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# New Trajectories in the Study of Early Modern Ottoman Historiography

**Şaban Ağalar***

**Abstract**

Since the early 1980s, literature on early modern Ottoman historiography witnessed a significant expansion in tandem with the rising interest in narrative sources and archival documents. The research, especially during the last two decades, is characterized by the use of new sources and methodology, which in turn, enabled the examination of previously overlooked features and dynamics of early modern history writing. This review argues that the imprint of the new trajectories in the study of early modern Ottoman historiography is particularly manifest in two themes of research. First, the field has undergone a shift from an emphasis on the narrowly defined political function of history writing to the acknowledgment of the multiplicity of purposes, agents, and messages. Studies in the field of art history have particularly contributed to this transformation by expanding the repertoire of historiographical sources beyond textual materials and raising productive questions regarding the authorship and audience of official histories. Second, thought-provoking studies on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historiography challenged the conventional categories of historian and historiographical work. Historiographers who were neither bureaucrats nor scholars integrated otherwise marginalized voices into the study of Ottoman historiography. Despite the promising developments in the field, there is still a lack of research on the theoretical dimensions and cross-cultural connections of early modern Ottoman history writing.

**Keywords:** historiography, history writing, early modern Ottoman Empire, Ottoman intellectual history

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# Erken Modern Osmanlı Tarihyazımı Çalışmalarında Yeni Yönelimler

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**Öz**

Erken modern Osmanlı tarihyazımı literatürü, 1980'lerin başından itibaren arşiv belgelerinin yanı sıra, anlatı kaynaklarına yönelik artan ilginin sonucu dikkate değer bir genişlemeye tanık olmuştur. Özellikle son yirmi yılda, yeni kaynakların ve metodolojilerin kullanılmaya başlanmasıyla erken modern tarih yazımının daha önce gözden kaçan özelliklerinin ve dinamiklerinin incelenmesi mümkün hale gelmiştir. Bu değerlendirme yazısı, erken modern Osmanlı tarihyazımı araştırmalarındaki yeni yönelimlerin izlerinin özellikle iki araştırma temasında kendini gösterdiğini iddia etmektedir. İlk olarak; literatür, tarih yazımının dar bir biçimde tanımlanmış siyasi işlevine yapılan vurgudan, amaçların, faillerin ve mesajların çokluğunun kabulüne doğru bir kayma geçirdi. Sanat tarihi alanındaki çalışmalar, tarihyazımı kaynakları repertuarını metinsel materyallerin ötesinde genişleterek ve eserlerin yazarları ve okuyucuları hakkında yeni sorular üreterek bu dönüşüme katkıda bulunmuştur. İkincisi, on yedinci ve on sekizinci yüzyıllarda yazılmış tarih metinlerini ele alan son çalışmalar, geleneksel tarihçi ve tarih eseri kategorilerini yeniden düşünmemizi sağlamıştır. Ne bürokratik ne de ilmî hiyerarşinin bir parçası olan tarihçiler üzerine yapılan çalışmalarla, marjinalleştirilmiş sesler Osmanlı tarihyazımı incelemesine entegre edilmiştir. Alandaki umut verici gelişmelere rağmen erken modern Osmanlı tarih yazımının teorik boyutları ve kültürler arası bağlantıları hakkında daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** tarihyazımı, erken modern Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Osmanlı entelektüel tarihi

## Introduction

The dependence of modern historians on historical narratives written by Ottoman authors during the early modern period (c. 1450-1800) cuts across multiple subfields of Ottoman studies. Scholars of the social, political, or cultural history of the Ottoman Empire treated narrative sources as a major complement to archival documents to gain a better sense of the Ottoman past and its interpretation by early modern observers. Apart from the use of Ottoman historical works as sources on which the past is to be constructed, the very phenomenon of recording the past during the early modern period emerged as a separate field of inquiry. Modern historians of the Ottoman Empire interested in early modern historiography have discussed various aspects of these historical accounts including function, style, methodology, authorship, audience, and production. The post-1980s proved to be particularly productive for the study of early modern Ottoman history writing. Over the last four decades, academic literature on early modern historians and their works has flourished, including modern editions, translations, and analytical works.

