن شوق ایله خندان
بن کول دوشنم کلخن محنتده سبب نه

"A-smile on bed of roses thou lie in all delight/ In dolour's stove-room mid the ashes couch I, —why is this?" See Gibb, *History*, 75.

²⁸⁸ Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 146.

²⁸⁹ Laṭīfī, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 146.

²⁹⁰ While I have opted for a prose translation, I have certainly benefitted from Gibb's translation of this passage. See Gibb, *History*, 75.

traditional imagery of love and desire, and describe a man subsumed in suffering. When the poems are dislocated from their original context (the full poem) and re-located to a new one (larger prose texts, e.g. biographical dictionaries, letters), the pathos expressed in the couplets shifts from the desire for the beloved into the fraternal struggle for the throne. Desire for reunion is thus a form of expressing the feeling of resentment, in Bayezid II's case. In Cem Sultan's couplets, this same desire stands for the hope of a prince who felt himself mistreated and looked for moral retribution. The questions that traditionally a lover asks to the coy beloved become the reproach of a brother calling out the hypocrisy of his younger sibling, who had claimed to be a spiritual pilgrim, but was in fact only worried about his share in the empire of their father, a share that he lost several times in campaign.

In this instance, high prose transforms the emotional economy of a lyric poem (*gazel*) into a political commentary. The yearning for love illustrates the moral inadequacy of Cem Sultan's right to rule. Indeed, these couplets work well within the structure of the full poem as it is recorded in the *divan*. Yet in the case of some of the miscellanies and the biographical dictionaries, the couplets are dislocated and replaced within an even larger narrative, a narrative of love, of desire, and of hope, just as much as the original poem was. In this case, however, the narrative is the empire. The combination of two registers of speech, lyric poetry and narrative prose, transform the traditional tropes of love and desire. By interpreting the lover's pathos, the historical context given to the poems provides us with a proof of the moral limits of rebellion. In other words, the political history surrounding these couplets, which read in isolation would not differ from the hundreds of poems in Cem Sultan or Bayezid II's *divans*, opens

up an emotional complexity that is employed to illustrate the relation between the two princes and express the political anxieties of the Ottoman elites. What are the limits of rebellion? What is the role of fraternal love in the imperial succession? Is a prince expected to be honest? The widespread use of the princes' couplets in different narratives of the succession struggle speaks to the flexibility of the lover-beloved binary as a means of communication. The combination of prose and lyric poetry allowed the shift between factual description and the princes' personal feelings, such as anger, suffering, and hope.

The incorporation of lyric poems within larger prose texts added layers of meaning to the main narrative. In many instances, couplets helped historians to emphasize the relevance of architectural monuments or important battles by referring to specific panegyrics. In other occasions, scholars use poems to summarize a point made in a chapter or a paragraph. In this instance, however, the poems are used as windows to the characters' emotional response to political events. Yet, they seem to have a recognized layer of reality that supports the retelling of the historical event of the fight between the two brothers. The poem steps into reality as if it was recording an actual dialogue. The lyric nature of this dialogue, the words of desire and suffering, the hope, even if phrased as the expectation of the impossible, adds a layer of meaning to the historical events.

The effort to produce texts in different media exploring the issue of legitimate succession resulted in a comprehensive commentary on what was considered acceptable in the struggle for power versus what was considered rebellion. It provided a map of the moral implications of a prince's claims to the throne, which expanded the legal limits established in the books of law. Regardless of the legality of Cem Sultan's claims, and the

apparent irregularity of Bayezid II's succession, the long history of the princes' personal interactions and love, compiled in isolated letters and ultimately articulated in poetry, settled new boundaries for princes and their supporters. This commentary on the role of love, honesty, and morality in the succession was important for the legitimacy of Bayezid II's succession as much as it was relevant to his controversial abdication in favor of his son, Selim I.

A Bureaucrat's Prose: Mesīhī

Models for letters also expressed and discussed the limits of social association through the description of the mechanics of Ottoman bureaucracy. In the case of Tācī Beg and his sons, the moral boundaries of rule take form in the interactions of public lives, embodied here by the two opposing heirs to the Ottoman throne, namely, Bayezid II and Cem Sultan. As shown above, the letters juxtapose proper and reproachable behavior. However, in the case of procedural manuals for scribes, also called compilations of high prose (*münşeat mecmuası*), the series of possible episodes to be faced by bureaucrats provides a normative guide for the imperial subjects' proper behavior. The depiction of the associations between various classes of Ottoman subjects attempted to define these very same associations, and in so doing, advanced a political project. These manuals were compilations of letters assumed to constitute exempla for future bureaucrats.

The nature and scope of scribal manuals changed in the late fifteenth century. Manuals composed in the first half of the fifteenth century were textbooks, which included clear instructions for writing and examples for the scribe to copy as needed.

Most of the examples are constituted of formulaic phrases followed by generic terms, such as "son-of-son", which were to be replaced with the particularities of each case. However, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century exempla were compiled from the actual work of the scholar and bureaucrat compiling the manual. Indeed, Mesîhî, a middle-ranking bureaucrat under the service of Grand Vezir Hadım Ali Paşa (d. 1511) produced a compilation of letters he wrote for both personal issues and matters related to his office as scribe. Mesîhî titled his compilation *The One Hundred Petal Rose (Gül-i Şād-berg)* and it has been assumed that it was meant to contain a hundred model letters.²⁹¹

Mesîhî belonged to a different class of bureaucrat connected to the imperial service than that represented by Tācî Beg and his sons. He did not belong to a powerful family nor was he trained in the Imperial Palace. His access to social networks and resources was the result of his education, career choices, and his capacity to distinguish himself from others. Mesîhî was born in Piriştine, in the province of Rum. His contemporary, Sehî Beg, records that Mesîhî began training in religious sciences, yet he soon left the scholarly life and instead became a soldier (*sipahi*).²⁹² No other biographical dictionary comments on or confirms Mesîhî's change of career. Instead, 'Āşık Çelebi emphasizes Mesîhî's talents in calligraphy, and how his skills permitted him to join the

