



A Sufi Bureaucrat's Reflection: The Late Ottoman Concept of Terakkî (Progress) in Aşçı Dede's [1828-1906] Memoirs

Bir Sufî Bürokratın Geç Osmanlı Düşüncesindeki Yeri: Aşçı Dede'nin [1828-1906] Hâtırat'ında Terakkî Kavramı

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Abstract


This article examines the notion of *terakkî* (progress) within the 19th-century Ottoman context, focusing on the role of Sufi perspectives in ongoing debates about modernization. While Sufi orders were often viewed as obstacles to progress, labeled as elements fostering stagnation, this study challenges that perception by analyzing Aşçı Dede's memoirs—a unique self-narrative account from the Tanzimat period. Aşçı Dede (d. 1906), a prominent Sufi figure involved in both bureaucratic and spiritual realms, presents an alternative view of progress that blends spiritual and societal development. By scrutinizing his reflections on Japan's modernization as a model for the Ottoman Empire, the article argues that Sufi orders actively engaged with reform discourses, contributing a nuanced vision of progress that emphasized both material and spiritual dimensions. This re-evaluation highlights the multifaceted role of Sufi officials in the Ottoman modernization process, bridging the gap between tradition and reform. It offers a new perspective on the interplay between spirituality and bureaucracy, underscoring the significant yet underexplored contributions of Sufi bureaucrats to the intellectual and reformist landscape of the late Ottoman period.

Keywords: The Late Ottoman Era, Ottoman Modernization, Terakkî, Sufi Movements, Aşçı Dede's Memoir, Self Narrative.

Öz

Bu makale, 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı bağlamında terakkî (*ilerleme*) kavramını inceleyerek, modernleşme tartışmalarında Sufi perspektiflerinin rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Sufi tarikatları genellikle ilerlemeye engel olarak, durağanlığı teşvik eden unsurlar olarak görülürken, bu çalışma Tanzimat dönemine ait nadir bir olan Aşçı Dede'nin (d.1906) birincil ağızdan anlatılar türündeki hatıratlarını analiz ederek bu algıyı sorgulamaktadır. Hem bürokratik hem de manevi alanlarda aktif olan önemli bir Sufi figürü olarak Aşçı Dede, manevî ve toplumsal gelişmeyi harmanlayan alternatif bir ilerleme anlayışı sunmaktadır. Aşçı Dede'nin Japonya'nın modernleşmesini Osmanlı İmparatorluğu için bir model olarak değerlendirmesine odaklanan bu makale, sîfî bürokratların reform söylemleriyle aktif olarak ilgilendiklerini ve maddî ve manevî boyutlarıyla to-pyekün ve çok yönlü bir ilerleme vizyonu sunduklarını savunmaktadır. Bu yeniden değerlendirme, Osmanlı modernleşme sürecinde tasavvufî hareketlerin çok boyutlu rolünü vurgulayarak gelenek ve reform arasındaki boşluğu doldurmaktadır. Tasavuf hareketleri ve bürokrasi arasındaki etkileşimi yeniden ele alan bu çalışma, Sufi figürlerinin geç Osmanlı dönemindeki entelektüel tartışmalara yaptığı önemli, ancak yeterince incelenmemiş katkılarını öne çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geç Osmanlı Dönemi, Osmanlı Modernleşmesi, Terakkî, Tasavvuf Hareketleri, Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article & Benzerlik / Similarity: 7

Başvuru / Submitted: 5 Ekim 2024 & Kabul & Accepted: 2 Ocak 2025

Atif / Citation: Yalçinkaya, A. E. "A Sufi Bureaucrat's Reflection: The Late Ottoman Concept of Terakkî (Progress) in Aşçı Dede's [1828-1906] Memoirs", *Osmanlı Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 25 (2025): 127-154.



Published by Ottoman Civilization Studies, İstanbul, Türkiye

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Introduction

Sufi orders, often labeled as bastions of tradition, were frequently accused of fostering stagnation and hindering progress during the 19th-century Ottoman reform (*islâh*) era. However, Aşçı Dede (d. 1906?), a prominent Sufi figure and civil servant deeply embedded within the Ottoman bureaucratic structure, offers a unique perspective in the debates on the concept of *terakkî* (progress) during his time. Through his engagement in spiritual and administrative realms, he embodies a Sufi approach to modernization that challenges the conventional narratives of progress prevalent in reformist discourse.¹ Regarded as one of the earliest Sufi figures actively engaging with Tanzimat-era reforms (1838-1876), Aşçı Dede's memoir, which is considered one of the era's most comprehensive self-narratives or ego-documents, provides a nuanced perspective on *terakkî* discussions. His accounts illuminate the dynamic interactions between Sufi perspectives and the prevailing reform currents within Ottoman intellectual circles.² Through an analysis of these writings, particularly his reflections on Japan's rapid modernization as a potential model for the Ottoman Empire, this study foregrounds a rarely acknowledged mystical approach to progress. It provides significant insights into the current literature on late Ottoman historiography, which has predominantly neglected the Sufi perspective in intellectual discussions over the empire's destiny.³

To fully appreciate Aşçı Dede's approach to *terakkî*, it is essential to contextualize it within the Ottoman intellectual framework, which was deeply influenced by Islamic thought and cyclical historical views, particularly those articulated by Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Khaldun's model conceptualizes history as a series of inevitable cycles, where each cycle of prosperity and cohesion eventually succumbs to fragmentation and decline, a rhythm dictated by the inherent weaknesses in human social bonds.⁴ Reflecting a broader worldview shared across many classical traditions until the medieval period, this cyclical approach perceived worldly progress as ultimately returning to a divine state of perfection, with the afterlife embodying this ultimate return. This perspective shifted significantly with the Enlightenment, which introduced a more linear conception of human advancement.⁵ Grounded in the principles of renewal and inevitable decline,

¹ Aşçı Dede's memoir has been compiled and edited recently, Mustafa Koç and Eyyüp Tanrıverdi eds., *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle Son Dönem Osmanlı Hayatı: Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları*, vol. 1-4 (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006).

² Tanzimat reforms laid the groundwork for these changes in bureaucracy, aiming at the establishment of a more rationalized and efficient state machinery. See Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 152.

³ Mustafa Kara, "The Social and Cultural Activities of the Dervishes Under the Second Constitution", *Sufism and Sufis in the Ottoman Society*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: TTV Yayınları, 2005), 531-44.

⁴ See Allen James Fromherz, "Between the Circle and the Line: Ibn Khaldun's View of History and Change," *Journal of Global Initiatives* 14/2 (2019), 45-60; The cyclic understanding of history was gradually replaced by "Eurocentric declinist periodization". See Recep Şentürk, "The Decline of the Decline Paradigm: Revisiting the Periodization of Islamic History", *Reihe für Osnabrücker Islamstudies* 38 (2020), 213-247.

⁵ Sydney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 45-47; Majid Fakhri, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 123-125.

this cyclical view of history contrasts markedly with the Enlightenment's linear model, which introduced a cumulative, progressive conception of human development to Western thought.⁶ As European concepts of linear advancement began filtering into Ottoman reformist circles⁷—particularly during the late 19th century—Ottoman thinkers increasingly framed *terakkî* regarding national rejuvenation.⁸ By the mid-century, *terakkî* had become a focal point for debates surrounding the empire's future, capturing a shift from a cyclical to a linear perspective that placed unprecedented value on external, measurable forms of progress.⁹

The Tanzimat era's sweeping reforms and the mounting pressures from military losses generated an intense intellectual re-evaluation of *terakkî* (*progress*), situating it as a pivotal yet often divisive concept within Ottoman discourse.¹⁰ The Young Ottomans

⁶ Augustine (d. 430) saw time as a purposeful march toward an ultimate judgment, disagreeing with ancient cyclical ideas that brought Western thought to a linear history. Enlightenment valued reason and a rational march of history. See Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17–22; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), 21–29; Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58.

⁷ İnalçık's sanalysis highlights the early institutional roots of Ottoman reform through the Sened-i İttifak (1808) Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 167–169; Zürcher situates the Ottoman embrace of progress within the ideological currents stemming from the French Revolution, which brought European scientific and technological influences into Ottoman reformist circles. See Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 95–110; Kılıç's illustrates how the Ottoman discourse on progress evolved from internal renewal grounded in Islamic principles to a more material concept. See Recep Kılıç, "The Birth of the Idea of Progress in the Ottoman Empire: Reform Discussions and Reforms," *Journal of Regional Studies* 8/1 (2024): 105–124; Regarding the entry of progress in the Ottoman intellectual life and its representatives, see also Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Tanzimat'tan Sonra Fikir Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Maarif Vekaleti, 1940), 70–80.