Rather than presenting an exhaustive survey of the recent studies on Ottoman history writing, this review will be limited to some selected works that represent novel approaches to early modern Ottoman historiography. More specifically, I will focus on how distinct themes and methods, recently proposed in the study of historiography, offer to shift the focus of the scholarship away from the political function of history and challenge the established categories of historian and historiographical work. The first section of the article will explore the changing perspectives in explaining the historiographical explosion in the sixteenth century. I will then discuss recent studies, particularly in the field of art history, that present history writing in an arguably more sophisticated context than dynastic legitimation. Finally, I will attempt to demonstrate how several thought-provoking studies on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries usefully investigated the margins of early modern historiography by focusing on authors' writings outside the scholarly or political establishment.

## Explaining the Sixteenth-Century Historiographical Explosion

An early modern historiographical development that has appealed to modern scholars is the revival of historical writings in the sixteenth century, starting with the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566). Historical expression was displayed in three major genres during this period: the histories of the house of Osman (*tevārīḫ*), universal histories, and literary works devoted to a ruler or an event.[1] While

1 Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 239–40; Gabriel

universal histories, including Ottoman history, were written mostly in elegant Persian, the Turkish language dominated the other two genres (except for the Persian *gazavātnāme*s).

The growing interest in recording the past during this period largely overlapped with the institutionalization of Ottoman administrative structures, which later came to be known as "classical institutions." Against this background, modern historians frequently made connections between the transformation of Ottoman polity and the proliferation of historical accounts. Cornell Fleischer, in his seminal book *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, drawing from the life and works of the historian Mustafa Ali (d.1600), argues that the rapid bureaucratization and the emergence of a bureaucratic consciousness influenced the rise of historical writing during the sixteenth century.[2] Elsewhere, Fleischer underlines how history writing functioned as the primary means to promote Süleyman's imperial persona as a universal ruler, a messianic figure, a lawgiver, and the defender of Sunni Islam.[3] Starting with the last years of Süleyman I's life, the newly emerging bureaucratic class engaged in the process of constructing a sense of nostalgia for the imagined glorification and justice of the Süleymanic years. Throughout the second half of the century, numerous historical works, including *nasīḥatnāme*s (advice to sultans), contributed to this image of a "Golden Age" by ascribing a perfectly working systematic and meritocratic persona to the long rule of Süleyman. This explains why the period in question is particularly critical in terms of classicizing Süleyman's reign; furthermore, this historiographical tendency has continued to dominate history writing until recently.

Along with the thematic studies discussing sixteenth-century historical writings across subfields of historical literature, many modern scholars of the early modern Ottoman Empire examined specific genres to understand the transformation of historiography during this period. In her pioneering study published in 1983, Christine Woodhead presents the Persian-style illustrated history books, *şehnāme*s, that proliferated in the second half of the sixteenth century as "a form of official historiography in the Ottoman Empire which predates that of the *vaḳ'anüvīs* (court chronicler)."[4] According to Woodhead, while the adulation of the sultan's

Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003, p. 38–39.

2 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 243.

3 Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleyman," In *Soliman Le Magnifique et Son Temps: Actes Du Colloque de Paris*, Gilles Veinstein (ed.), Paris: Ecole du Louvre, 1992, p. 159–77.

4 Christine Woodhead, "An Experiment in Official Historiography: The Post of Şehnāmeci in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555-1605," *Wiener Zeitschrift Für die Kunde Des Morgenlandes*, 1983, no. 75, p. 73–74. For another early study on the official history writing see, Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Vekayi'nüvis," In *Vekayi'nüvis: Makaleler*, İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1994, p.103–38.