²⁹¹ While none of the existing manuscripts is composed of exactly a hundred letters, scholars have rescued a total of 85 letters in all the manuscripts plus 15 super inscriptions to the Imperial Palace. Of these letters, a total of 70 occur in the two recensions identified by Ménage. None of the available manuscripts seems to be an autograph. As with most compilations made by the authors themselves at this time, it is hard to know with any certainty the number of editions produced during the author's life and whether the existing manuscripts represent a variation of the text made by the author himself or by the copyists. In point of fact, one of the manuscripts—namely Paris 159—contains a series of personal communications between Mesîhî and other Istanbulite poets. See Ménage, *Gül-i Sad Berg*, 11-32. See also Derdiyok, *Mesîhi*, 132-139.

²⁹² Sehî Beg, *Heşt Bihişt*, 99b.

office of Grand Vezir Hadım Ali Paşa.²⁹³ After the Grand Vezir's death in 1511, Mesîhî was left without a patron, allegedly already in disgrace with Hadım Ali Paşa due to his drinking habits and behavior. Sehî Beg suggests that Mesîhî entered then the service of Yunus Paşa.²⁹⁴ It is probably at this time, while searching for a patron, that Mesîhî composed a panegyric for Ca'fer Çelebi, then Imperial Chancellor to Bayezid II.²⁹⁵

Positions within the bureaucracy depended on the establishment of strong networks, adequate patronage, and good deal of chance. The balance between advancement and downfall (exile, execution, punishment) was volatile. Indeed, Mesîhî failed to secure a position in Istanbul after losing his patron, and consequently he was sent to Bosnia. He was granted revenue from a tax farm (*timar*), but he most likely had to abandon his scribal career in order to serve as a non-regular soldier during this time.²⁹⁶ A letter addressed to the poet Sūzenî and included in some of the manuscripts of the *Gül-i Şād-berg* suggests that Mesîhî took part in local raids against Christian lands.²⁹⁷ Mesîhî reports that his stay in Bosnia was miserable. Mesîhî describes how the habitants of Bosnia barely knew Turkish and thus he was unable to communicate with them, to the point that, in a rhetorical exaggeration, he claims to be incapable of writing in Turkish, not even to praise God and the Prophet Muhammad. The letter is a clear plea to return to Istanbul, full of the bitterness of living in the province and the hope that his stay in Bosnia would be temporary in nature. Mesîhî, however, died in Bosnia in 1512. It is quite

²⁹³ 'Āşık Çelebi, *Meşāirü'ş-Şuarā*, 2: 809.

²⁹⁴ Sehî Beg, *Heşt Bihişt*, 99b.

²⁹⁵ Laṭîfî, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'ara*, 499; 'Āşık Çelebi, *Meşāirü'ş-Şuarā*, 809. For a discussion on Mesîhî's kaside to Ca'fer Çelebi, see above, chapter 2.

²⁹⁶ His access to revenue derived from a tax farm seems to confirm Sehî Beg's claims that Mesîhî served as a non-regular soldier (*sipahi*) at some point during his life, although it is unclear whether this preceded his service for Hadım Ali Paşa or was a last resort after the pasha's death, since Mesîhî was unable to find a new patron. Sehî Beg, *Heşt Bihişt*, 99b.

²⁹⁷ For a transcription of this letter, see Ménage, "Gül-i Sad Berg," 31-32

likely that the *Gül-i Şād-berg* was written and rewritten several times during Mesīḥī's tenure as a scribe and then compiled again during his time away from the capital. His search for a patron would only intensify Mesīḥī's need to produce a portfolio of his work as a means to persuade potential patrons of his own value as a scribe. The *Gül-i Şād-berg* would also have a didactic value, both as a manual of style and as an encyclopedia of sorts in which all possible situations faced by the imperial administration were recorded.

Manuals for letter writing were repositories of learned forms of prose composition that at the same time demonstrated the author's competency as a bureaucrat and his education as a member of the administrative elite of the empire. Only recently, the Islamic tradition of letter compilation has begun to be considered as a means to reconstruct the expectations that scribes, bureaucrats, and gentlemen had to meet in order to constantly prove themselves of worth to administrators and rulers.²⁹⁸ However, the normative value of these texts has not been explored. Inasmuch as the letters provided an image of the ideal member of the Ottoman elite, they also reflected the expectations that the bureaucrat had of society; and they were a means through which mid-ranking bureaucrats posed a case for a better society. The selection of particular cases and the administrative responses that followed, compiled in one single encyclopedic volume and presented as a comprehensive model for scribes, offered an idealized mirror for society, which created a prescriptive guide for action. In other words, these letters had authoritative value both as exemplary prose and as the result of the expertise of competent bureaucrats. If they were taken seriously and used by administrative offices,

²⁹⁸ See Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); and Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*.

they also provided a procedural norm for the daily challenges of the major bureaucratic offices of the empire.

Administrative procedure was not fixed in the late fifteenth century and it rarely became subject to theorization. Precedent and repetition created the rule. Procedure shapes all actions of governance, and thus its standardization represents a normalization of the administrative mechanics of empire. Each of these manuals was a materialization of a social project by mid-ranking, well-educated bureaucrats. None of them was adopted as the authoritative manual, and thus, the combination and fluid exchange of these letters as models must be seen as a space of discussion, a series of attempts to advance one particular ideal of society, triggered and fueled by the bureaucrat's expectations of service and his desire to belong to the central administration. The piecemeal selection of these letters by the ruling elite produced in turn a complex and changing state machinery that would not be fully standardized until the end of the century. At the same time, their lack of standardization permitted the continuing appearance of advice and prescriptive literature.