⁸ Sariyannis points out that Phanariot scholar as important carriers of European discourses into Ottoman sphere, Marinos Sariyannis, "The Limits of Going Global: The Case of "Ottoman Enlightenment (s)", *History Compass* 18:9 (2020), 1–13; For the early 19th century, Topal uses *tanzîm* (reordering). Alp Eren Topal, "From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concept Reform 1600-1876" (PhD Thesis, Bilkent University, 2017), 143–182.

⁹ During this period, although the Tanzimat-centered reform movements aimed to renew tradition from within, they later shifted under the influence of Orientalist discourse, with renewal and progress increasingly oriented toward Western thought and technology. See İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi: Metinler, Kişiler, 1. Kitap* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2014), sayfa; Hakan Karateke, "The Vocabulary of Disorder in a Late Eighteenth Century Ottoman Reform Treatise: Nihâli's Mirror of the State", *Turcica* 50 (2019), 417–448.

¹⁰ The issue of factors hindering progress gained significant importance across the Islamic world in the late 19th century, particularly influenced by Ernest Renan's (d. 1892) views. The relationship between Islam and progress, often framed through an Orientalist lens, became a central concern for Ottoman intellectuals. Renan's work *L'islamisme et la science* argued that Islam and the racial characteristics of Muslims inherently prevented scientific thought. In response, Namık Kemal (d. 1888) strongly opposed Renan's claims in the *Renan Müdafaaamesi* (1910). See Zeynep Çelik, *Avrupa Şark'ı Bilmez: Eleştirel Bir Söylem*

argued that *terakkî* (progress) was essential for the empire's survival and saw constitutionalism as a necessary step away from outdated governance structures.¹¹ Although initially driven by an intent to rejuvenate (*tecâid*) tradition from within, the reform movement—progressively entangled in Orientalist discourse—began to challenge and critique the entirety of the Islamic tradition, with its intellectual legacies and practices now re-examined through an external, Western-centric lens. Sufi doctrine and communities soon became a focal point of criticism, seen as the underlying cause of the empire's—and, by extension, Islamic societies'—perceived stagnation.¹² Reformist critiques, shaped by both internal aspirations and Western models, accused Sufi concepts and practices such as *tevekkül* (*reliance on God*), *teslimiyet* (*submission*), *rızâ* (*contentment*), and *fakr* (*ascetic poverty*) of perpetuating a passive disposition believed to obstruct economic and social development.¹³ Sufi groups were seen as unable to embrace the idea of progress because they emphasized a lifestyle focused on passive submission rather than active effort, reasoning, or willpower. This perceived mindset of Sufis stood in contrast to the values of productiveness and initiative: At the core of the modernist debate lay the question of whether Islamic principles, particularly those manifest in Sufism, could align with the shifting imperatives of statehood and economic modernization.¹⁴

The Ottoman state's efforts at centralization aimed to strictly control all social strata, which led to the gradual integration of Sufi organizations into the bureaucratic structure. As Sufi institutions became entwined with state modernization efforts, many practitioners assumed roles within an expanding bureaucracy.¹⁵ Bureaucrats like Aşçı

(1872-1932) (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 21-22; Erdoğan Erbay, "Terakki, İslam ve Ahmed Midhat Efendi", *Ahmet Midhat Efendi*, ed. Mustafa Miyasoğlu (Ankara: Kültür Ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012), 333.

¹¹ Necati Çavdar, "Ali Suavi'de Terakki Ve Medeniyet Düşüncesi: Muhbir Yazıları", *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 126:149 (2020), 309.

¹² On the critiques of Sufi practices, particularly *tevekkül*, which intensified during the Hamidian era due to reform-oriented discussions of progress, see Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık*, 16-18; Melis Hafez, *Inventing Laziness: The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 30.

¹³ Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık*, 123.

¹⁴ Kara, "İslamcılık", *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce VI: İslamcılık*, ed. Yasin Aktay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 38; For more information: Meir Hatina, "Where East Meets West: Sufism, Cultural Rapprochement, and Politics", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39:3 (2007), 389-409; Nathan Hofer, "Endowments for Sufis and Their Institutions", *Sufi Institutions*, ed. Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 59-60; Ahmed Akgündüz, "The Ottoman Waqf Administration in the 19th and Early-20th Centuries: Continuities and Discontinuities", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 64:1 (2011), 71-87; Erhan Bektaş, *Religious Reform in the Late Ottoman Empire: Institutional Change and the Professionalization of the Ulema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023), 75.

¹⁴ For more information on practices of governmentality on the Sufi component of Ottoman society, Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29:2 (2009), 171-185.

¹⁵ For more information of practices of governmentality on Sufi component of Ottoman society, Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29:2 (2009), 171-185.

Dede illustrate the nuanced balance between spiritual commitments and reformist demands, highlighting the diversity of Sufi responses as they navigated enduring traditions within an evolving Ottoman framework. Although Findley describes Aşçı Dede as embodying a “tangled hidden garden” outlook that resists Western conceptions of progress and reflects a traditional Sufi vision of *terakkî* (progress),¹⁶ his diaries reveal a figure deeply committed to Sufi principles while also critically engaging with Ottoman reform discourse, where he assesses the empire’s limited successes.¹⁷ Reflecting on global modernization models, notably Japan’s rapid industrial rise and cultural preservation, Aşçı Dede saw Japan’s achievements—culminating in its victory over Russia—as proof that a non-European power could assert itself without abandoning its cultural identity. In contrast to imitating Western modernity, he envisions progress grounded in spiritual depth and cultural authenticity.

This study examines Aşçı Dede’s memoir as a critical lens through which to explore the intersections between Sufi thought and the reformist intellectual landscape of the late Ottoman Empire. By analyzing his reflections on *terakkî* (progress) within his diary entries, this research delineates how his Sufi worldview engaged with—yet remained distinct from—contemporary reformist ideals. In particular, his contemplations on Japan’s modernization and its implications for societal advancement allow for a reassessment of the prevailing scholarly paradigm. Rather than conforming to the traditional narrative of Ottoman modernization as a rigid dichotomy of progress versus decline, this inquiry reveals an alternative trajectory in which Sufi principles contribute to, rather than resist, the broader discourse of Ottoman reform.

1. Studies on the Integration of Sufis into the Bureaucratic System and the Case of Aşçı Dede

Ottoman bureaucratization has been approached in the literature to exercise state power over the vast territories of its rule and expand this influence over its people and all aspects of life.¹⁸ Driven by an ambition for centralization and rooted in principles of renewal (*tecdîd*) and progress (*terakkî*), the Ottoman reform period saw an extensive reorganization of societal structures, significantly reshaping Sufi life and institutional autonomy throughout the 19th century.¹⁹ In the latter half of the period, reforms increasingly brought Sufi lodges under state regulation, diminishing their

¹⁶ Findley in his work on Ottoman civil officialdom has a chapter titled “Into the ‘Tangled Magic Garden’ with Aşçı Dede İbrahim Halil” reflects on his life as a mystic: Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 179-186.

¹⁷ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Süfînin Gözüyle*, 4/1670.

¹⁸ Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons, “Empires, Bureaucracy and the Paradox of Power”, *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: From Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15.

¹⁹ Selçuk Akşin Somel and Seyfi Kenan, “Introduction: The Issue of Transformation within the Ottoman Empire”, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Boğaç Ergene (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 2; Mustafa Kara, *Metinlerle Günümüz Tasavvuf Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2010), 57, 163-175.

independence.²⁰ The establishment of the Assembly of Sheikhs (*Meclis-i Meşâyih*) in 1866 formalized these efforts, requiring Sufi leaders to register, adhere to new standards, and pass state-administered examinations, which restricted their financial autonomy and aligned Sufi institutions with the state's broader modernization agenda.²¹ Sufis in urban and provincial areas found themselves navigating these shifting dynamics, with many actively seeking roles within the expanding bureaucratic system.

The initial engagement of Sufis with state institutions was profoundly influenced by the tensions arising as dervishes sought to harmonize the longstanding traditions of their spiritual orders with the complexities introduced by progressive, state-led reforms.²² In contrast to their contemporaries who stayed immersed in Sufi lodges, Sufi bureaucrats were highly involved in state affairs, striking a balance between their religious obligations and their official duties that mirrored a continual struggle.²³ Adapting to new norms—including Western attire and modern medical practices—these Sufis interwove contemporary advancements into their spiritual practices.²⁴ Their roles within the bureaucracy were substantial, as documented in recent scholarship.²⁵ Yet the individualized responses of Sufis to Ottoman modernization remain underexplored. How did they navigate the process of bureaucratization and engage with state-led reforms? What underlying mentalities shaped their mandatory or voluntary involvement? Moreover, how did they interpret the evolving notions of reform (*ıslahât*)

²⁰ Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Modernity from the Empire to the Republic," *Islam and Modernity in Turkey*, ed. Brian Silverstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 65-66.