personality and deeds remained a major theme in illuminated history books, their authors were rather creative in constructing distinct images for each sultan. For example, contrary to Selim I or Süleyman I's depiction as a warrior sultan leading the army into battle, Murad III (1574-95), who was considered a sedentary sultan, was predominantly portrayed in his court. Drawing on salary records, Woodhead finds no reason to question the official character of the *şehnāme*s, position, which was occupied by five permanent and salaried historians appointed by sultanic decrees for half a century.[5] According to Woodhead the official appointment of the historians directly by the sultan ensured their role in promoting a prestigious image of the sultan.[6] Similarly, Fleischer describes the role of the *şehnāmeci* as that of a producer creating "elegant dynastic propaganda."[7] According to Fleischer, this imperial project of monopolizing historical expression was effectively resisted by a recently created bureaucratic elite who envisioned Süleyman's reign as depersonalized and orderly administration rather than a messianic utopia.[8]

In a comparative study published in 2007, Baki Tezcan investigates the rise of court historiography in the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Tezcan, early modern state-making and the historiographical transformations can be understood within the context of the struggle between "absolutists" and "legalist" camps in imperial politics.[9] He interprets the limited circulation and the prominence of the court histories in the second half of the sixteenth century "as signs of a royal failure to dictate a certain understanding of Ottoman history to the intellectual elite." This stands in contrast to the eighteenth century when the official narratives eventually monopolized historiographical expression.[10] Woodhead criticizes Tezcan's argument about the decline of the *şehnāme* genre as a failure of absolutism by arguing that "such an understanding of *şehnāme*s moves away from the literary perspective to stress the political."[11] Woodhead opposes Tezcan's argument regarding the "failure" of *şehnāme*s by attributing a significant political role to historical works with rather limited dissemination.[12] Woodhead's article is especially interesting for illustrating how the transformation of the scholarship after the 2000s can be seen even in the works written by the

5 Woodhead, "An Experiment in Official Historiography," p. 170.

6 Woodhead, "An Experiment in Official Historiography," p. 178.

7 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 239.

8 Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah," p. 172.

9 Baki Tezcan, "The Politics of Early Modern Ottoman Historiography," In *the Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (eds.), Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 167–98.

10 Tezcan, "The Politics of Early Modern Ottoman Historiography," p. 170.

11 Christine Woodhead, "Reading Ottoman 'Şehnâmes': Official Historiography in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Studia Islamica*, 2007, no. 104/105, p. 78.

12 Woodhead, "An Experiment in Official Historiography," p. 79.

same author twenty-four years apart. Contrary to her earlier work on *şehnāmes*, which has already been discussed, Woodhead highlights the non-dynastic dynamics of history writing.

Despite several disagreements, Woodhead, Fleischer, and Tezcan, in their works discussed earlier, seem to agree on the interpretation that court historiography was officially promoted as a means of dynastic propaganda. Indeed, the prominence given to the dynastic function of history writing represents the prevalent perspectives in the field up until the last several decades. For example, İnalcık's foundational article published in 1962 is dedicated to showing that the legitimacy concerns of the sultans, particularly Bayezid II, indicates the revival of general history writing in the fifteenth century.[13] Moreover, Rhoads Murphey in his survey of early modern historiography, emphasizes the changing priorities of the sultans as the patrons of historical works, and suggests that history was a "vehicle for the sole use of and manipulation by the monarch" until the seventeenth century.[14] Colin Imber similarly frames history writing as the primary instrument through which "Ottoman dynastic myths" and the idea of their commitment to *ghazwa* ideology were produced and disseminated in an attempt to legitimize the Ottoman claims of rulership, especially during the period between the early fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries.[15]

## Moving Beyond Political Legitimation

Emine Fetvacı, an art historian, rejects the arguably simplistic yet widely assumed view that history books exclusively reflect the ideology of the ruler to whom it was presented.[16] According to Fetvacı, the proliferation of court histories in the late sixteenth century was primarily connected to the political aspirations of the members of the Ottoman court. She argues that high-ranking bureaucrats, soldiers, and household servants promoted their ideas by creatively participating in historiographical production rather than simply eulogizing the sultan. In addition to showing the variety of agents involved in the production process, Fetvacı maintains that the readership of official histories was not only restricted to the few

13 Halil İnalcık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, Bernard Lewis (ed.), London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

14 Rhoads Murphey, "Ottoman Historical Writing in the Seventeenth-Century: A Survey of the General Development of the Genre after the Reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617)," In *Essays on Ottoman Historians and Historiography*, İstanbul: Eren, 2009, p. 280.