Manuals of letters, such as *Mesīhī's*, center on the balance of asking (letters of request) and giving (letters of appointments, communications regarding grants and gifts). Indeed, the letters in the *Gül-i Şād-berg* offer examples of the different parts of a formal letter of request, although not all of them include every single element of the ideal letter. Instead, most letters emphasize only one particular section of the ideal letter. The 85 letters comprising the two main recensions of the text are mostly requests of one sort or another, with the exception of two letters—epistle number 1 informs of the conquest of

Egypt, while number 70 is a response to a previous communication.²⁹⁹ Derdiyok identified seven sections in the letters following the classification of Mīralay Süleyman Beg in his prose manual, the *Mebāniyü'l- İnşā*. According to this classification, the letters teach the adequate use of titles and names (*elkāb*), the appropriate pleasantries of the introductory section (*ibtidā*), as well as how to articulate the transition between the introduction and the main body of the letter (*taḥallüs*), the request proper (*ṭalep*), the conclusion (*intihā*), and the final prayer (*dua*) followed by the signature (*imza*).³⁰⁰

These formulaic sections, particularly the rules for addressing people according to their status, held special importance during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There was an active interest in producing manuals in order to train scribes for service in the newly formed Ottoman principate since the first years of its expansion. As I mentioned earlier, the first of these manuals was produced by Aḥmed-i Dā'ī, a seasoned poet-bureaucrat from the neighboring state of Germiyan, which had a longer court tradition and history. After the fall of Germiyan, Aḥmed-i Dā'ī was received in the Ottoman court due to his expertise as a scholar, as a tutor of princes, and as a skillful bureaucrat. His understanding of the formulaic aspects of government, expressed through his mastery of literary and educated language, was precisely his asset as a human commodity exportable to the burgeoning principate. Similar to Aḥmed-i Dā'ī's *Teressül*, Kırımlu Hafız Hüsam's homonymous work *Teressül* and Yahya Beg's *Menāhicü'l-İnşā*, all contemporary

²⁹⁹ As mentioned earlier, at least seven copies of Mesīḥī's *Münşeāt* exist, only four of which are titled *Gül-i Şād-berg*. These four manuscripts seem to represent the main compilation of Mesīḥī's letters, which in turn are the result of two recensions. In addition to these, there are letters by Mesīḥī in other compilations, some of which are titled *Münşeāt-i Mesīḥī* and *İnşā-i Mesīḥī*, although not all letters contained in these compilations belong to Mesīḥī or are present in the *Gül-i Şād-berg*. See below.

³⁰⁰ Derdiyok, "XV. Yüzyıl Şairlerinden Mesīḥī'nin Gül-i Sad-Berg'i," 54–64.

manuals for scribes, he focuses prominently on the mechanics of introducing letters and addressing recipients according to their place and status.

The adequate use of adjectives, titles, and names served to reinforce the line of command and authority within the empire and to negotiate the place of the Ottoman polity among other regional powers. When in 1453 Mehmet II conquered Constantinople, the Mamluks changed his titled to an adjective indicating a higher regard among other Muslim rulers. In turn, when Mehmet II changed the formulaic titles of the Mamluk sultan, diplomatic relations between both empires became tense, perhaps announcing future hostilities.³⁰¹ The provocative manipulation of titles in diplomatic correspondence between the Ottomans and the Mamluks continued during Bayezid II and Selim I's reigns. The origins of the Mamluk dynasty among the ranks of slave soldiers of the Ayyubi dynasty was evoked by the meaning of the Arabic words *mamlūk*, that who is possessed, and *mālik*, king or that who possess. The wordplay made evident the Mamluk sultan's inferior position vis-à-vis the Ottoman royal descent, that is to say, it contrasted the Mamluk sultan as a slave who fights under the command of a Muslim ruler versus the Ottoman sultan, who was a free Muslim warrior.³⁰² Appropriate titles could be used as a means to provoke an ally by insulting him and thereby legitimize a militaristic campaign against another Muslim ruler. Yet, titles were also a way to categorize the world, and knowledge of the subtleties of titles was an accepted indicator of a sovereign's aptitude to rule.

³⁰¹ Muslu, "Language of Diplomacy," 249-253; 258-264.

³⁰² See Hakan Karateke, "Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate. A Framework for Historical Analysis," in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 25.

In contrast, a lack of etiquette revealed ignorance and thus incapacity to govern properly. During the reign of Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) ‘Āşıkpāşāzāde, a Zeyni historian, retrospectively narrates the unfortunate diplomatic exchange between Mehmet II and the Mamluk sultan. The historian considers it "regrettable" that such a ruler should be upon the throne of a land like Egypt.³⁰³ Similarly, when advising Persian rulers in the popular mirror for princes *Chahār Maqāla*, Nizāmī-i ‘Arużī offers abundant examples of the effectiveness of the proper use of adjectives and the concise usage of words and titles in preventing or provoking a war, and even in assuring victory.³⁰⁴ The *Chahār Maqāla* was a model known in Ottoman administrative circles, among other Persian and Arabic manuals of scribes.³⁰⁵ Indeed, the fact that these models were so necessary but accessing them required an advance mastery of Persian and Arabic language was what first motivated Aḥmed-i Dā‘ī to write a similar manual in the Turkish language.

Proper forms of address extended beyond diplomatic exchanges between two heads of state. Titles, formulae, and prayers also regulated interactions between the various classes of Ottoman subjects and the ruling elite. Consequently, Mesīḥī’s *Gül-i Şād-berg* contains letters focusing on titles for peers, as well as people of both superior and inferior rank. In addition, it offers a series of fifteenth formulaic introductions (*sername*) for addressing the imperial court. These formulaic introductions appear in the text without any of the other sections of a letter, highlighting the importance of knowing how to write to and petition the sultan.

³⁰³ Quoted in Muslu, "Language of Diplomacy," 260.

³⁰⁴ Nizāmī-i ‘Arużī. *The Chahār Maqāla*, 22-44.