²¹ Melek Cevahiroğlu Ömür, "The Sufi Order in a Modernizing Empire: 1808-1876," *Tarih* 1:1 (2009), 78-79; Wilson, "The Twilight of Ottoman Sufism: Antiquity, Immorality and Nation in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *Nur Baba*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017), 233-253; Hofer, "Endowments for Sufis", 68. For the criticism on cradle sheiks, Thierry Zarcone, "Shaykh Succession in Turkish Sufi Lineages (19th and 20th Centuries): Conflicts, Reforms and Transmission of Spiritual Enlightenment", *Asian and African Area Studies* 7:1 (2007), 26; Raymond Lifchez, "Introduction", *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 7.

²² During this process, many dervishes found a place for themselves in the civil service. For more information, please see: Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform*, 204.

²³ Findley, "Social Dimensions", 129-143; Nathalie Clayer, "Life in an Istanbul Tekke in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries According to a "Menakibname" of the Cerrahi Dervishes," *The Illuminated Table, The Prosperous House: Food and Shelter in Ottoman Material Culture*, eds. Suraiya Faruqi and Christoph K. Neumann (Istanbul: Orient Institute, 2003), 219-35.

²⁴ Findley, "Social Dimensions", 129-143; Yüksek would note that the Sufi's of Istanbul increasingly became engaged with the necessities of modern life such as building a family and holding a job, Ahmet Yusuf Yüksek, "Sufi and the Sufi Lodges in Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Socio-Spatial Analysis", *Journal of Urban History* 49:4 (2021), 15-16.

²⁵ Cemal Kafadar, "The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life", *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 307-322.

and progress (*terakkî*), concepts that had come to occupy a central place in late Ottoman intellectual debates?²⁶

As a late Ottoman sufi bureaucrat, Aşçı Dede occupies a significant place in existing literature due to his rare and extensive memoirs. Yet research on his Sufi perspective still necessitates additional scrutiny. His previously understated memoir receives a significant analysis in Findley's work, which portrays him as a dedicated Sufi adept at maneuvering through bureaucratic frameworks while remaining neutral in the ideological conflicts of the era between Westernizers and Islamicists.²⁷ Following this scholarly path, some studies have emphasized that Aşçı Dede embodies the adaptable nature of Sufism at the turn of the century, skillfully merging his spiritual practices with modern advancements, thereby demonstrating a harmonious integration in his diverse engagements.²⁸ While recent studies have illuminated his reconciliation amid the changing dynamic of the era, there still warrants a closer reading to analyze the specific Sufi dynamics and contemplative framework that informed Aşçı Dede's nuanced engagement with the shifting currents and intellectual discourse of the late Ottoman era.²⁹

2. The Portrait of Aşçı Dede: Unveiling the Sufi Diary

Despite the demanding nature of his bureaucratic duties, Aşçı Dede made significant contributions to Sufi literature. His *Mecmua*, spanning three volumes and over 2,000 pages, offers a unique insight into Aşçı Dede's perspective, illustrating the delicate equilibrium he upheld as an Ottoman Sufi dedicated to state service, where his spiritual and official responsibilities merged within the bureaucratic framework. Furthermore, published under the title *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle Son Dönem Osmanlı Hayatı: Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları* (The Life of Late Ottoman Era Through the Eyes of a Versatile Sufi: Aşçı Dede's Memoirs), this comprehensive work captures his intimate reflections on bureaucracy, modernization, and Sufi practices.³⁰ The work is

²⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 95–110.

²⁷ Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 179-186. Also, there is considerable literature in German related to the fact that the first comprehensive academic study of Aşçı Dede was conducted by a German scholar, Marie Luise Bremer, *Die Memoiren des Türkischen Derwischs Aşçı Dede İbrahim* (Bonn: Verlag für Orientkunde, 1959).

²⁸ Yüksek, "Sufi and the Sufi Lodges in Istanbul", 15-16.

²⁹ There have been certain studies that focus on Aşçı Dede's Sufi thought. However, these works do not engage with his bureaucratic roles, Zeynep İrem Çeven, "Hatıralar Işığında Tasavvufi Terbiye (Aşçı Dede Örneği)" (MA Thesis, Bursa Uludağ University 2017). There is also one study that explores the Sufi life in the city of Erzincan as conveyed in Aşçı Dede's memoirs, Halil Baltacı, "Aşçı İbrahim Dede Hâtıratı Çerçevesinde XIX. Yüzyıl Erzincan'ında Dinî Ve Tasavvufî Hayat", *Erzincan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 9:1 (2015), 47-64. Another study explores his works on Persian language and grammar, Esra İpek Turan, "Aşçı Dede Halil İbrahim Efendi'nin Fars Dili ve Gramerine Dair Çalışmaları" (MA Thesis, İstanbul University, 2007).

³⁰ Mustafa Koç and Eyyüp Tanrıverdi eds., *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle Son Dönem Osmanlı Hayatı: Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları*, vol. 1-4 (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006).

often classified in the literature as *self-narratives* (*ben anlatıları*), a genre encompassing memoirs, letters, autobiographies, and diaries. One straightforward definition of this form is a portrayal of “self,” where the autobiographical aspect directs the narrative toward “writing about oneself.”³¹ Aşçı Dede’s writing exemplifies this genre, as both the title and content center on his journey. In recounting his life story, he provides rich details about his upbringing, his time in provinces like Erzincan and Damascus, his spiritual path, and his observations of the world around him, offering invaluable insights into the complexities of Ottoman society, particularly regarding the integration of Sufi orders into the state’s reform efforts.³²

Examining self-narratives offers critical insights into individual perspectives, contributing to the broader fabric of historical understanding. Kafadar’s work demonstrates how these narratives bring to light the lives of Ottoman figures often overlooked in traditional historiography.³³ Similarly, Terzioğlu identifies the abundance of primary materials produced by the Ottoman Sufi community, presenting a rich foundation for further inquiry. She observes that these sources, while abundant, are often approached with primarily descriptive methods within current historiographical frameworks. This material wealth includes unique works like Aşçı Dede’s memoir, which offers a personal yet instructive perspective within the Sufi tradition.³⁴

Parts of his memoir, written during his time in Edirne, were transcribed by one of his subordinates before his retirement, with some sections dictated orally by Aşçı Dede himself. The memoir is not a typical autobiographical work; it intertwines Sufi teachings with personal recollections. For instance, the first pages of the initial volume resemble a Sufi treatise, in which Aşçı Dede delves into Sufi concepts such as the *Hakikat-i Muhammediyye* (the Reality of Muhammad), *ma’rifetullah* (knowledge of God), the attributes and ethics of prophets and saints, the concept of the *insân-ı kâmil* (the perfected human), and the *fenâfillâh* (annihilation in God) spiritual station.³⁵ Following this introduction, he channels into his autobiography, recounting his birth, family, and early life. The subsequent sections blend personal memoirs with Sufi reflections, including anecdotes about his father and grandfather, his schooling, his philosophical musings on love, his marriage, and his initiation into the Mevlevî order. After these episodes of spiritual teachings, Aşçı Dede returns to reflect on his experiences.³⁶

³¹ A term coined by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser (d. 1970) and later transferred to English by Peter Burke, Selim Karahasanoğlu, “Ottoman Ego-Documents: State of the Art,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53 (2021), 301-308; Karahasanoğlu, “Ottoman Ego-Documents”, 301-308.

³² Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/140-149.

³³ Cemal Kafadar, *Kim Var İmiş Biz Burada Yoğ İken: Dört Osmanlı: Yeniçeri, Tüccar, Derviş ve Hatun* (İstanbul: Metis, 2009), 13-29.

³⁴ Derin Terzioğlu, “Tarihi İnsanlı Yazmak”, *Cogito* 29 (2001): 294.

³⁵ Nihat Azamat, “Aşçı İbrâhim Dede Mecmuası”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, III (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1991), 546-547; See for these foundational concepts in Ibn al-Arabi’s thought bkz. Mahmut Erol Kılıç, *İbnü’l-Arabi Düşüncesine Giriş, Şeyh-i Ekber* (İstanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2009), 233-250.

³⁶ Azamat, “Aşçı İbrâhim Dede Mecmuası”, 546-547.

As narrated in his memoir, Aşçı Dede was born with the name Halil İbrahim in 1828 in Kandilli, a neighborhood along the Bosphorus in Istanbul. His early life was affected by the dissolution of the Janissary Corps in 1826, where his father, Mehmed Ali, had been a Janissary but was later incorporated into the newly-formed army.³⁷ Aşçı Dede's formal education began at the Süleymaniye Rüşdiye, one of the significant educational institutions of its time, designed to train future Ottoman bureaucrats.³⁸ After graduating, his administrative career officially began in 1846 at the Rûznâmçe Kalemi (*the registry office*).³⁹ This entry into the Ottoman state apparatus marked the beginning of a lifetime of service across the empire, with each post shaping both his bureaucratic career and his understanding of Sufism, notably his engagement with the concept of *terakkî*. Moreover, tenure in the civil service seems to have equipped him with the capacity to write so prolifically and intrinsically.