15 Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth," *Turcica*,1987, no. 19, p. 7–27.

16 Emine Fetvacı, "The Office of Ottoman Court Historian," In *Studies on Istanbul and Beyond: The Freely Papers*, Robert G. Ousterhout (ed.), Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2007, vol. 1, p. 7–21; Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013.

members of the inner court.[17] Instead, these books were also circulated among a wider group of elites who were not necessarily members of the ruling class. This amplified their role as a medium of transmitting political messages. Fetvacı, with a particular emphasis on the diversity of purposes, agents, and messages in writing and illustrating *şehnāme*s, suggests that the political function of official histories is far more complex than earlier modern historians have assumed. Her study implies that dynastic eulogy was the available language – rather than the ultimate purpose – for the patrons and creators of the *şehnāme*s to voice their visions about imperial politics. Based on archival evidence, Fetvacı questions the long-held assumptions about *şehnāmeci*s and their work, such as their status as a salaried and "official" position. She convincingly points out the "ad-hoc nature of the projects" undertaken by *şehnāmeci*s.[18]

The perspective of art historians on Ottoman historiography challenges defining historiographical material exclusively as a "text." Emine Fetvacı and Serpil Bağcı's studies that deal with the illustrations of *şehnāme*s demonstrate that the function of visual elements in historical texts is not simply to support the message provided in the text.[19] Instead, visual elements often contain messages that are missing in the textual parts of the *şehnāmes* because "the text and its illustrations can (…) appear as independent entities to be read and interpreted in their own right."[20] Bağcı indicates that the Ottoman painters who produced Ottomanized versions of the Persianate illustrations of historical texts played a critical role in the Ottoman adoption of the genre. Necipoğlu, based on his examination of the historical text with royal portraits, especially the books about human physiognomy, *şehnāme*s, and world histories from the late sixteenth century, argues that the Ottoman painters, who can be treated as historiographers, were mainly concerned with presenting dynastic continuity and longevity as opposed to Safavid and Mughal painters who gave primacy to the lineage.[21] Necipoğlu's work, along with Bağcı and Fetvacı's later studies on the royal images, showcase how visual materials can help historians discover the often-neglected aspects of historiographical transformation during the early modern period.[22]

17 Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*, p. 25–58.

18 Fetvacı, "The Office of Ottoman Court Historian," p. 10–14.

19 Fetvacı, "The Office of Ottoman Court Historian"; Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*; Serpil Bağcı, "From Translated Word to Translated Image: The Illustrated Şehnâme-i Türkî Copies," *Muqarnas*, 2000, no. 17, p. 162–76.

20 Bağcı, "From Translated Word to Translated Image," p. 164.

21 Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Serial Portraits of Ottoman Sultans in Comparative Perspective", In *the Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2000, p. 22–61.

22 Bağcı, "From Translated Word to Translated Image"; Emine Fetvacı, *The Album of the World Emperor: Cross-Cultural Collecting and the Art of Album-Making in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul*, Princeton University Press, 2020. For the earlier scholarship that is primarily

Apart from the works that provide an art history perspective to the study of Ottoman historiography, two monographs by Kaya Şahin and Erdem Çıpa represent the rising efforts to investigate the multifaceted dynamics of the sixteenth-century Ottoman historiography. Kaya Şahin in *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman* presents the works of authors from different socio-cultural backgrounds in an attempt to promote distinct visions of imperial politics.[23] Drawing upon the historical works of Celālzāde Muṣṭafā (d. 1567), the head of the Ottoman imperial chancery, Şahin's meticulous study offers an episode of interplay between empire building and historical writing, and in doing so, he also underlines the usefulness of examining the Ottoman political experience within the larger context of early modern Eurasia.[24] Despite this theoretical assertion, however, his discussion about the lives and the works of the Ottoman courtier remains confined to the Ottoman context throughout the book. Except for drawing rudimentary parallels among Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, Habsburg, and English examples of early modern bureaucratization in the introductory chapter, the "Eurasian" context hardly contributes anything of substance to Şahin's work.