³⁰⁵ Marinos Sariyannis, "Ruler and State, State and Society in Ottoman Political Thought," *Turkish Historical Review* 4 (2013): 83-117.

The comprehensive nature of the *Gül-i Şād-berg*'s range and diversity turns Mesīhī's compilation into a prescriptive model of the multiple associations between different classes of Ottoman subjects. Indeed, the *Gül-i Şād-berg* brings together various letters, most with different aims; and in so doing, it offers diverse examples of scribal duties, a catalogue for the author's work, and an ideal representation of communication. The compilation's largest group of letters is made of requests, which in turn can be divided into letters of support or recommendation (*şefkat-nāme*), usually targeted to sheikhs, ulema, and local commanders. There is a total of twelve such letters. The second group is made of petitions (*ṭalep-nāme*) asking for specific appointments, donations, salaries, and even land revenues. It also contains letters that are meant to inform of the dispatch of other previous or future communications as well as goods to be received by the addressee (*irsāl-nāme*). Some of these letters introduce a package sent to the addressee, such as books, poems, calligraphy, or even prisoners. These letters include a small request as well, which works as a means to negotiate a something wanted in return for that which is sent with or before the letter.³⁰⁶

As a whole, the *Gül-i Şād-berg* provides a clear direction for important issues of daily bureaucratic procedure, and in so doing, it advises on the expectations of proper governance.³⁰⁷ In letter 2, for instance, Mesīhī communicates the request of the imperial court to support a person by the name of 'Abdū'l-Celīl bin Cemīl.³⁰⁸ The letter is divided into three sections, including a description of 'Abdū'l-Celīl bin Cemīl and the main issue

³⁰⁶ I have followed Derdiyok's classification because of its clarity in dividing the letters into coherent groups. See Mesīhī, *Gül-i Şād-berg*, 54-91. See above, 36.

³⁰⁷ Mesīhī includes twelve letters which the writer either express his support for a religious/authority figure (a sheikh, ulema, emir, etc.) or communicates the support of others. The letters' numbers correspond to Derdiyok's edition. See letters 2, 3, 18, 21, 24, 27, 45, 48, 59, 78, 80 and 83. The page numbers quoted here and below also correspond to the transcription prepared by Derdiyok.

³⁰⁸ Mesīhī, *Gül-i Şād-berg*, 159-161. The page numbers quoted here and below also correspond to the transcription prepared by Derdiyok.

of the letter, namely, that 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl had been mistreated due to the distrust and resentment of of his peers. The second section references another similar letter of support by Piri Paşa, who supports 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl. In the last section, Mesîhî communicates the wish of the imperial court to mitigate the ill treatment to which 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl had been subjected. In addition to the particular incident narrated in this letter, Mesîhî clearly states the expected virtues of a sheikh when he describes 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl in order to unequivocally prove his worth. Furthermore, Mesîhî contrasts 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl's qualities against the resentment and injustice perpetuated by his peers. The fact that Mesîhî quotes Piri Paşa's endorsement suggests the need to provide more than one source of support. The multiple interactions described in the letter (peers, 'Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl, Piri Paşa, Mesîhî, and the imperial court) underline the importance of the relation between a sheikh and an authority figure in the administrative chain of command of the empire, in this case represented by Piri Paşa. Last but not least, it reinforces the image of the state not as a mediator, but as the ultimate authority in matters of civil peace. The state is not mediating the resentment of Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl's peers, but commanding the end of unjust treatment and ruling on the proper behavior of other sheikhs and religious authorities towards Abdü'l-Celîl bin Cemîl.

Letters of support represent the other end of the spectrum of letters of request in official communications. They are similar in nature, but operate from the bottom to the top of the bureaucratic line of authority. Mesîhî compiles twelve letters of this sort, covering petitions for donations, books, yearly allowances, and even marriage (see letter

75).³⁰⁹ However, letters of delivery are probably of more interest to us as they that inform recipients of the arrival of precious cargo. Thirteen of these examples exist.³¹⁰ As mentioned already, the most important part of these letters of delivery is not found in the section describing the cargo, which was probably already clear to whoever was receiving the expected goods. The actual communication occurred in the section that followed, wherein the signee of the letter would describe the appropriate reward/payment expected for the delivery of the goods. This brief yet crucial section exemplifies the space of negotiation provided in formal communications between members of the imperial chain of command. For example, while it was the duty of the guards of Istanbul to identify spies and put them into custody, it is clear that when the event actually occurred it opened the possibility of a reward and a material incentive. Letter 43, which informs its recipient of the capture of a spy, was not a report in the modern sense, which would merely register the success of the city guards for bureaucratic procedures. It was instead an opportunity for renegotiating the terms of duty for imperial servants. This group of letters as a whole illustrates the possible requests that could be made in the case of such events, that is, the appropriate upper limits of the negotiating space for Ottoman subjects.

Letters in the *Gül-i Şād-berg* also illustrate the bonds between authorities and subjects. For instance, letter 78 instructs the reader on the appropriate titles given to madrasah teachers.³¹¹ In order to do so, it explains the rules of writing a letter of support to provide the necessary means of sustenance to teachers. This example is particularly interesting because it involves on the one hand frontier lords, that is, local authorities that had established dominion over a locality through a combination of imperial appointment

³⁰⁹ The letters of request in Derdiyok's edition are 6, 19, 22, 23, 34, 36, 44, 47, 67, 75, and 84.

³¹⁰ These include letters number 25, 30, 38, 39, 40, 41, 4, 43, 54, 61, 62, 66, and 79.

³¹¹ Mesīhī, *Gül-i Şād-berg*, 271-273.

and military success on the frontier, and on the other hand the two military judges of the empire, who both had an incredible administrative and religious jurisdiction, only parallel to the Grand Vizier and the Mufti of Istanbul, later to be the *Şeyhü'l-İslām*. This letter emphasizes the obligations of provincial authorities towards the madrasah teachers as well as the responsibility of the central authorities to negotiate on their behalf and ensure they have proper working and living conditions. It must be remembered that most madrasah teachers of the provinces were indeed appointed by the religious and political authorities in the capital and their position was ratified and executed by the imperial court.