His early career in the Imperial capital allowed Aşçı Dede to cultivate strong relationships with various state officials and spiritual leaders, and his diaries reflect the fusion of his professional and spiritual lives. As recorded in his memoir, despite his daily duties as a civil servant, he remained deeply committed to Sufi practices; he regularly attended sema ceremonies at the Kasımpaşa Mevlevîhâne, where he engaged with local dervishes.⁴⁰ His spiritual journey began in earnest when he joined the Mevlevî order and later expanded to other Sufi traditions, including the Kadiri and Nakşibendî-Hâlidî Sufi orders.

A pivotal moment in his spiritual path occurred in 1856 when he traveled to Erzincan and met the Nakşî-Hâlidî sheikh, Fehmi Efendi (d. 1880).⁴¹ Aşçı Dede soon became deeply involved in the Halidî order, describing his initiation's impact as follows: "I lit my candle from the flame of the Truth of Fehmi, igniting my eternal love with the flame of my soul."⁴² In 1867, while serving under Sheikh Fehmi, Halil İbrahim

³⁷ Azamat, "Aşçı İbrâhim", 546-547; The elite, political, and power structures generated around the Sufi lodges are a matter of crucial significance considering the strong infiltration of Sufi groups within the state system of the Ottoman Empire. This strong presence was one of the leading principles why the Bektashi Sufi order was abolished in 1826, as the Janissary Corps and Bektashi order became so inextricably linked that they were indistinguishable: Cemal Kafadar, "On the Purity and Corruption of the Jannisaries", *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 15:2 (1991), 273-280; Stanford S. Shaw, "The origins of Ottoman Military Reform: the Nizam-ı Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III", *The Journal of Modern History* 37:3 (1965), 291-306.

³⁸ The education provided in the *rüşdiyes* (secondary schools) established to train civil servants was later deemed insufficient, leading to the establishment of *sultanis* (higher schools), Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Osmanlı'da Eğitimin Modernleşmesi (1839-1908): İslâmlaşma, Otokrasi ve Disiplin* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 60-65.

³⁹ Azamat, "Aşçı İbrâhim", 546-547.

⁴⁰ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/20.

⁴¹ Fehmi Efendi's spiritual lineage traces back to Abdullah Mekki Erzincanî. For further information on the Naqshi-Khalidi Sufi path, see Süleyman Uludağ, "Hâlidîyye (Anadolu'da Hâlidîlik)", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1997), 15: 296-299.

⁴² "Şem'-i hakikat-i Hazret-i Fehmi'den kandilimi uyandırdım, sermaye-i ezel ü ebed olan aşkımı şulelendirdim" Aşçı Dede, *1*, 207.

was granted the title of *Dede*, a significant honor within the Sufi tradition, marking his role in leading and administering the space where spiritual gatherings were held.⁴³ The title *aşçı* (cook) was a family inheritance from his ancestors. Though Aşçı Dede did not serve as a cook in any of the *tekkes* where he lived, he was always entrusted with various services and responsibilities within the lodge.⁴⁴ In this sense, one could say that he was actively involved in the behind-the-scenes work of the *tekke* just as much as he was in his bureaucratic life. This dual engagement reveals how Aşçı Dede, navigating both realms with remarkable fluidity, not only served within the Ottoman bureaucracy but also embraced a multi-faceted role within the Sufi lodges.⁴⁵

Aşçı Dede's participation in various Sufi circles exemplifies his adaptability in engaging with multiple orders' spiritual teachings and social networks. Despite formal ties to the Halidî and Nakşibendî traditions, his enduring loyalty to the Mevlevî path served as a foundational element of his identity. His experiences in locations such as Erzurum and Damascus deepened his Sufi knowledge. They informed his navigation of the bureaucratic structures, creating a unique synthesis of spiritual insight and administrative skill.⁴⁶ In these regions, his duties ranged from administrative roles to interactions with local Sufi communities, where he deepened his mystical knowledge while simultaneously carrying out state functions. During his post in Damascus, Aşçı Dede is noted as having received his first disciple, Ahmed Tevfik Efendi (1262–?),⁴⁷ another bureaucrat—a milestone marking the onset of his role as a sheikh. Reflecting on this incident, Aşçı Dede composed a humble poem that reveals his self-awareness: “O Dede, even you are in need / How can you still strive to help others?”⁴⁸ This self-reflective verse underscores his mindfulness of his limitations and his commitment to serving others, a sentiment that bridged his Sufi identity with his public role. Such records and his diary entries illustrate how seamlessly his duties as a civil servant and his Sufi responsibilities intertwined, with neither role strictly confined to separate spaces or times. He describes one such instance in his memoirs:

“Thanks be to the Almighty. He did not further blacken my already dark face and accepted my supplication. The report was prepared and submitted to the *Serasker*'s office for review and presentation. Upon learning of the matter, Ahmed Tevfik Efendi,

⁴³ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/11.

⁴⁴ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/193.

⁴⁵ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/49.

⁴⁶ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 2/287.

⁴⁷ Ahmed Tevfik Efendi, son of Mehmed Emin Ağa, born in Damascus in 1862, civil registration officer in the district of Wadi al-‘Ajam, see BOA.DH.SAİD.d 95.93 (29 Zilhicce 1278/29 December 1862).

⁴⁸ “Kendi de muhtac ey dede/Kanda kaldı gayra himmet ede”, Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 2/287.

our son, came to me early the next morning in the office, hands still wet, and kissed my hand, expressing his thanks.”⁴⁹

These dual roles—as both bureaucrat and Sufi Sheikh—are vividly documented in Aşçı Dede’s memoirs, where he reflects on how his spiritual identity shaped, and was simultaneously shaped by, his administrative responsibilities.⁵⁰ His life provides a unique case study in the late Ottoman Empire, demonstrating how the Tanzimat reforms fostered a context where spiritual and secular spheres naturally intermingled rather than stood in rigid separation. The introduction of Western-inspired administrative structures without displacing Islamic values fostered an environment where these domains converged, evolving into what scholars later recognized as an Ottoman-Islamic synthesis. As Hanioglu notes, this period was less about directly imitating Western systems and more about accommodating diverse influences to address the empire’s internal and external challenges.⁵¹ This fluid navigation between roles underscores the Ottoman modernization project’s dual character, where figures like Aşçı Dede could simultaneously embody bureaucratic and spiritual duties.

While many Sufi bureaucrats of the period encountered similar intersections of administrative and spiritual roles, Aşçı Dede’s memoir reveals the intricate and sometimes challenging permeability between these spheres, illustrating the varied responses of Sufis to the evolving Ottoman context. Indeed, his reflections demonstrate that these roles often overlap. Aşçı Dede’s daily routine encapsulates this synthesis: mornings were devoted to spiritual practices, including lessons at local tekkes (Sufi lodges) or madrasas (Islamic schools) after dawn prayers. At the same time, afternoons were dedicated to bureaucratic responsibilities.⁵² His memoirs further reflect how these responsibilities were interwoven with his spiritual exercises—whether through morning *sema* rituals or evening *dhikr* gatherings—illustrating how Sufis operated within and alongside state structures within the nuanced fabric of late Ottoman modernization.

Aşçı Dede’s Sufi identity is multifaceted, as he defines himself as Nakşî-Mevlevî reflecting the various spiritual paths he engaged with throughout his life.⁵³ Like a Naqshbandi, he was devoted to the practice of *zikr* (remembrance of God). At the same time, his artistic soul resembled that of a Mevlevî, blending the inner and outer

⁴⁹ “Hamdolsun ki Cenab-ı Hakk’a bu kara yüzümü bir kat daha kara etmeyip niyazımı ihsan buyurdular. İşte mazbatası bu yolda yapıp makam-ı seraskeriye arz ve takdim olundu... Ahmed Tevfik Efendi oğlumuz bu işe malumat alıp hemen alessabah kaleme yanına gelip elleri yaş, ıslak olduğu halde elimi öpüp arz-ı teşekkür etti.” Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 2, 779-780.

⁵⁰ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/181.

⁵¹ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman*, 8-9.

⁵² Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/181.

