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## Erken Modern Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Alternatif Bir Panoraması: Kutbüddîn en-Nehrevâlî'nin el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye fi'r-rihleti'l-Medeniyye ve'r- Rûmiyye'sinde Harabeler ve Hastalık

*An Alternative Panorama of the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: Ruins and Sickness in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī's Journey to the Sublime Porte*

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#### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Kutbüddîn en-Nehrevâlî'nin 1557-1558 yıllarında Mekke'den İstanbul'a yaptığı seyahatini anlatan el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye fi'r-rihleti'l-Medeniyye ve'r-Rûmiyye (Medine ve Rum Diyarları Seyahatindeki Muhteşem Faydalar) adlı eserin yakın okumasını yapacaktır. En-Nehrevâlî (1511/12-1582) bu ziyareti, Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ı görmek ve ondan Medine'deki Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin başında olan Delü Piri'nin görevden alınmasını istemek için gerçekleştirdi. Daha önceki çalışmalar, el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye'yi en-Nehrevâlî'nin hayatı veya on altıncı yüzyıl İslam ve Osmanlı toplumu hakkında bilgi sağlayan tarihi bir kaynak olarak incelemiştir. Bu makale ise bir edebiyat çalışması gibi el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye'nin yakın okumasını yaparak onu bir anlatı olarak inceleyecek ve eserdeki bazı metinsel dinamikleri ortaya koyacaktır. En-Nehrevâlî, İskenderiye ve Kahire gibi şehirlerin harap bir duruma düştüğünü bildirir. Ayrıca, İskenderiye'den bazı mermer kalıntılarının İstanbul'a nakledildiğini ve bu kalıntıların Süleymaniye'nin inşası için kullanıldığını belirtir. İstanbul, Süleymaniye Camii gibi ihtişamlı yapılarıyla harap duruma düşmüş Kahire ve İskenderiye'den oldukça farklı gözükmektedir. Ancak, İstanbul hakkındaki bölümde bazı detaylar daha dikkatli incelendiğinde farklı bir tablo ortaya çıkar. Şehirde, Hürrem Sultan ve Ahmet Çelebi gibi önemli kişiler hastalıklara yakalanır ve hatta vefat eder. En-Nehrevâlî Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu açık bir şekilde eleştirmese de onun eserinde imparatorluk ideal bir düzene sahip değildir; çünkü İskenderiye gibi şehirler harap bir duruma düşmüştür ve Arapça diliyle şiirine önem veren Ahmet Çelebi kendisini saray içi anlaşmazlıkların içinde bulmuştur. El-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye, imparatorluğun ihtişam ve nizam ile özdeşleşen bir devri hakkında harabelerin ve hastalıkların ön plana çıktığı alışılmadık bir panorama ortaya koyar.