Communication occurred also amongst peers, not only vertically between the ruling elite and the subjects. The *Gül-i Şād-berg* includes a letter for his colleague, Suzeni—an Istanbulite poet.³¹² It is unclear whether this letter was included by Mesīhī himself or added later by the copyists (*müstensīh*). This lack of clarity stems both from the manuscript analysis done by Ménage and Derdiyok, and from the fact that this letter was written shortly before Mesīhī's death in a tone of ultimate defeat. As mentioned above, Mesīhī had been exiled to Bosnia. His lack of proximity to the court meant alienation from the vivid community of poets and scholars of the empire's metropoleis, especially Istanbul. Mesīhī, as I mentioned already, complains of his isolation and the provincial nature of his exile in a place where he is unable to fully exercise his linguistic and intellectual capacities. The most interesting element of this letter is the description of the province as the worst possible place for intellectual development. By describing the inadequacy of Bosnia as a place that would allow him to write, compose, or even talk,

³¹² Mesīhī, *Gül-i Şād-berg*, 421-425. Ménage has also transcribed the letter in his article about the *Gül-i Şād-berg*. I have opted to use Ménage's transcription, since the transcription provided by Derdiyok is defective. See Ménage, "Gül-i Şād-berg," 31-32.

Mesîhî emphasized the need of a metropolitan environment for poets. In other words, Mesîhî argues that in addition to the generous salaries that many scholars enjoyed in their retirement in the provinces, the human landscape of the capital was a necessity for them. Dialogue, competition, and constant interaction with other poets and scholars fueled the intellectual potential of the Ottoman intellectual elite. And according to Mesîhî, the lack of such a social environment had only resulted in the poet's incapacity to even praise God.

A Scholar's Prose: Lâmi'î Çelebi

The social project posed by scholars and bureaucrats responded to their personal allegiances and beliefs. In the particular case of Lâmi'î Çelebi, the project is most visible in the introductory section of his collection of epistles, the *Müneşeât-i Mekâtib* or *Nisabü'l-Belağâ*.³¹³ Lâmi'î Çelebi builds a defense of prose through a short autobiography. While the whole introduction is set as an allegory about the act of writing, it clearly states the author's argument for the mystical nature of religious knowledge. Lâmi'î Çelebi was, indeed, a skillful and renowned stylist as well as a prolific and successful poet. Born in Bursa, he was son to Bayezid II's treasurer (*hazine defterdârı*), Osman Çelebi, and grandson of the famous calligrapher Nağas 'Âlî bin İlyas 'Âlî, responsible for the calligraphy in Murad II's mausoleum, the Green Tomb (Yeşil Türbe). Lâmi'î Çelebi was educated in the Muradiye complex in Bursa and had contact with important scholars such as Mollâ Ahaveyn and Ḥasan-zâde Mollâ Mehmed.³¹⁴ Indeed, Lâmi'î Çelebi's close circle was composed of scholars and religious mystics. In the

³¹³ Lâmi'î Çelebi, *Müneşeât-i Lâmiî: (Lâmiî Çelebi'nin Mektupları): İnceleme, Metin, İndeks, Sözlük*, ed. Ali Hasan Esir (Trabzon: Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, 2006).

³¹⁴ Günay Kut, "Lâmiî Çelebi," *TDVİA* 27 (2003): 96-97

introduction to his letters, as I discuss further below, Lāmi'ī Çelebi narrates his youth as an infancy in the religious sciences, a time in which he focused on the external limitations of formal education. He then explains his own growth as a trajectory of freedom, his separation from the constraints of the rules embodied in madrasah training, and his proximity to the mystical nature of Creation as an act of awakening in his understanding of the world.³¹⁵

Lāmi'ī Çelebi had a peculiar independence from the court. Contrary to Tācī Beg and his sons, and even to Mesīhī, Lāmi'ī Çelebi was never appointed to a position in the madrasah system or in the bureaucracy of the empire. His works of translation, however, were in wide demand in the madrasahs of Bursa and Istanbul, and most of them are not only skillful renditions of Persian and Arabic works into Turkish, but also are extensions and commentaries of the original pieces. His work was known in court circles as well, and he received a 35 *akçe* daily allowance from Selim I for his allegorical treatise *Hüsn-i Dīl*, a translation of Fettāhī's homonymous work.³¹⁶ He was particularly interested in mystical texts, producing more than works in prose and verse including his famous commentary of Sa'di's *Gulistān* and his multiple translations of the Persian mystic Abdürāḥmān-i Cāmī (d. 1492).³¹⁷

As a scholar who influenced and partook of the vivid community of poets and scholars both within and outside the Ottoman court, yet who always remained in the margins, Lāmi'ī Çelebi was a unique case in his time. He does not seem to have aspired to political office. His work, however, seems to have enjoyed public recognition.

³¹⁵ Lāmi'ī Çelebi, *Münşeât*, 79-83.

³¹⁶ Kut, "Lāmi'ī Çelebi," 96-97.

³¹⁷ Paul Losensky, "Jāmī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2008) 15: 469-475.

Furthermore, Lāmi'ī Çelebi's introductory pieces, partly biographical, seem to point to an author who was clearly aware of his audience and interested in presenting his knowledge as a means to take the path of mysticism.