In another study that primarily associates history writing with the dynamics of broadly defined imperial politics, Erdem Çıpa examines the construction of Selim I (r. 1512-1520)'s image in Ottoman historical writing through the lens of *naṣiḥatnāme*s and *selīmnāme*s, which emerged towards the end of Selim's reign.[25] Çıpa, in the historiographical part of *The Making of Selim*, demonstrates that *selīmnāme* literature, which has been largely interpreted as straightforward dynastic propaganda in favor of Selim, actually conveys composite messages about contemporary politics rather than only exploring the historical aspects of Selim's reign.[26] Furthermore, authors of *nasiḥatnāme* literature participated in debates about politics and the qualities of an ideal ruler by presenting Selim as an ideal sultan.[27] Driven by anti-*kul* sentiments, Çıpa indicates that they implicitly urged the sultans to be *kānūn*-conscious and meritocratic. Şahin and Çıpa's works ascribe greater agency to history writers; and when considered together,

interested in the artistic features of paintings see, Nurhan Atasoy and Filiz Çağman, *Turkish Miniature Painting*, İstanbul: R. C. D. Cultural Institute, 1974.; Nurhan Atasoy, "Nakkaş Osman'ın Padişah Portreleri Albümü," *Türkiyemiz*, 1972, no. 6, p. 2–14.

23 Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 164–65.

24 Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman*, p. 6–12.

25 H. Erdem Çıpa, *The Making of Selim: Succession, Legitimacy, and Memory in the Early Modern Ottoman World*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017. For an early, and largely descriptive, examination of the genre see, Ahmet Uğur, *The Reign of Sultan Selīm I in the Light of the Selīm-Nāme Literature*, Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1985.

26 Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, p. 145–50.

27 Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, p. 176–209.

this approach fits well with the new directions in the study of sixteenth-century Ottoman historiography.

Either due to an overemphasis placed on the link between political legitimation and history writing, or of the once-widely held assumption that the Ottomans lacked theory or philosophy in general, modern researchers have paid little attention to the theoretical aspects of Ottoman historiography. Cornell Fleisher's seminal article *Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and "Ibn Khaldûnism" in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters* published in 1983, stands out as an early study that addresses an underlying theoretical framework in Ottoman history writing. Contrary to the established view that the Ottomans were indebted to Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* for the framework of historical cyclism in their approach to political history, Fleisher makes the point that "it was accorded a warm reception by thinkers who found its ideas at once relevant and familiar."[28] It follows that the seventeenth-century Ottoman historians Kātib Çelebi and Na'īmā, unlike their predecessors, explicitly responded to Ibn Khaldun's theory of history in their reflection on the perceived decline of Ottoman polity.[29] Fleisher maintains that, far from uncritically accepting Ibn Khaldun's deterministic formulation, the two historians reinterpreted the theory of the cycle by recognizing that the decline could be stopped with institutional reforms.[30]

In recent years, Gottfried Hagen and Ethan L. Menchinger have been among the few historians to cultivate an interest in the philosophical/theoretical dimensions of Ottoman historical thought. In their brief but thoughtful article, Hagen and Menchinger offer an innovative classification of Ottoman historical writings based on the concepts of time that were adopted in their narratives: universal, communal, and personal time.[31] They treat Kātib Çelebi's *Taqwīm at-Tawārikh* as a turning point in Ottoman history since it allowed for "a unified chronology of historical events that broke down continuity but at the same time made the synchronicity of many parallel historical developments visible."[32] Hagen and Menchinger's discussion, in the same article, about the conceptual framework of early modern Ottoman historiography provides insight into these often-overlooked dimensions of history writing. In an attempt to reveal Ottoman historians' theoretical take on the problem of "agency and morality" as a case study, they considered personalism, dynastic cyclism, exceptionalism, human agency, and

28 Cornell Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and" Ibn Khaldûnism" in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18, 1983, no. 3–4, p. 47.

