

ORIGINS OF THE OTTOMAN DYNASTY

ORIGINS OF THE OTTOMAN DYNASTY:
A PHILOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF ITS EARLIEST ACCOUNT

KEMAL SİLAY



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*Dedicated to Dr. Larry Vernon Clark,
Turkologist, Teacher, Friend*

عمر ما حاصله او علم کبیر اشبو کتاب
قورقین بن او ایجان جاهل و نادانہ دوشه
غریک حق یچون سدن یوز امارم یارب
خبر یلم یاد ایدن صاحبی یارانه دوشه

—Wojciech Bobowski (°Ali Ufkî), *Mecmû'a°-i Sâz u Söz*

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Kemal SİLAY
Indiana University, Bloomington (2023)

TRANSCRIPTION SYSTEM

ا, آ	a A/e E, ā Ā
ب	b B [p P]
پ	p P
ت	t T
ث	ṡ Ṣ
ج	c C [ç Ç]
چ	ç Ç
ح	ḥ Ḥ
خ	ḥ Ḥ
د	d D
ذ	ẓ Ẓ
ر	r R
ز	z Z
ژ	j J
س	s S
ش	ş Ş

ص	ş Ş
ض	ẓ Ẓ/d Đ
ط	ṭ Ṭ
ظ	ẓ Ẓ
ع, ء	ċ Ċ
غ	ğ Ğ
ف	f F
ق	ķ Ķ
ك	k K/g G/ñ Ñ
ل	l L
م	m M
ن	n N
ه	h H/a A/e E
و	v V/u U/ü Ü/o O/ ö Ö/ū Ū/ō Ō
ی	y Y, i Ĭ, ı I, ī Ī

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

A	Arabic
add.	adds
ante	before, in front of
ff.	folios
om.	omits
P	Persian
pl.	plural
post	after
pro	for, instead of
sing.	singular
T	Turkish
a: bcd	<i>a</i> as compared with <i>b, c, d</i> , etc.
a...bcd	from-to; to avoid writing a part or the whole of a verse or couplet
....	illegible letters
-	marks the separation of two verses of a couplet in apparatuses
-----	absent or illegible letters, the number of which is undetermined
	separating two words, expressions, etc. and their variants
	separating two apparatuses
(2), (3), etc.	in the <i>Critical Index Verborum</i> , indicates the number of times that the word appears in a given couplet
[⇒ abcd]	shows other related names, words, or expressions
◇	signals idioms, <i>izāfets</i> , the verses of the <i>Qurʿān</i> or the <i>Ḥadīṣ</i> .
□	introduces forms other than the infinitive, base or root of the word, expression or sentence

ORIGINS OF THE OTTOMAN DYNASTY

Strenuous challenges to representation come from the traditions of expressionism and formalism. Expressionism generally posits an unrepresentable essence (God, the soul, the author's intention) that is somehow manifested in a work. The "somehow" is the key: the unrepresentable is often construed as the invisible, the unpicturable, even the unspeakable—but not, generally, as the unwritable. Writing, arbitrary marks . . . and allegory are the signs that "encrypt" representation in a secret code. Thus, the cult of the artistic genius and the aura-laden artifact often accompany the expressive aesthetic. —W. J. T. Mitchell¹

Aḥmedi's "Tevārīḥ-i Mülūk-i āl-i ʿOṣmān ve Ġazv-i İṣān bā-Küffār" [literally translating, "History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raid(s) against the Infidels"] is the foundation text for the study of the rise of the Ottoman State. Virtually every scholarly work dealing with the subject refers to his versified account of the early Ottomans.² Even though the "Tevārīḥ-i Mülūk-i āl-i ʿOṣmān" encompasses only a limited period of the Ottoman dynastic history, from Ertuğrul to Emīr Süleymān, its importance derives from the fact that it is the oldest annalistic account of Ottoman history that has come down to us. Because those earliest Ottomans left no accounts of themselves, Aḥmedi's work became the key source—though almost always without a proper reading of the text—for subsequent theories regarding the social and political structure of the early Ottoman State. One abiding example of its importance is that Aḥmedi's work has been cited in support of contradictory interpretations of the concepts of *ğāzā* and *cihād* (*jihād*) that provide the fuel for debate between Western and Turkish Ottomanists. The "Tevārīḥ-i Mülūk-i āl-i ʿOṣmān" serves as the fundamental reference both for those

¹W. J. T. Mitchell, "Representation" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 15.