The almost autobiographical nature of his defense of prose vis-à-vis the primacy of verse in his introduction to his *Müneşeāt-i Mekātib* highlights the dialectical nature of religious learning and spiritual realization through the exercise of language, that is, through reading and writing. Indeed, later in his life, Lāmi'ī Çelebi became a follower of Nakşibendi sheikh Emir Buhari, a disciple of 'Abdüllāh-i İllāhī, and studied with al-Ṭusī and Abdürāhmān-i Cāmī in Horasan. Emir Buhari was the Nakşibendi sheikh who came to Istanbul after Mehmet II's invitation to 'Abdüllāh-i İllāhī.³¹⁸ Emir Buhari was hosted by Şeyḫ Vefā in Istanbul, and while he was treated cordially, he was advised to mitigate 'Abdüllāh-i İllāhī's intentions of settling down in the Ottoman capital. Emir Buhari then composed a poem in Persian wherein he suggested that his sheikh delay his visit to the capital. 'Abdüllāh-i İllāhī then stayed in Simav in Northwest Anatolia, where he had been born. It is interesting to note that Simav was the first place where the Nakşibendi order began to spread in Anatolia, and it was also the place where Bayezid II eventually appointed Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi, who had strong links to the Halvetiye order. 'Abdüllāh-i İllāhī and Emir Buhari, and in general the Nakşibendi order, followed Ibn al-Arabi and the philosophy of the unity of existence or *vaḥdet-i vücūd* (see above). This philosophy is similar yet not completely in accordance to the Zeyniye, and in particular Şeyḫ Vefā's teachings, which were an offspring of the illuminist philosophy derived from the works of Suhrawardi.

³¹⁸ See chapter 2.

Lāmi'ī Celebi's scholarly agenda was deeply entangled with his convictions about the Sufi path. Poets and scholars actively engaged in the reproduction and dissemination of the spiritual ideas proposed by their sheikhs, as can be seen in Sinān Paşa's defense of Şeyh Vefā and Lāmi'ī Çelebi's intellectual production. These multiple yet connected forms of spiritual realization were, I believe, political projects in as much as they presented all-encompassing directions for action within the world, and thus, directives for social interaction. These social projects guided the relation between authority and power by determining the limits and forms of an individual's commitment to God and to one's self as well as to the social environment and the political body to which one belongs. In other words, they presented a commentary on the balance between the polis and the individual, and thus, they were clearly and unequivocally political projects.

Advancing a Sufi sheikh and his works as a means by which spiritual admonitions are spread is only possible when the chain of transmission of knowledge happens beyond the master-student relationship of the order's lodge. The heavily theoretical works of sheikhs and the founders of Sufi orders were only be accessible to the very few initiates in the Sufi path. Many of these works were written in Persian and required a high level of proficiency in the language. The process of translation and commentary by local scholars made the Sufi teachings accessible to a larger audience. The translation process happened not only in literal renditions of the original text into another language, as in the case of translations from Persian to Turkish, which were almost always interpretative works. It happened also in the additional commentaries that accompanied them, as well as in the many other works that surrounded these translations. In many occasions, these were works of poetry.

It is true that the totality of an author's work should not be considered as a coherent project and that whenever possible the different stages of intellectual development should be taken into consideration. Most of the time this analysis points toward a fragmented corpus of intellectual production, and rarely to stages of a teleological progression towards the fully formed intellectual project of what is considered the author's mature work. Indeed, considering the chronological order of one author's work as matching a progressive line that preludes the fully formed ideas of his most accomplished works is misleading. Yet, in the case of highly prolific authors it may be possible to establish the relation between their different works. When it is possible to know with some certainty the chronology of his work as well as the chronology of his life and learning, it may be also worth considering the interrelation of all these elements in the production of his thoughts. In this sense, works written simultaneously not only can, but should be read in conjunction, even if they belong to different genres. Texts of the early modern world rarely exhibit the distinctions between genres established by modern scholarship, avoiding the same disparity in form and content and the same isolation in terms of early modern ideas. It should be kept in mind that pre-modern Ottoman scholars were not only capable of, but also expected to communicate successfully in the many registers of Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic languages available to them. And thus, the relation between genres was complementary in their communications rather than dividing.

With the bureaucratization of the scribal class in the Ottoman Empire, the production of manuals of communication derived from the need for competent scribes as well as from an attempt to standardize social behavior. The mechanics of social

interaction and the limits that defined associations between all members of Ottoman society changed as the empire and the bureaucratic system expanded and included more and more people. Issues ranging from religious conviction, the morality of kings, and the duties of subjects required an Ottoman precedent that not only translated the wisdom of Persian and Arabic works, but that also responded to the new realities of the empire.

The educated classes of the empire, in all their multiplicity, posed a variety of solutions to these challenges of governance by creating a matrix of precedence that was at the same time an attempt to create a prescriptive commentary. The creation of this diverse set of answers to problems of governability and sociability did not happen only as a conscious effort. While it is certain that the imperial court orchestrated to a certain extent the creation of an official historiography, it is impossible to fully reconstruct how the attempt to narrate the empire affected the authorial decisions of subjects whose work was not directly commissioned by the sultan. Yet, it is safe to assume, as we have seen in this chapter, that historiographical tendencies at court were in accordance with the political anxieties of the Ottoman elites; and they thus shaped the literary and intellectual production of the circles attached to these elites.

The three cases revised in this chapter illustrate the variety of responses to political challenges faced by imperial functionaries, middle-rank bureaucrats, and renowned scholars. They enacted politics by exercising language in an attempt to establish their work as authoritative precedent for future reference. The production of a work with the potential to define action, be it by constraining the freedom of imperial succession, giving order to the procedures of bureaucracy, or simply by redefining the

path of religious and moral learning, is a public act that hopes to seize the associations that constitute the political body.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Aḥmed Paşa (d. 1497) never returned to Istanbul. His remains are buried in a small mausoleum right outside the entrance of his madrasah in Bursa, across from the much more visited Muradiye imperial complex. Sinān Paşa left his post as vizier and left for Edirne to teach at the Dar'ül-Hadis, one of the most important religious schools in the empire. In 1486, he died in Gallipoli. Mesīhī died in exile in Bosnia less than a year after he wrote a letter to his friend Suzenī. This letter asked for help with arranging Mesīhī's return to Constantinople and described his longing for the community of poets and scholars in the capital. In 1515, Ca'fer Çelebi was executed. He had been framed as participating in a failed attempt to revolt against the sultan. The biographical dictionaries quote Selim I as regretting his decision not much later. By then, it was too late.