⁵³ The chapter which briefly describes his life is titled as follows, “The Treatise on the Life of Aşçı Dede, the Nakşibendî-Mevlevî”, Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/1-21.

dimensions of Sufi practice.⁵⁴ Though he expressed different elements of these Sufi orders in his daily life, his memoir reveals that all these spiritual influences ultimately converged within the framework of Mevlevî thought.⁵⁵ His diary is filled with commentaries on the *Mesnevî* and quotations from Celâleddîn-i Rûmî (d. 672/1273), emphasizing a deep connection to the doctrinal aspects of Sufism that transcend individual orders.⁵⁶ The references to Muhyiddin İbnü'l-Arabî's (d. 638/1240) metaphysical ideas further indicate his engagement with broader Sufi metaphysical concepts.⁵⁷ It is evident that Ottoman Sufi thought, especially with its emphasis on love, unity, and *tawhid* (oneness), was the central pillar of Aşçı Dede's Sufi thought, a cornerstone of the intellectual landscape of Ottoman mysticism.

Throughout his postings in various empire regions, Aşçı Dede never lost sight of his educational commitment. In Erzincan, he continued to pursue studies in Arabic and Persian, often under the guidance of Sufi sheikhs, enhancing both his bureaucratic skills and spiritual knowledge. The Naqshbandi lodge he frequented in Erzincan doubled as a madrasa, where he received formal education in classical Islamic sciences, eventually earning him an *icâzet* (permission to teach) in some fields of study. His intellectual and spiritual growth was thus inseparable from his professional duties, each reinforcing the other in shaping his identity as a Sufi bureaucrat. Aside from his constant progress in religious sciences and meticulous recording in his memoirs, he was also a prolific writer. His works include a compilation of Persian to Turkish translations of Rûmî's *Mesnevî*, Hâfız-ı Şîrâzî (d. 792/1390 [?]) and Sâ'dî's (d. 691/1292) couplets, *Tercümetü'l-Farisiyye fî Tefsiri'l-Hakkiyye* (1889); a Persian grammar book, *Kavâidü'l-Fârisiyye* (1889).⁵⁸ Also, the memoir indicates that he had composed *Risâle-i Tercümetü'l-Hakayiki'l-Hakikat* while in the presence of Sheikh Fehmi, evident in Aşçı Dede's recording in his memoir asking his Sufi teacher: "Baba Efendi, something has been written about the truth, may we see it?"⁵⁹ He has also composed in his words "as a

⁵⁴ Within the Naqshbandi order, the practice of *dhikr* is traditionally conducted as a silent, inward recitation (*hafî*), reflecting a focus on internalized devotion rather than vocal expression. For detailed discussions, see Necdet Tosun, "Nakşibendiyye (Adap ve Erkan)", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2006), 32: 342-343.

⁵⁵ On Rumi's Sufi thought see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 1-14.

⁵⁶ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/14-17, 22-80; 2/637, 716-718; 3/1095-1103; 4/1588-1591; Reşat Öngören, "Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2004), 29:441-8; Many Naqshbandi sheikhs in Anatolia are known to have held a deep interest in the *Masnavi*, frequently incorporating its readings into their lodges as part of their spiritual instruction. For examples, see Ömer Faruk Yiğiterol, "Anadolu'daki Nakşi Şairlerin Meşnevî'ye İlgisi," *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3 31: 1 (2022), 227-241.

⁵⁷ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/95, 578; 2/642, 649, 771, 815, 826, 827, 843, 865, 932, 963, 997; 3/1189, 1257, 1269, 1489. Also, in the third volume, he has a whole section dedicated to İbnü'l-Arabî titled, "This section is about being graced with the favors of the Exalted Grand Master, the Honorable Muhyiddin İbnü'l-Arabî, may his secret be sanctified", 3/1491-1528.

⁵⁸ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/47-48.

⁵⁹ "Baba efendi, hakikate dair bir şey kaleme alınmış, acaba görebilir miyiz?", Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/49.

service to his fellow dervishes,” *Risâle-i Tercüme-i Ahvâl-i Aşçı Dede-i Nakşî Mevlevî* (First Volume 1885, Second Volume 1900).⁶⁰

Aşçı Dede, though not explicitly embracing a progressive mindset, consistently moved forward in both personal growth and intellectual development. While he may not have identified himself in such terms, his lifelong dedication to education and spiritual advancement reveals a clear commitment to self-improvement. Labeling him with contemporary notions of progress might be anachronistic, yet his life embodies continuous intellectual and spiritual refinement. His intellectual productivity and dedication to self-betterment illustrate how his spiritual and philosophical pursuits were deeply intertwined, positioning him as a Sufi and an active and contributing bureaucrat within the Ottoman Empire. However, Aşçı Dede’s understanding of progress was not limited to his personal experiences or the spiritual realm alone. It extended into his reflections on *terakkî* (*progress*), a concept he saw as an individual, spiritual journey and transformative ideal essential to the Ottoman intellectual landscape.

3. Aşçı Dede’s Conceptualization of *Terakkî* (*Progress*) in his Diary: Traditional Responses to the Contemporary Discussions

Aşçı Dede’s worldview sharply distinguished him from the Westernized bureaucrats and Mülkiye graduates prevalent in the Ottoman administration of his time. As Findley observes, Aşçı Dede’s core identity was that of a Sufi, approaching matters within the framework of his spiritual orientation.⁶¹ Educated to a secondary level—an education consistent with the expectations of his era—Aşçı Dede completed his studies at the esteemed Süleymaniye Rüşdiyesi before embarking on his bureaucratic journey at the Bâb-ı Seraskerî in 1847. Aşçı Dede’s writings reveal a figure for whom the ideals of *tekâmül* (spiritual maturation) and professional advancement coexisted within the Ottoman bureaucratic framework. His devotion to inner growth did not detract from his dedication to his career; instead, these parallel pursuits marked him as a Sufi bureaucrat in harmonious balance.⁶² Throughout his tenure as a civil servant, he remained deeply committed to his spiritual development, and this devotion subtly permeates his memoirs, revealing a life consistently aligned with his mystical aspirations.⁶³

As reflected in his diaries, Aşçı Dede’s concept of *terakkî* (*progress*) unfolds on two interconnected levels. As reflected in his diaries, this dual-layered approach illustrates his perspective on progress. The first layer pertains to the moral maturation of the *salik* (seeker), achieved through the *seyrüsülûk*, or Sufi training path, which

⁶⁰ An original copy can be found at Istanbul University Library Turkish Manuscripts no. 78-80; “ihvân-ı bâ-sefâya bir hizmet olmak üzere”, Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/49.

⁶¹ Carter Findley, “Into the ‘Tangled Magic Garden’ with Aşçı Dede İbrahim Halil,” *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 179-187.

⁶² Âmiran Kurtkan Bilgiseven, “Terakki ve Tekâmül”, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 60 (1985), 47-56.

⁶³ Aşçı Dede’s use of terms like *fakîr* and *miskîn* embodies a Sufi ideal of spiritual humility and detachment from worldly ambitions, presenting these terms not as signs of material poverty, but as expressions of inner tranquility and divine reliance, countering the Orientalist view that interprets them as passive or stagnant. Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/20–21, 537.

fosters individual spiritual development and ethical growth. According to Aşçı Dede, personal advancement applies to both professional and spiritual realms. Professionally, Aşçı Dede views *terakkî* as “moving forward,” a term he applies to his career and intellectual successes within the Ottoman bureaucracy. However, beyond worldly achievements, *terakkî* holds a much broader, deeply Sufi-oriented significance in his writings, symbolizing moral and spiritual maturation achieved through the rigorous path of *seyrüsülûk* (spiritual journey).⁶⁴ Here, *terakkî* represents the ascent of the self (*nefs*) through stages of purification and refinement, moving the seeker closer to divine proximity.⁶⁵ In Sufi discourse, *tedennî* (regression) and *tekâmül* (maturation) also mark this journey, where each step reflects the soul’s progress or setbacks in a cyclical return to its original, perfected state.⁶⁶ Reflecting on his self-discipline before bureaucratic duties,⁶⁷ Aşçı Dede writes, “I feel I am regressing (*tedennî*) when I should be advancing (*terakkî*),”⁶⁸ a reminder of his commitment to continuous moral and spiritual elevation.⁶⁹

In his contemplative reflections, Aşçı Dede presents a vision of *terakkî* that merges personal spiritual refinement with societal well-being. Here, societal advancement emerges as a natural outgrowth of individuals’ moral and ethical development, uniting personal virtue with collective welfare in a model that diverges from the era’s linear, secular conceptions of progress. Aşçı Dede uses terms like *tevekkül* (trust in divine will), *fakr* (ascetic poverty), and *rızâ* (submission) to articulate an inward form of *terakkî*, embodying a cyclical notion of spiritual maturation rooted in classical Sufi thought. For him, actual progress involves mastery over the *nefs* (self), not merely professional or material achievements, thus embracing both outward actions and inner spirituality—*zâhir ü bâtın terakkî* (progress of both outer and inner realms). This approach elevates *terakkî* to a holistic framework, where spiritual refinement

⁶⁴ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/57.