²Just to list a few, see Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Luzac, 1938), pp. 12–15; Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *Les origines de l'empire ottoman*, Études orientales, III (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1935), p. 26; Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*, Indiana University, Uralic and Altaic Series, Volume 144 (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, 1983), p. 3, p. 7; Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth," *Turcica: Revue d'études turques* XIX (1987), p. 10, p. 11, p. 12, p. 17.

who maintain that the political expansion of the Ottomans was the outcome of a “Holy War” against the “infidel,” and for those who consider the conduct of the Ottomans to have been contrary to any religious ideology of Islam.

Paul Wittek argued that “from the first appearance of the Ottomans, the principal factor in this political tradition was the struggle against their Christian neighbors, and this struggle never ceased to be of vital importance to the Ottoman Empire.”³ This view was also embraced by perhaps the greatest Ottoman historian of our time, Halil İnalcık: “At the time of its foundation at the turn of the fourteenth century, the Ottoman State was a small principality on the frontiers of the Islamic world, dedicated to *Gazâ*, the holy war against infidel Christianity.”⁴ However, decades after Wittek had established this “struggle” or “Holy War” interpretation, Rudi Paul Lindner proposed a new hypothesis that “. . . the Holy War played no role in early Ottoman history, despite the later claims of Muslim propagandists.”⁵ Pál Fodor, using some sections of Aḥmedi’s history as his basic source, maintained a similar view of the role of Holy War in the early Ottoman State: “. . . the *Dâsitân* contains concrete references to the effect that the ideas of *gazâ* and *gâzî* are the products of later interpretations.”⁶ In a stunning response to Wittek, I find the following arguments made by R. C. Jennings to be the most compelling: 1) “Only Muslims may undertake a *cihad*, so a *gazi* army would be expected to consist exclusively of Muslim soldiers.” 2) “It is well documented, however, that some of the earliest Ottoman armies included not just Muslim Turkish horsemen but also some Greek Orthodox subjects of the areas first conquered from the Byzantine empire by Osman himself. Including such Christians in an army of real *gazis* is hardly conceivable.” 3) “While marrying royal Christian women is not incompatible with the principles of a *cihad*, anything that could be construed as alliance of equals is. So many members of the Ottoman family, including rulers, became involved in marriages with such women that they must have at least at some times compromised the resolution of any who might have considered themselves

³Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 2.

⁴Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 3.

⁵Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*, p. 6.

⁶Pál Fodor, “Aḥmedi’s *Dâsitân* as a Source of Early Ottoman History,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXXVIII, 1–2 (1984), p. 52.

as *gazis*.” 4) “The policies of the 14th-century Ottoman rulers reflect a pragmatic policy of political and military aggrandizement more than a *gaza*.” 5) “Heroism is naturally the subject of epic poetry . . . Ahmedi was no historian, but a poet, author of an epic.”⁷ In a beautifully written and highly significant work, Cemal Kafadar argued in support of Lindner’s earlier opposition to the so-called Holy War theory,⁸ though their view seems not to depend on a close reading of Aḥmedi’s text. *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* by Heath W. Lowry is perhaps the most sophisticated and thoroughly researched presentation of the role that “Holy War” played in the construction of the Ottoman State. Here, Lowry strongly opposes the so-called “*Ġāzī* Thesis” and proposes that Wittek’s theory be laid to rest.⁹ In his recent article entitled “Impropriety and Impiety among the Early Ottoman Sultans (1351–1451),”¹⁰ Lowry attempts to provide further evidence for his position and reaches the conclusion that “[i]f our sources are to be trusted, as late as the third decade of the fifteenth century, more than a century after they first appeared on the scene of history, the Ottoman rulers were still observing only those aspects of Islam which did not interfere with a lifestyle typified by equally latitudinarian attitudes towards the consumption of wine and engagement in illicit sex . . . At the risk of stating the obvious, the kinds of behavior discussed in this paper cannot fail to throw into doubt any depiction of the early Ottoman rulers as God-fearing *ġāzīs* whose primary motivation was to spread Islam to their Christian neighbors.”¹¹

Lowry and other scholars (including myself) who have opposed the “*Ġāzī* Thesis” were not the earliest critics of Aḥmedi’s representation of the early Ottomans as devout Muslims whose lives were dedicated to *ġāzā* and *cihād*. Manuscript J (MS J) of the present work (Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi, Y 402) is a fascinating example of a critical voice from

⁷R. C. Jennings, “Some Thoughts on the Gazi-Thesis,” in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 1986, Vol. 76, Festschrift Andreas Tietze zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet von seinen Freunden und Schülern (1986), pp. 151–161.