29 Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and" Ibn Khaldûnism," p. 47–49.

30 Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and" Ibn Khaldûnism," p. 48.

31 Gottfried Hagen and Ethan L. Menchinger, "Ottoman Historical Thought," In *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, Wiley Blackwell Companions to History, Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori (eds.), Chichester: Wiley, 2014, p. 94–96.

32 Hagen and Menchinger, "Ottoman Historical Thought," p. 94.

eschatology as the principal elements of the Ottoman conceptualization of the past.[33] Elsewhere, Menchinger discusses the eighteenth-century official chronicler and reformist Ahmed Vasıf's philosophy of history.[34] He demonstrates that even the official histories that have been widely read as neutral descriptions of contemporary events manifest a complex philosophy of history that consists of particular assumptions of causality and human agency in the past.

Among the studies that contribute to the expansion of the field, beyond the formerly overlooked features and dynamics, are those that blur the conventional boundaries between the disciplines of history and literature by framing historiography primarily as a literary genre. Piterberg and Tezcan's studies discussed so far have already addressed the narrative structures and techniques adopted in historical texts. However, Gül Şen's recent manuscript on the seventeenth-century chronicler Na'īmā's authoritative history is the first comprehensive study devoted entirely to a literary analysis of an early modern chronicle.[35] Dealing with narrative features, such as structure, language, style, and interpolations, her study reveals that the author's purpose of writing is not only to support and question the legitimacy of Ottoman rule but also to create meaning out of history.

## Challenging the Category of Historian

Before the establishment of history departments in universities in the modern era, one could not have been identified as a "professional historian" in Muslim societies.[36] Instead, historical works were penned by the members of the learned elite who mostly pursued careers in courts or *medrese*s. The Ottoman period, in that regard, was hardly an exception since the majority of the historical accounts were written either by bureaucrats or members of the ulama. Indeed, all the examples of historical writing that I have discussed so far were composed by medrese-trained authors, even if their professions varied. Nevertheless, modern historians studying the Ottoman Empire have recently been paying growing attention to the previously understudied historical accounts compiled by authors who were not part of the scholarly or ruling elite.

Two remarkable studies by Baki Tezcan and Gabriel Piterberg explore the formation and transformation of historical narratives of the dethronement of Osman

33 Hagen and Menchinger, "Ottoman Historical Thought," p. 97–102.

34 Ethan Menchinger, "A Reformist Philosophy of History: The Case of Ahmed Vâsıf Efendi," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 2014, no. 44, p. 141–168.

35 Gül Şen, *Making Sense of History: Narrativity and Literariness in the Ottoman Chronicle of Na'īmā*, Boston, MA: Brill, 2022. For an early study on Na'īmā see, Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima*, ed. Norman Itzkowitz, New York: New York University Press, 1972.

36 Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 159.

II by focusing on the account of a retired janissary, Hüseyin Ṭūgī (d. after 1623).[37] Tezcan and Piterberg alike maintain that the historical perspectives on the military rebellion in 1622 and the eventual deposition of Osman II were largely shaped by the sociocultural backgrounds of the authors and their audience. The theoretical framework, presented by Cemal Kafadar and applied by Piterberg, concerns the manifestation of different "social worlds" in conflicting historiographical positions. The framework provides insights into Ṭūgī's *kul*-centric approach as opposed to the perspective adopted by the supporters of the dethroned sultan.[38] Ṭūgī's understanding and the narration of the events he witnessed were shaped in a social world positioned in opposition to the supporters of Osman II. As the *kul* managed to establish themselves as a major influential group in imperial politics in the eighteenth century, Ṭūgī's account became the prevalent, and eventually the official narrative of the dethronement of Osman II. Tezcan identifies another significant departure from the earlier historiographical consensus on Osman II in the late nineteenth century.[39] Furthermore, he argues that the reformist ideas of the modern Ottomans were ill accorded with the disparagement of a "reform-minded" sultan. The modernist elite of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the early Republican period, in turn, presented a revised version of the events connected to Osman II whom they identified as a revolutionary sultan resisted by reactionary janissaries.