⁶⁵ The term *nefs*, in its dictionary definition, refers to the soul, spirit, life, life principle, essence, existence, human being, and desire. In Sufism, *nefs* is generally understood as the locus of a person’s negative traits and immoral qualities, serving as the source of harmful inclinations and impulses. Süleyman Uludağ, “Nefs”, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2005), 274.

⁶⁶ From the earliest Sufi writings, these terms have been consistently used to denote the continuous progress toward moral and spiritual perfection. Aşçı Dede emphasizes the necessity of disciplining the self (ego) and moving from deficiency and imperfection to goodness and spiritual maturity. Indeed, throughout many pages of his memoirs, these terms are frequently invoked, primarily to describe the various stages of spiritual advancement. In his memoirs, the concept of *terakkî* is particularly prominent in the earlier sections, where it appears in stark contrast to the modern progressive mindset of his time. Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/102, 189, 190, 257, 283, 319, 341. Additionally, *terakkî* in his work is used to denote an increase in divine love and affection, suggesting that a deeper emotional and spiritual intimacy with God is itself a form of progress. Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/433.

⁶⁷ Süleyman Uludağ, “Sülûk”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2010), 38: 127.

⁶⁸ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 1/189.

⁶⁹ In the path of the seeker’s spiritual journey (*sülûk*), one progresses through stages of self-purification and inner discipline, advancing through each level of the self (*nefs*). A lack of effort and breaking the commitment to ascetic practices (*riyâzet*) can lead to a decline in one’s spiritual state. Bkz. Abdülkerim Kuşeyrî, *Kuşeyrî Risâlesi*, ed. Süleyman Uludağ (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1991), 234,290.

supersedes purely social advancement, reflecting a worldview that prioritizes cyclical self-purification over linear ascent. Within this framework, *tevekkül* serves as a foundational element, challenging Orientalist interpretations that view Sufi reliance on divine will as passive or stagnating.⁷⁰ Instead, Aşçı Dede positions *tevekkül* alongside *sa'y ü gayret* (effort and striving), creating an active commitment that fosters both individual virtue and communal progress.⁷¹ Aşçı Dede's writings reveal a more profound perspective⁷² that aligns with the gradual transformation envisioned by figures like Namık Kemal (d. 1888) and Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (d. 1895), whose approaches to progress intertwined societal betterment with ethical self-cultivation.⁷³ In this intellectual milieu, where the pursuit of modernity was intrinsically linked to a revival of tradition, Aşçı Dede's interpretation of *terakkî* emerges as a multidimensional journey integrating personal virtue with societal responsibility and the collective well-being of the nation. Aşçı Dede's reflections reveal an admiration for Japan's model, likely drawn to this example as it appeared to embody a harmonious application of both layers of progress he valued

3.1. A Non-Western Model of Progress: From a Sufi's Hidden Garden to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)

Aşçı Dede's first two volumes of memoirs generally avoid explicit commentary on political matters, with his connection to the events of his time mostly emerging subtly between the lines. However, in the third volume of his recently published memoir, which covers the early 1900s, Aşçı Dede provides a detailed account of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).⁷⁴ In the nearly 1,000 pages of his extensive memoir, Aşçı Dede scarcely touches on contemporary issues, aside from the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897, and completely avoids discussions on topics that preoccupied many of his

⁷⁰ Hafez, *Inventing Laziness*, 15.

⁷¹ For a text from this period emphasizing the importance of effort and diligence for national development, see Ali Emiri-i Âmidî, "Vatan Muhabbeti, Sa'y ve Gayret, İlim", *Âmid-i Sevdâ Mecmuası* 4 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amidî, 1325), 49-55; For information on the journal *Say ü Amel* published during the Second Constitutional Period, see Kenan Demir, *Osmanlı'da İktisâdî Dergiclik (1857-1923, Doktora Tezi)* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2014), 93-94; for the concept of *Personal initiative* introduced into Ottoman discourse through French thought during the same period and the contributions of Sufi circles to this approach, see Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "From Concept to Novel: Tâhirülmevlevî's (1877-1951) Sufi Engagement and Critique of Teşebbüs-i Şahsî (Individual Initiative) in the Late Ottoman Era", *Kadim* 23 (2024), 23-50.

⁷² The issue of factors hindering progress gained significant importance across the Islamic world in the late 19th century, particularly influenced by Ernest Renan's (d. 1892) views. The relationship between Islam and progress, often framed through an Orientalist lens, became a central concern for Ottoman intellectuals. Renan's work *L'islamisme et la science* argued that Islam and the racial characteristics of Muslims inherently prevented scientific thought. In response, Namık Kemal (d. 1888) strongly opposed Renan's claims, particularly in his essay *Avrupa Şark'ı Bilmez* and later in the *Renan Müdafaaamesi* published in 1910, where he fiercely defended the compatibility of Islam and science: Zeynep Çelik, *Avrupa Şark'ı Bilmez: Eleştirel Bir Söylem (1872-1932)* (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 21-22.

⁷³ Ümit Meriç Yazan, *Cevdet Paşa'nın Toplum ve Devlet Görüşü* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1992), 21.

⁷⁴ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Göziyle*, 3/1389-1409.

contemporaries, such as Westernization, modernization, and identity.⁷⁵ What does this silence indicate? Could it be that what might be perceived as indifference was, in fact, a deliberate stance? A possible answer lies in Aşçı Dede's sudden excitement and his memoir's lengthy analysis and discussions during the Russo-Japanese War. This shift suggests that Aşçı Dede's thoughts were shaped by a vision of *terakkî* (progress) that was deeply rooted in his own cultural and traditional context, offering a distinct perspective on modernization that aligned with his values. This contrast in Aşçı Dede's approach—his silence on most contemporary issues followed by his intense engagement with the Russo-Japanese War—may reflect a selective and purposeful engagement with topics he deemed relevant to his spiritual and cultural worldview.

As an alternative to European civilization, Aşçı Dede highlights how Japan had rapidly advanced along the path of progress, achieving significant economic and commercial success. He closely examines Japan's swift development across several key areas: economics, administration, military, commerce, communications, and transportation. Much of the detailed information he provides appears to have been drawn from *Asır* newspaper, which Aşçı Dede followed regularly.⁷⁶ This section describes the battlefronts and the critical turning points of the war and offers insights into Japan's geographical, political, and historical context. Yet, Aşçı Dede's recounting of these events starkly differs from the language used by historians, intellectuals, or politicians of the time. The "hidden garden" of Aşçı Dede offers an inner, contemplative perspective, viewing events through a Sufi's spiritual understanding.

The search for a non-Western model of modernization became especially significant for Ottoman intellectuals during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909).⁷⁷ Abdülhamid's policies, which emphasized the preservation of Islamic and Eastern roots, fueled an increased interest in the Japanese model of modernization within Ottoman discourse. Ottoman intellectuals closely observed Japan's success in adopting Western technology while maintaining its Eastern identity. Japan's ability to modernize without losing its cultural essence became a source of inspiration. While Japan was viewed as a brutal society during the Tanzimat period, by the Hamidian era, it was seen as a model of successful cultural synthesis.⁷⁸ This fascination with Japan emerged when the Ottoman Empire lost control over key trade routes, experienced military defeats, and faced economic decline, which deepened debates about the

⁷⁵ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Süfinin Göziyle*, 2/976-994.

⁷⁶ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Süfinin Göziyle*, 3/1391.

⁷⁷ Renée Worringer, *Ottoman Imagining Japan: East, Middle East and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 111-152.

⁷⁸ For the various approaches to modernization with the late Ottoman intellectual discourse and Japan's place as a model, Renée Worringer, "Sick Man of Europe or Japan of the Near East?: Constructing Ottoman Modernity in the Hamidian and Young Turk Eras", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36 (2004), 207-230; Selçuk Esenbel, "Türk ve Japon Modernleşmesi: 'Uygarlık Süreci Kavramı Açısından bir Mukayese", *Toplum ve Bilim* 84 (2000), 19; Ali Babahan, "Modernization and Ideological Divergence among the Bureaucracy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Suggestion for a New Classification", *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* 8 (2021), 32-38.

empire's future.⁷⁹ The Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) offered Ottoman thinkers an authentic model of modernization that resonated with their quest for progress without Western domination.⁸⁰ Japan's development became a vital model even for the most secular and social-Darwinist factions of the Young Turk movement.⁸¹ These groups reevaluated Japan's successful modernization strategies, considering how the Ottoman Empire could implement similar reforms. In this context, it was the first time that the Young Turks, who had traditionally looked to Western societies as models, began to pay attention to the potential for progress in Eastern cultures.