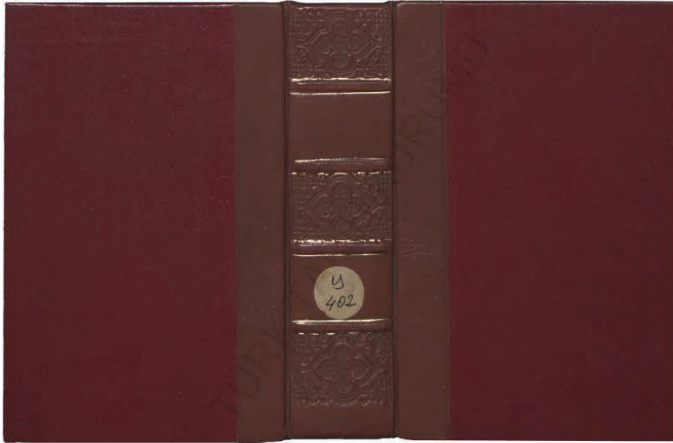
⁸Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995).

⁹Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

¹⁰Heath W. Lowry, “Impropriety and Impiety among the Early Ottoman Sultans (1351–1451),” *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 26:2 (2002), pp. 29–38.

¹¹Lowry, “Impropriety and Impiety,” p. 38.

within the Ottoman times. The manuscript is missing some folios toward the end, therefore it is not possible to establish an exact date of composition or to identify its copyist. However, physical evidence (binding, paper, script style, absence of diacritical marks, etc.) suggests that it is a very late manuscript even though it looks like it was copied from an early manuscript (orthographic evidence). MS J is by far the shortest of the manuscripts I utilized for the present work. It has a total of 215 couplets. In other words, it has 119 fewer couplets than the Manuscript A (İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 921; copied in 847/1444 by Nebî bin Resûl bin Ya'qûb). The majority of the couplets MS J omits seems to have religious references. For example, an entire section narrating a Biblical story is eliminated completely: “Hikâyet der-Beyân-ı Şümî-i ʿAdem-i İlhlâs” (“The Story about the Inauspiciousness of Deficient Belief”). It is quite unusual for a copyist to take this much liberty in eliminating this many couplets from a source manuscript. There might be many possibilities behind this decision but the fact that the majority of the sections eliminated have religious references might have played a significant role during the selection process. This is indeed a rare situation in which the copyist acts as critic/editor/author. Among the possible scenarios: 1) the copyist questioned Aḥmedî’s representation as “history” and attempted to “correct” it by eliminating some religious references; 2) his patron did not approve the way Aḥmedî was presenting the early Ottomans as Sunnî warriors; 3) his patron and/or himself was either a non-Muslim (Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian), a Şîʿa or ʿAlevî, because textual evidence shows that all references to ʿÖmer in the manuscript were eliminated.



MS J (Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi, Y 402) Binding

The overwhelming religiosity found in the earliest history of the Ottomans continues to stir great debates among historians. Most recently, Uli Schamiloglu has presented yet another take on the subject in his study entitled “The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: The Black Death in Medieval Anatolia and Its Impact on Turkish Civilization.”¹² There, Schamiloglu argues that “the most important fact overlooked in all the theories on the rise of the Ottoman Empire . . . is the impact of the Black Death.” Schamiloglu summarizes his support of this claim by focusing on the following points:¹³ (1) The Black Death was a general phenomenon in Anatolia beginning in 1347. (2) After the arrival of the Black Death in spring 1347 Byzantium fell into crisis, resulting in an invitation to the Ottomans for military cooperation. (3) The Turkish principalities that were the rivals of the Ottomans were devastated by the Black Death. (4) The Ottoman principality suffered less than its rivals because it was largely nomadic. (5) Ottoman expansion was aided by depopulation in Southeastern Europe. (6) The city of Constantinople became depopulated as a result of the Black Death. (7) There was a decline in indigenous ethnic and religious communities in Anatolia as a result of the Black Death. (8) The Byzantines and Ottomans became serious rivals only after 1347. (9) The increase in religiosity in Anatolia after 1347 contributed to the development of a new ideology of religious war against Byzantium. (10) The Black Death is not mentioned in the Ottoman sources, even though this historical phenomenon is well documented in other sources. His thesis merits serious consideration by the various historians engaged in this debate.