The life stories of Ottoman scholars, poets, and bureaucrats zigzag from fame to disgrace. The biographical dictionaries of poets of the sixteenth century record a myriad of lives that started in anonymity, were transformed into stories of success or scandal, and ultimately—as every human story must—ended in death. The lives of most poets concluded in exile, execution, or simply oblivion. Archival sources confirm the dismissals and the exiles of the poets alongside accounts of their temporary wealth. The biographical dictionaries offer some clues to connect their stories and their works. But on many occasions, their biographies resemble a morality tale, a commentary on patronage, as much an account of the benefits of poetry as a warning of its dangers. The lives of these poets are blurred between the lines of the historical, the fictional, and the anecdotal.

But it is, as I have shown, within the works of these scholars that we begin to see the creation of a poetics of empire.

This dissertation focused on the spiritual and political dimension of poetic and literary language. It took a step away from the biographical dictionaries and questioned the lives of poets as they intersected with the Ottoman imperial court by reading their poetic works. It looked at their use of language as they reimagined the imperial space through their narrations of Constantinople. It examined the praises they wrote to support the charisma of Sufi sheikhs and to foster relationships with them. These relationships were both spiritually and pragmatically beneficial to the poets. Last but not least, "Poetics of Empire" interrogated the moments of intersection between literary and administrative language. Most importantly, it has shown that the act of poetic expression was at the center of the conceptualization of an ethics of empire.

Ottoman political commentary took the form not only of a philosophy of the state, but as the poetic abstraction of the dynamics that articulated Ottoman society. We saw two ways this occurred. First, we saw it in ideal representations of the city, the Sufi sheikh, and the sultan and his subjects. Second, we saw it in the production of an administrative language that codified authority and restrained the limits of expression between ruler and subjects. These formal constraints were the only means through which communication occurred. Communication, understood as the means of expressing social action, defines it and limits it. In this sense, this dissertation understands literary language not as representation, but rather as a creative act that shapes the possibilities of social action. As we have seen throughout the dissertation, up to the end of the Ottoman Empire the Ottomans themselves considered poetry worthwhile only inasmuch as it was capable

of creating spiritual meaning. In other words, Poetry held the capacity to guide men into being good Muslims as well as the power to corrupt them.

The language, metaphors, and genres used and created by Ottoman scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth century became canon. This cultural canon defined both the formation of a literary tradition and the representation of imperial power. Simultaneously, scholars created institutions that enabled the production, reproduction, and monopoly of language, such as the chancellery. These institutions remained central to the production of an Ottoman imperial discourse until the end of empire.

The biographical dictionaries of the sixteenth century reminded their readers of the power of language, the need to defend it, and its central role in the making of the Ottoman intellectual class. "Poetics of Empire" looked into this defense of words, followed the agents of poetry, the space they inhabited, and the ways in which they experienced the transformation of their careers and the expansion of the Ottoman Empire by creating, transforming, and enacting poetic and literary language.

APPENDIX

Selection from Tācī-zāde Ca'fer Çelebi 's *Heves-nāme*

[...] languages differ hugely in lexis as well as syntax; [...] one language doesn't 'move into' another automatically. [...] when you translate a work, whether it is a poem or a long work of fiction, you have to keep in mind the integrity of the whole thing. Words and sentences may be the bricks and mortar but it has a structure as a whole that you are constantly aspiring towards. But of course, I'm also aware that different translators read, interpret and work differently.

Lakshmi Holmström

In this appendix, I provide an English translation of the section in which Ca'fer Çelebi explains his reasons for composing the book, which I discuss in chapter two. The original text is in rhymed couplets with the pattern AA, BB, CC. and in *hezec* meter. I have opted for a prose translation in order to facilitate reading. I also believe a prose translation preserves the narrative aspect of the text in ways it would be too difficult if not impossible to emulate in the English language. I have provided explanatory notes when I considered it necessary. In order to facilitate reading, I have opted for the Modern Turkish rendition of proper names rather than the transcription with diacritics. For the one book title that appears in the translation I have decided to employ the most commonly used version in English. Thus, I have preferred *Khosrow and Shirin* for *Hüsrev ile Şirin*.

The couplets corresponding to this translation are 476-534 in the transcription prepared by Hivren Demir and Hakan Atay for the Ottoman Text Archive Project at the University of Washington. Together with Demir and Atay's transcription I have followed the manuscript *Nuruosmaniye 4373* from the Suleymaniye Library's collection. I have also benefited from Necati Sungur's edition.

Translation: Reasons for Composing the Book of Passion³¹⁹

I was pleasantly sitting one night. The night's joys were many, while sorrows, distress, and troubles were few. I was conversing with a couple of friends and drinking at ease. Everyone present was an eloquent conversationalist. And all who were at the feast recited pleasant verses and poems. They considered the virtues and merits of every heart-taking verse they recited. So, there was soon a discussion regarding the ancestors of the time and those who led among them.³²⁰ Words came from everyone. They pondered the qualities of those who love words among the lords of verse. And they ranked those who were capable of beautiful expression amid the masters of verse. They acknowledged and praised some of them, and they censured and condemned others.

At that moment, a friend of mine came to me and said, "Oh, Sea of the Ocean of Meaning! Thousands of praises and a hundred thousand thanks to Him, the Lord, Master of the World and the great Distributor of Blessings. He granted you talent, the strength of nature, and provided you with a pristine mind and excellent intellect. Whenever the poems and panegyrics you have composed are read, hearts and souls are calmed! This is what I think: 'Alas! Since you are skilled in every respect, you must also be capable of writing *mesnevis*.³²¹ If you compose a *mesnevi* and persevere, it will become a memory of

³¹⁹ This translation was awarded the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association's *Samiha Ayverdi Best Ottoman Translation Award* 2015. I have submitted this translation for publication. Oscar Aguirre Mandujano, "Rhetoric, Expression, and the Poets of the Turkish Language: A Translation of a Hasb-I Hal in Tâcî-Zâde Ca'fer Çelebi's Book Of Passion," in *Âb-I Hayâtı Aramak: Gönül Tekin'e Armağan*, ed. Ozan Kolbaş and Orçun Uçer (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, forthcoming).