Japan's victory in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War marked a turning point, as its nation-centered model of modernization increasingly became a point of reference in Ottoman discourse.⁸² Globally, this triumph was viewed as the first time an Asian nation, symbolized by Japan's yellow-skinned people, had defeated a white, Christian world power.⁸³ This conflict's most significant global impact was the breakdown of the previously unshakable belief in Western hegemony, progress, and modernity.⁸⁴ In Aşçı Dede's memoirs, the concept of civilization often emerges in connection with Japan.⁸⁵ He speaks of Japan as an alternative to European civilization, highlighting the Japanese nation's rapid advancement on the path of progress, achieving high economic and commercial prosperity.⁸⁶ Aşçı Dede meticulously examines Japan's swift progress across several key domains, including its economy, administration, military, commerce, communications, and transportation.

A key reason for Aşçı Dede's emphasis on Japan lies in his belief in the applicability of its model of progress, notably as he distanced himself from earlier

⁷⁹ For the loss of Ottoman Empire economic power, Seven Ağır, "Peripheralization of the Ottoman Economy, 1838-1908", *Political Economy of Development in Turkey*, eds. Emre Özçelik and Yonca Özdemir (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 47-78.

⁸⁰ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 333-370.

⁸¹ Nader Sohrabi, "Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew About Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44:1 (2002), 53; Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasî Fikirleri 1895-1908* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1964), 287-288.

⁸² Cemil Aydın, "A Global Anti-Western Moment? The Russo-Japanese War, Decolonization, and Asian Modernity", *A Global Anti-Western Moment? The Russo-Japanese War, Decolonization, and Asian Modernity*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 213.

⁸³ For the details of western discourse on the Japanese race during the second half of the 19th century, Rotem Kowner, "Lighter Than Yellow, But Not Enough: Western Discourse on the Japanese Race, 1854-1904", *The Historical Journal* 43:1 (2000), 103-131.

⁸⁴ The presentation of Japanese modernization as a model began during Japan's victory over China in 1895, when Western media portrayed Japan as an exceptional case where Westernization and reform efforts had been successfully implemented, Aydın, "A Global Anti-Western Moment?", 214-215.

⁸⁵ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1396.

⁸⁶ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1396-1397; the comparison of Japanese and Turkish-Ottoman modernization processes and the image of Japan within the Islamic world have become significant topics of discussion, Selçuk Esenbel, *Japon Modernleşmesi ve Osmanlı: Japonya'nın Türk Dünyası ve İslam Politikaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2012); Hasan Aksakal, "Japon ve Türk Modernleşmelerinin Karşılaştırmalı Tarihi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme: Gerçekten 'Japon Mucizesi' vs. 'Türk Usulü' Mü?," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 27 (2012), 83–108.

Western-centric development models. At the onset of the conflict, Aşçı Dede's Sufi vision emerges in his memoir, describing his appointment as a spiritual commander during the Russo-Japanese War (1905).⁸⁷ He claims that his spiritual support and prayers contributed to the success of the Japanese army, underscoring his belief in the power of prayer and remembrance (*zikir*) to invoke divine assistance in influencing the outcome of worldly events. For him, Japan held special significance as a symbol of divine favor and spiritual success, embodying the qualities he admired as a Sufi.⁸⁸ Aşçı Dede, as mentioned in his memoir, was similarly engaged in providing spiritual support through prayers during the Ottoman-Greek War (1897), reflecting his deep belief in the capacity of Sufi spiritual efforts to alter the course of conflict:

“In the previous Greek war, we were graced with the favor and blessings of the saints, both outwardly and inwardly, serving as their herald. Certainly, I have no doubt, my dear, that in this Japanese war as well, I will again receive the blessings and favor of the king of saints for the heralding I have done.”⁸⁹

In his view, divine grace and power played a significant role in Japan's victories against Russia. He interprets the events of the war through a spiritual lens, attributing Japan's triumph to divine intervention. According to Aşçı Dede, God bestows sovereignty upon whom He wills and takes it away from whom He wills, as noted in the memoir, “God gives sovereignty to whom He wills, and takes it away from whom He wills (...) He exalts the Japanese and humiliates Russia, taking sovereignty from Russia and giving it to the Japanese”.⁹⁰ For him, Japan's success manifested in God humbling Russia and elevating the Japanese.

In Aşçı Dede's worldview, the events observed in the phenomenal world (*şehadet alemi*) are divine decrees that manifest through God's will, a perspective influenced by both Rumi and İbnü'l-Arabî.⁹¹ This understanding reflects a deeply Sufi approach, where outward occurrences are seen as expressions of a higher, divine order, continuously unfolding in alignment with God's will and purpose. This perspective balances the divine gaze that looks down from above with the passive human gaze looking upward, seeking refuge in God's will while observing worldly events. As a Sufi, Aşçı Dede interprets occurrences through the principle of *tevhid* (*oneness of God*), guided by expressions such as *lâ fâile illallâh* (there is no actor but God) and *lâ havle*

⁸⁷ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1390-1391.

⁸⁸ Probably an issue that Aşçı Dede read, the first page fully covered with the news from Japan's success: “Haftalık Tarihçe,” *Asır (Selanik)*, 22 Şubat 1904/9 Şubat 1319.

⁸⁹ “Geçen Yunan muharebesinde tellallık olmak üzere zahir ü batın erenlerin lutf u ihsanına mazhar olmuş idik. Elbette bu sefer de Japon muharebesinde eylediğimizi tellallık için erenler şahının mazhar-ı lutf u ihsanları olacağımda şük ve şüphem yoktur azizim”, Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1393.

⁹⁰ “Allah dilediğine mülk verirsin, dilediğinden mülkü alır (...) Japonları aziz eder, Rusya'yı zelil eder, Rusya'dan mülkü alıp Japonlara verir”, Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1391.

⁹¹ According to İbnü'l-Arabî, God (Hak) is the mirror of the universe. In it, the beings of the world see their images as they exist in the divine knowledge, Suad el Hakîm, “Âlemin Aynası”, *İbnü'l-Arabî Sözlüğü*, trans. Ekrem Demirli (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2005), 34.

velâ kuvvete illâ billâh (there is no power or strength except with God). Regarding Japan's success, he reflects on the verse from the Quran (8:17): "It was not you who killed them, but it was Allah Who did so. Nor was it you who threw, but it was Allah Who did so (...)"⁹² This approach reflects his inclination to view every event, big or small, from a divine perspective.⁹³ Aşçı Dede's interpretation is rooted in the divine and the human realm. On the one hand, he acknowledges God's will in unfolding events; on the other, he recognizes human engagement with divine aid and intervention. This is evident in the Sufi concept of *himmet*, which refers to divine assistance or spiritual power that can influence worldly matters. From this intermediary realm of *himmet*, a spiritual space where divine and human agency meet, Aşçı Dede speaks and evaluates the world around him.

The *Mesnevî* story that Aşçı Dede recounts here offers notable insight. In the tale, when a man prays for his neighbor's donkey to prosper, God grants him a donkey of his own. This symbolism raises a question: could Aşçı Dede's prayers for Japan also carry an unspoken hope for the Ottoman Empire, whose existence was increasingly threatened?⁹⁴ Aşçı Dede was likely acutely aware of the empire's fragile state. Yet, in the narrative oscillating between the 'I' and the "we," multiple layers of meaning emerge. Within his personal "I," the future of the entire empire may well have been concealed. This ambiguity becomes even more pronounced in a poem he wrote, inspired by Japan's remarkable victory at Port Arthur.⁹⁵ The poem opens a window into the space where the boundaries between his identity and the fate of the state blur, revealing his deep connection to both his spiritual journey and his nation's future: "Come on then/Let's dance/So that fate smiles upon us/And we may succeed."⁹⁶ This celebration is abruptly followed by a moment of self-accountability, where Aşçı Dede begins to examine his *nafs* (self). This interplay between external events and personal reflection highlights Aşçı Dede's ability to move fluidly between the material world and spiritual contemplation, thus offering a perspective where both realms are in constant dialogue.

⁹² Enfal, 8:17; Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1393.

⁹³ Ahmed Avni Konuk, *Fusûs'u'l Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*. ed. Mustafa Tahralı, Selçuk Eraydın (İstanbul: M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2000), 2: 135.

⁹⁴ Aşçı Dede recounts a story of a man praying for his neighbor's donkey to increase, which in turn earns him divine favor as God grants him his own. This tale, aligning with Sufi values of the interconnectedness of *zahîr ü batın* (outer and inner), serves as a parallel to Aşçı Dede's prayers for Japan's prosperity, subtly expressing his hope that similar blessings might extend to the Ottoman Empire through selfless goodwill and divine grace. See Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1395.