For my part, however, Aḥmedi’s work of 334 couplets may be viewed as a religious epic (*dāstān*) that manifestly glorifies the sacrifice made by the Muslim Ottoman warrior on the path of God. Regardless of whether these earliest militant engagements actually served a specific religious ideology or not, Aḥmedi’s text nonetheless strives to construct a historical memory about them that requires a religious justification.

¹²Unpublished article to appear in the *Richard W. Bulliet Festschrift* (New York: Columbia University Press). I thank Professor Schamiloglu for giving me permission to benefit from his article for the present work.

¹³Schamiloglu naturally addresses the fact that the surviving sources on the foundation of the Ottoman State simply do not mention the existence of bubonic plague by speculating that “[it is] possible that there was a strict taboo against invoking the name of such a powerful disease lest one unleash its awesome power. . .”; op. cit. I might add that even in today’s Anatolia one may encounter similar taboos in regard to such life-threatening diseases as cancer, tuberculosis, and the like.

However, any attempt to explain the rise of the Ottoman State solely as a result of a *ğazā/cihād* enterprise is destined to fail if it is based on the assumption that Aḥmedi's work is an objective and factual record of those events. Such an approach would be equivalent to explaining the foundation of the Turkish Republic *only* as the result of the workings of a miraculous nationalist spirit. Political entities routinely feel a need to construct legendary and magical discourses when explaining their successes and failures. This need has manifested itself both in ideology and in literature over the centuries.

The total rejection by Lindner and those in agreement with him of the "Holy War" discourse as the principle factor in the expansion of the early Ottomans and their characterization of this discourse as "the later claims of Muslim propagandists"¹⁴ raises several relevant questions. One question is whether Aḥmedi's work, in any sense, could be viewed as the production of a later "propagandist." Our earliest copy of the *İskendernâme* is the 1416 manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Given that Aḥmedi was born around 1334 and that he began this work some decades later, this time frame still lies closer to the foundation of the Ottoman State around 1300 than to the so-called "later propagandists." In fact, his work, regardless of its true nature, does not make claims that could be identified as typical of significantly "later" times. Moreover, one cannot ignore the possibility that Aḥmedi merely copied and rewrote this section on the Ottomans from an earlier work by an unknown author, thereby rendering virtually moot the "later claims" argument. But, more importantly, this argument by Lindner and others does not take into consideration the nature of court poetry and its discourse in the author's time and, needless to say, throughout the centuries since. Specifically, we must ask why would a court poet like Aḥmedi, whose works (like those of the great majority of Ottoman court poets) are filled with secular and epicurean images, compose his "History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage" within the confines of the "Holy War" discourse? After all, these authors were not "fanatical Muslims" or, for that matter, even "Muslim propagandists."

¹⁴The following passage encapsulates Lindner's views: "The constellation of events and evidence in these last few paragraphs should have left the clear impression that the Holy War played no role in early Ottoman history, despite the later claims of Muslim propagandists. Economic and social symbiosis, political cosmopolitanism, and religious syncretism all combined to exclude the *ghaza* as an effective influence on the early Ottomans" (*Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*, p. 6).

Just as authors of numerous *gazavātnāmes* and *cihād-nāmes* (jihād-nāmes) over the centuries, Aḥmedī turned to the canonical sources of court poetry as his discursive inspiration: the *Qurʾān*, the *ḥadīth*, the already established Iranian and Arabic literature on the “virtues” of killing and dying on the path of Allah, the thirteenth-century Islamic Anatolian Turkish literature,¹⁵ and perhaps even the Islamic literature of the Central Asian Turks.¹⁶

In short, the “*gazā/cihād*” discourse already existed when Aḥmedī took up his pen. Whether he genuinely believed in that discourse or not, he reworked and intertextualized a known theme from the canonical sources in order to please the patron of his work. In the same way, court poets typically elaborated on details of a known and established theme with the goal of expressing the particular “color” of their own poetic voices, while at the same time endorsing an already established discourse. Taking into consideration this cultural and literary milieu, it would be hazardous to take at face value the historical information contained in a work like the “*Tevārīḥ-i Mülūk-i āl-i ʿOsmān*” to support a theory regarding the creation of the early Ottoman State.