³²⁰ The author in fact refers to well-established poets, the classics of the time, as it were.

³²¹ *Mesnevis* are long narrative poems written in rhyming couplets. In the Turkish tradition, *mesnevis* can extend to thousands of couplets. There is no exact translation for this term in English. Although the word *mesnevi* has been translated as romance, I have preferred to keep the original term to avoid the historical implications of "romance" in European history and literatures.

you in this world as it gains worth and esteem among the people!³²² The story of *Khosrow and Shirin* is stale by now; so it is only proper for you to recite a fresh story."³²³

Every companion agreed with him and many debates broke out regarding the matter. I answered them thus: "I may have the talent and the skill, but a certain inclination is needed when writing a *mesnevi*, to compose its verses. For it to be accepted, both among the commoners and the elite, all available diligence would be required. You know how eager men of virtue are to criticize poetry! Poetry is not for the people of virtue just as magic cannot explain the white hand of Moses. They ask: 'While our pen is busy analyzing the details of the world to reveal its truths, is it permissible to write idle tales that are not based on the Truth? While our pen is busy on revealing the secrets of past anecdotes, is it fair to focus the mind on imagining stories? Or while spending day and night in the acquisition of virtues, is it proper to focus on the hardships of poetry and work on it diligently?'"

Once again, with a hundred compliments and a thousand praises, my friends said: "You are right. There is no affair in this world that does not require effort. But it is acceptable to acquire divine knowledge from poetry. There is no need to provide a proof for that. So, if those reasons you give are the cause of your refusal to write a *mesnevi*, they are not valid in your case. He, the All Mighty, gave you excellence in talent and

³²² The *mesnevi* seems to have been a particularly difficult genre, for its length represented a challenge that lyrical poetry (*gazel*) and panegyrics (*kaside*) did not. For instance, when Aşık Çelebi attempts to convince Hayalî to write a *mesnevi*, the latter kindly refuses, arguing that such an enterprise requires a particular form of talent that he claims not to have. Selim S. Kuru. "Şiirin Kaybolduğu Nokta: Mesnevinin Dizginlenemez Coğrafyası." Talk delivered at the *Bilim ve Sanat Vakfı* (BISAV), Istanbul. 18/10/2014.

³²³ *Khosrow and Shirin* is one of the most popular love stories in Islamic literature. Probably its most acclaimed rendition is that by Nizami Ganjavi in Persian. However, this story was widely translated in Turkish. In the fifteenth century, the most popular version of it seems to have been Şeyhi's adaptation. Cafer Çelebi's selection of this love story in particular to highlight the need of a new love story successfully anticipates his friend's comments in the following section on Şeyhi's merits as a poet.

understanding in intellect. The lowest of your efforts would be enough for this to be done, and there won't be need for you to work on it day and night. Your time will not be wasted with it, for composing poetry will not be an obstacle to your work and learning. Above all, the act would bring you a good name and a legacy of fame and renown.

The understanding of divine knowledge is limited for the elite. Whosoever is wise and learned knows this. It's an accepted fact that those who achieve fame through poetry are counted among the most learned. Good name and fame are the purpose of this world, for whatever remains of a person is his name and mark. The state of those who write poetry is clear, just as it is the position of the best among them.

Oh my friend! Consider those who have earned renown in the Turkish language, Şeyhi³²⁴ and Ahmed [Paşa].³²⁵ If we are to be just, by God, we must admit that Şeyhi was eloquent. He understood the beautiful style of words and the modes and styles of expression. Yet, while new and original expressions are abundant in his words, he does not use the rules of rhetoric efficiently.³²⁶ And although Ahmed stands as a poet of fluent words and composes according to the rules of rhetoric, he has no eloquence. He is unable to connect words! There is beauty in his words, yes, but no grace. His verses resemble the embroidery of a skirt in that they have no life. For this reason, oh master, they are not known for being creative. It is evident what their words are. The best they can do is translate. If you look at each of their works and study their words, you would not find in

³²⁴ Şeyhi (d. 1428) was a poet and skilled physician at the court of Murat II. In addition to lyric poems and panegyrics, he also composed a Turkish adaptation of *Khosrow and Shirin*, as well as a famous satirical *mesnevi* entitled *Harname* or the *Book of the Donkey*. Sixteenth-century biographical dictionaries considered him one of the fathers of Ottoman poetry, together with Ahmed Paşa. See Timurtaş, “Şeyhî'nin Şöhreti ve Tesiri,” 86–87.

³²⁵ Ahmed Paşa (d. 1497) was a religious scholar and poet in the service of Mehmet II (r. 1444-6 and 1451-1481) and Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512). He acquired renown due to his elegant style, which emulated Persian poets. Karabey, *Ahmet Paşa*.

³²⁶ See note 208.

them any original meaning but a dancer to another's' music. They are not, in fact, poets, for they have no capacity of imagination. Only you have the power to craft pure verse and the strength to find secret meanings. With you rhetoric has no limits and eloquence reaches perfection. Why not show your strength? Why not make your power known? Is it fair to keep meaning concealed or to prevent this treasure from being revealed? If from your days of rest were you to assign just one day for this enterprise, you would then write a book in no time. And this book would have no parallel in this world."

They said this and spared no effort in convincing me, insisting once and over again. They insisted that I should write an example for their words. So I accepted that if I ever had the strength, I would dedicate myself to write in verse a story that would be the song of every lover.

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