⁹⁵ Port Arthur, located in northeastern China, was a key strategic military stronghold during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Its significance lies in its control over access to the Yellow Sea, and its capture by Japan marked a decisive victory that shifted the balance of power in East Asia, signaling Japan's emergence as a dominant military force, Rotem Kowner, "Becoming an Honorary Civilized Nation: Remaking Japan's Military Image during the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905", *The Historian* 64:1 (2001), 19-38; Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle*, 3/1392.

⁹⁶ "Haydi bakalım/Göbek atalım, Feleğin hoşuna gitsin/Muvaffak olalım" Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle* 3, 1395.

In Aşçı Dede's detailed accounts, certain aspects of Japan's progress stand out prominently. Chief among these is the rapid development of railway networks and the corresponding rise in passenger transport capacity. Strengthening transportation routes throughout the country is highlighted as a critical element of a centralized and modern state.⁹⁷ Similarly, Japan's expanding communication networks—evidenced by the growth of postal and telegraph offices nationwide—are notable for their role in the nation's evolving infrastructure. These advancements in transportation and communication were also key investment areas for the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the 19th century, particularly under Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). A prime example is the Hejaz Railway (1908), designed to solidify the empire's connection between its Middle Eastern territories and the central Ottoman authority.⁹⁸ Aşçı Dede also focuses on Japan's military advancements, noting its increased capacity in arms and army strength and developing its defense industry.⁹⁹ According to him, the modern and well-trained Japanese army had reached a level where it could compete with European numbers and technical ability standards. This observation is particularly significant when considering the Ottoman military's declining power and technical limitations during the same period. Japan's army exemplified successful modernization for the Ottoman military and offered a model for effective military reform.¹⁰⁰

Aşçı Dede also notes that Japan had, in the same period, established a formidable naval force, producing seven battleships, seven armored cruisers, and numerous torpedo boats constructed in both European shipyards and its facilities. In the economic sphere, Japan's progress was exemplified by the formation of 1006 joint-stock companies, 13 insurance companies, and 17 trading companies in 1894 alone, all backed by a combined capital of 500 million francs.¹⁰¹ At that time, 120 banks in Japan were conducting substantial financial transactions, and Japanese capitalists were both financing and operating railway construction. Industry was also advancing rapidly: in 1880, only 20 large factories employed 20,000 workers, but within 15 years, this number had grown to 3,200 factories employing 30,000 workers.¹⁰² In Tokyo alone, a single spinning mill

⁹⁷ Japan's communication policies also emerge as an important model, Sırrı Emrah Üçer, "19. Yüzyılda Yarı-Çevre Posta Bağımlılığı Tipi: Osmanlı Postasına Karşılaştırmalı Perspektiften Bir Bakış", *Toplumsal Tarih* 338 (2022), 63-64.

⁹⁸ For an evaluation of the Hejaz Railway within the framework of Abdülhamid's Islamist and authoritarian regime, Murat Özyüksel, *The Hejaz Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Industrialisation and Ottoman Decline* (London: I.B. TAURIS, 2014), 6.

⁹⁹ Japan's military advancements during the Meiji era became one of the key aspects closely followed by the Ottoman Empire in terms of strengthening its own army and developing warfare strategies. This influence was particularly evident after the Russo-Japanese War, Hüseyim Hilmi Aladağ, "Osmanlı Devleti Zaviyesinden 1904-1905 Rus-Japon Harbi", *SEFAD* 36 (2016), 579-606.

¹⁰⁰ Yuzbaşı Mustafa Kemâl, *Çuşima Muharebesi* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Bahriye, 1912); Mehmet Sadık, *Rus Japon Muharebesi Tecrübelerinden* (Dersaadet: Artin Asaduryan ve Mahdumları Matbaası, 1914).

¹⁰¹ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Süfinin Gözüyle*, 3/1396.

¹⁰² For the Japanese silk trade, Özgür Teoman ve Cumali Bozpınar, "XIX. Yüzyılda Osmalı İmparatorluğu ve Japonya'da Sanayisizleşme: İpekli İmalatı Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Değerlendirme", *Marmara Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi* 42:1 (2020), 170-171.

employed 3,000 workers. Japan's emphasis on maritime trade was also noteworthy; while there were no shipping companies 36 years prior, 1,315 steamships and 25 sailing vessels were engaged in commercial activity by this period. Aşçı Dede pens Japan's significant advancements in agriculture, particularly in the increase in mulberry trees used for silk farming, which he saw as an indicator of agricultural development. The scale of trade also grew significantly, with the volume of trade rising from 347 million francs in 1880 to 1.326 billion francs by 1902.¹⁰³ For Aşçı Dede, Japan's rapid advancement became a concrete example of *terakkî* (progress) in the material sense. Japan's swift progress across industry, agriculture, communications, military, and economic sectors exemplified Aşçı Dede's vision of genuine advancement, offering a model for the Ottoman state to emulate—one that demonstrated the potential for modernization without sacrificing cultural identity.¹⁰⁴ By examining Japan's achievements in such detail, Aşçı Dede sought to present it as a model for the Ottoman state to follow, highlighting the possibility of successful modernization without losing cultural identity.

Aşçı Dede's reflections on Japan's modernization serve as a revealing lens through which he critiques the Ottoman Empire's reform efforts while also expressing hope for its future. His fascination with Japan's rapid progress underscores his belief that the Ottomans could achieve similar success by learning from Japan's model. Japan's capacity to integrate Western advancements in military, education, and administration while preserving its cultural identity strongly resonated with Aşçı Dede's vision of progress. Focusing on synthesizing tradition with modernity, he saw Japan's success as a concrete example of a nation's ability to modernize while preserving its unique heritage. His meticulous comparison of Japan's achievements with the Ottoman Empire's struggles in areas such as military reform, education, and bureaucratic organization reflects his desire for the Ottomans to address their shortcomings. Aşçı Dede's attention to Japan's material progress and his careful analysis of statistics and developments illustrates his belief that Japan's success offered more than inspiration—it provided a roadmap for Ottoman modernization. Ultimately, Aşçı Dede envisioned a future where the Ottoman Empire could achieve comprehensive progress by synthesizing modern reforms with its cultural and spiritual foundations.

¹⁰³ Aşçı Dede, *Çok Yönlü Bir Süfinin Gözüyle*, 3/1397.

¹⁰⁴ For a comparative discussion on Japan and Turkey's process of industrialization, Selim Deringil, "Intellectual Encounters with the West: The Cases of Turkey and Japan", *New Perspectives on Turkey* 35 (2006), 65-83.

Conclusion

Aşçı Dede's memoir offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of both spiritual and material progress (*terakkî*) through the lens of a Sufi deeply embedded in the Ottoman bureaucratic and cultural world. By intertwining his spiritual journey with his observations on Ottoman modernization and global events, such as Japan's rapid rise, Aşçı Dede provides a unique perspective that bridges tradition and reform. His reflections on *terakkî* are not confined to spiritual or material realms but highlight the interconnectedness of moral, intellectual, and societal development. Among late Ottoman Sufis, Aşçı Dede's memoir is particularly striking as it is a rare example of a self-narrative. This personal account captures historical events and offers intimate insights into his inner world. His language is imbued with Sufi terminology, reflecting his spiritual path and efforts to reconcile his bureaucratic role with his mystical journey. Concepts such as *miskîn* (poor in spirit) and *fakîr* (destitute) appear frequently in his descriptions of himself, signaling his humility and spiritual modesty. This personal and reflective tone allows readers to witness Aşçı Dede's internal dialogue, in which worldly events are constantly filtered through a spiritual lens and progress is measured by material success and one's advancement in the Sufi path. His use of language reveals a delicate balance between the external world of statecraft and the inner garden of his mystical contemplations.

Aşçı Dede, while profoundly shaped by Sufi thought, addresses the urgent matters of his era. His admiration for Japan's modernization stems from the conviction that a non-Western model, which honors cultural and spiritual values, can guide the Ottoman Empire. This perspective differs from Western ideas of modernization, promoting the concept of material progress in harmony with spiritual integrity. His analysis of Ottoman reforms and admiration for Japan's integration of technological advancement with cultural preservation highlights his conviction that genuine progress is comprehensive, merging external achievements with internal development. Aşçı Dede portrays Japan's success as a triumph of spirit, indicating that their modernity is intricately linked to cultural and moral fortitude. His work connects Sufi tradition with contemporary movements, skillfully integrating personal introspection with socio-political critique, offering insight into his inner experiences and the broader historical landscape. Through his depiction of Japan as a paradigm of harmonious advancement, Aşçı Dede enhances our understanding of how non-Western societies can address the challenges of modernity without compromising cultural identity.

Teşekkür/Acknowledgements:

I would like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Cemal Kafadar, the head of Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and my supervisor, for his invaluable guidance and profound mentorship throughout my postdoctoral research project. His insightful contributions were crucial in the conceptualization and execution of this study, conducted during my tenure as a visiting researcher at the center from 2022 to 2024.

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