This perspective on the nature of Aḥmedī’s work may also help to resolve the debate on whether *gazā* is synonymous with *cihād*. In the context of modern Ottoman historiography, this question has become a sig-

¹⁵Works such as *Behcetü’l-ḥadāʾiḳ fi mevʿizeti’l-ḥalāʾiḳ* by an unknown author, Aḥmed Faḳīh’s *Çarḥnāme* and *Kitābu Evṣāf-ı Mesāciḍi’ş-şerife*, and İbrāhīm bin Muṣṭafā bin ʿAlīşir el-Melifdevi’s work on Islamic jurisprudence (*fıḳh*) entitled *El-Manzūme fi’l-ḥilāfiyyāt* (first mentioned by Şinasi Tekin in his “1343 Tarihli Bir Eski Anadolu Türkçesi Metni ve Türk Dili Tarihinde ‘Olğa-Bolğa’ Sorunu,” *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten* (1973–1974), p. 68) are particularly important sources for understanding the process of Islamization in Turkish culture and literature.

¹⁶Earlier examples of this discourse from the Central Asian past of the Turks may be found in Kāşğarī’s *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk*. Robert Dankoff cited one instance as follows: “Kāşğarī relates (545,14–546,6) how the *Ghāzi* [*Ghāzī*], Arslān Tegīn, with an army of 40,000 Muslims defeated the infidel Yabāqu tribe, who were 700,000 strong. Interestingly, he puts the story in the mouth of one of the defeated soldiers: ‘When the drums began to beat and the trumpets began to blow, we saw just ahead a green mountain blocking the horizon. In it were gates, too numerous to count, each of them wide open and shooting at us sparks from fires. We were bewildered on account of this, and so you defeated us.’ This is a typical ‘ghazi’ [*Ghāzī*] legend; Kāşğarī piously ascribes the miracle to the Prophet”; see “Kāşğarī on the Beliefs and Superstitions of the Turks,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95/1 (January–March 1975), p. 69.

nificant point of disagreement among Ottoman historians. Moreover, depending on the way they translate these two words into English, these historians have constructed differing arguments on the rise of the Ottoman State. In this regard, Cemal Kafadar proposed that the two terms clearly differ in meaning:

With respect to *gaza*, the first thing to be noted is that it is not synonymous with *jihad* even though all the scholars mentioned in the previous chapter use the two terms interchangeably or use one English term “holy war,” for both as if there were no appreciable difference. But there clearly was such a difference in both the popular imagination and in canonical works. Whether one takes the position of a learned Muslim or a narrator of frontier lore, who may not have had a rigorous training (and his audience, I presume), these terms are not to be collapsed into one. The word “*jihad*” is rarely used in the frontier narratives analyzed above or in the early Ottoman chronicles to be analyzed below; the sources clearly maintain a distinction.¹⁷

Colin Imber, on the other hand, held the opposite view, asserting in the strongest terms that *ğazā* is synonymous with *cihād*:

The two terms *mujaḥhid* and *ğāzī* both mean the same thing: one who wages *jihād* or *ğazā*—Holy War on behalf of Islam—, and their adoption by Orhan shows that from their earliest years, the Ottoman Sultans considered themselves leaders of a religious war against Infidelity. The foundation of the infant state on the border with Byzantium gave this idea a particular force and immediacy, but the idea of *jihād* is far older than the Ottomans and derives from the *sharīʿah* itself. The Holy Law, in fact, makes *jihād* against non-Muslims an obligation on the Islamic community. Although it is not an incumbency on each individual, a group of Muslims must at all times be fighting for the Faith, and if the *jihād* ever ceases, the entire community bears the guilt. The Holy War remains an obligation even when the Infidels have not themselves declared war. The Muslims should not, however, attack without inviting the unbelievers to accept Islam. If they refuse either to convert to Islam or to pay the tax due from non-Muslim subjects, then *jihād* becomes a religious duty. In waging war on Christians, Orhan and his successors were fulfilling the command of

¹⁷Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 79.