Even though Ṭūgī was not from among the learned or ruling elite, one can hardly describe him as someone writing from the "periphery" given his former position as a personal guard of the sultans, thus a member of the military establishment. An account that we can more confidently interpret as the voice of the Ottoman periphery is the history book compiled by a barber in eighteenth-century Damascus. Dana Sajdi in her intriguing book *The Barber of Damascus* deals with this unusual historical work and its author.[40] Rather than treat the Damascene author as an exceptional figure, Sajdi argues that his work entails an expansion of authorship since "he was joined by other new authors whose social backgrounds were quite unusual for the genre of the chronicle, including a couple of Shī'ī farmers from southern Lebanon, a Samaritan scribe from Nablus, a Sunni court clerk from Ḥimṣ, a Greek Orthodox priest from Damascus, and

37 Baki Tezcan, "The 1622 Military Rebellion in Istanbul: A Historiographical Journey," *International Journal of Turkish Studies,* 2002, vol. 8, no. 1–2, p. 25–43; Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*.

38 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 4–5; Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996.

39 Tezcan, "The 1622 Military Rebellion in Istanbul," p. 35–43.

40 Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013.

two soldiers also from Damascus."[41] The widening of literary production to the non-*ulema* in the eighteenth century also reflects the rise of the provincial elite in imperial politics.[42] Sajdi argues that the sociopolitical transformation in the periphery was accompanied by the rise of "nouveau literacy." This perspective, which places the historiographical transformation within a broader context of sociopolitical dynamics, challenges the once widespread reduction of history writing to political legitimation. Sajdi's contention that "texts, or rather genres, are socially apportioned" is particularly useful in revealing how social groups – which were not necessarily formed around political endeavors – utilized history writing among other mediums for self-representation.

## Conclusion

The past several decades witnessed a general rise of interest in early modern Ottoman historiography. The increase of historiographical research in Ottoman Empire studies has been accompanied by the introduction of novel approaches and sources. This article has argued that a shift from a dependence on court histories to an emphasis on the multiplicity of voices and agents in the historiographical field stands out as a major transformation in modern scholarship. Tezcan, Piterberg, and Sajdi challenge the domination of court-centered or *ulema* narratives by examining the works of "unusual" historians like janissaries or barbers. This shift came in tandem with the general tendency in modern Ottoman history writing to highlight the political agency of actors in the periphery as opposed to a monolithic understanding of imperial centralization.[43]

A remarkable development in the scholarship on history writing in the early modern Ottoman Empire is what I would call an "artistic turn." Recent studies in the field of art history have expanded our otherwise limited repertoire of historiographical sources by recognizing visualization in history books as a separate platform to construct the past. In that regard, they approach the meaning of "writing" the past in a broader sense that is not restricted to the production of textual material. They illustrate that "visual language" as a system of transmitting historical memory followed different patterns than written sources in terms of authorship, audience, and patronage.

Early modern historical writing has not been thoroughly studied in terms of its theoretical and methodological dimensions. Despite the promising expansion of scholarship on Ottoman historical thought in recent decades, only a handful

41 Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus*, p. 6.

42 Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule: 1516-1800*, New York; Oxford: Routledge, 2008, p. 79–113.

43 See, for example, Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994; Hathaway, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule*.

of modern scholars have devoted their works to early modern Ottoman theories of history so far. Brief studies by Hagen, Menchinger, and Fleischer, to some extent, illustrate often-overlooked purposes of history writing during the early modern period – which was to make sense of cosmology and human agency. Their studies display the usefulness of approaching historiography in a broader context rather than as political legitimation.

Another field of inquiry that still requires attention in modern scholarship is the connections that early modern Ottoman historical literature had with other contemporary scholarly worlds across imperial boundaries. Despite a relevant emphasis, modern scholarship seems reluctant in approaching Ottoman historiography within the larger context of early modern Islamicate or Eurasian history writing. As part of a general tendency to imagine an isolated Ottoman scholarship, exchanges with contemporary Mamluk, Safavid, and Mughal historiographical traditions remain understudied.

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