#### ABSTRACT

This study gives a close reading of Journey to the Sublime Porte (al-Fawā'id al-saniyya fi al-riḥla al-Madaniyya wa-l-Rûmiyya) by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī (1511/12-1582). Journey to the Sublime Porte narrates the journey that al-Nahrawālī undertook from Mecca to Istanbul in 1557-1558. The earlier scholarship has analyzed this work as a historical source to generate insights on the sixteenth-century Islamic world or on al-Nahrawālī's life. Instead, like a work of literary criticism, this article analyzes Journey to the Sublime Porte to flesh out important textual patterns in the travelogue. Al-Nahrawālī claims that cities such as Alexandria and Cairo have fallen into a ruinous state. He also notes that some ruins in Alexandria were transported into Istanbul so that they can be used for the construction of the Süleymaniye Complex in Istanbul. With its splendid constructions such as the Süleymaniye, Istanbul seems different from Cairo and Alexandria that have fallen into ruins. However, a close attention to descriptions of Istanbul reveals another picture. In Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī witnesses that prominent people like Hürrem Sultan and Ahmet Çelebi fall sick and even die. Al-Nahrawālī does not openly criticize the Ottoman Empire; however, his work suggests that the empire has not achieved an ideal order, because cities like Cairo and Alexandria fell into ruin and someone like Ahmet Çelebi who shows a high respect for Arabic language and poetry becomes embroiled within court conflicts. For a period often associated with order and control, this article pays attention to a travelogue that provides an alternative panorama of the early modern Ottoman Empire that foregrounds ruins and sickness.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Bu çalışma, Kutbüddîn en-Nehrevâlî'nin 1557-1558 yıllarında Mekke'den İstanbul'a gerçekleştirdiği seyahatini anlatan el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye fi'r-rihleti'l-Medeniyye ve'r-Rûmiyye (Medine ve Rum Diyarları Seyahatindeki Muhteşem Faydalar) adlı eserinin yakın okumasını yapacaktır. En-Nehrevâlî (1511/12-1582), merkezileşme ve bürokratikleşme ile özdeşleşen erken modern Osmanlı devri hakkında harabelerin ve hastalıkların ön plana çıktığı alışılmadık bir tablo ortaya koyar. Makale, iki kısımdan oluşmaktadır. İlk kısımda, eserin İstanbul'u ihtişamlı ve kozmopolit bir yapıya erişmiş bir imparatorluk başkenti olarak tasvir ettiği gösterilecektir. İkinci kısımda ise eserde bazı önemli detaylara dikkat edildiğinde İstanbul'un zannedildiği kadar ihtişamlı olmadığı ve imparatorluğun bazı önemli sorunlarla yüzleştiği ortaya konacaktır. Bu makale, daha önceki çalışmalardan iki açıdan farklıdır. İlki, eser incelemesinde kullanılan metodolojik yaklaşımdır. Önceki araştırmaların aksine, el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye, sadece en-Nehrevâlî'nin ziyaret ettiği mekanlar ve Osmanlı hanedanlığına verdiği hediyeler hakkında bilgi sağlayan tarihî bir kaynak olarak analiz edilmeyecektir. Ayrıca, o dönem veya en-Nehrevâlî'nin hayatı hakkında bilgi üretmek için incelenmeyecektir. Bu makale, bir edebiyat çalışması gibi eseri bir anlatı olarak inceleyecek ve metindeki önemli dinamikleri ortaya koyacaktır. İkincisi ise kaynağın kendisi hakkındadır. Erken modern dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu hakkında seyahat yazılarını inceleyen akademik çalışmaların neredeyse tamamı, Evliya Çelebi'nin veya Avrupalı seyyahların eserleri üzerinedir. El-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye ise Seyahatnâme ve Tabakât ül-memâlik ve derecât ül-mesâlik gibi eserlerden farklıdır; çünkü Mekke'de köklü bir aileden gelen en-Nehrevâlî, imparatorluk hakkında yeni bir bakış açısı sunar. En-Nehrevâlî, Avrupalı seyyahların aksine bir Doğu-Batı karşılaştırması yapmaz. Ayrıca, hayatı boyunca İskenderiye, Kahire, Medine ve İstanbul gibi şehirleri bir kereden fazla ziyaret etmesi bu şehirlerin geçirdiği değişimleri kaydetmesini, Türkçe bilmesi ise Osmanlı bürokrasisi hakkında önemli gözlemlerde bulunmasını sağlar.

En-Nehrevâlî'nin hayatı hakkında kısa bir bilgi verip eserin özetini çıkardıktan sonra, bu çalışma el-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye'yi analiz edecektir. En-Nehrevâlî, Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'dan Medine'deki Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin başında olan Delü Piri'yi görevinden almasını istemektedir; ancak eserin sonunda Kanunî Sultan Süleyman, bu talebi reddeder. Bu talebin reddedilmesi Kanunî'nin Mekke'yi görmezden geldiği anlamına gelmez. Kanunî Sultan Süleyman ve Hürrem Sultan, Mekke'ye önemli yatırımlar yaptı ve oradaki mimarının gelişmesini sağladı. Ayrıca, Kanunî Mekke'de önemli yapılar inşa ederek İslam dünyasının halifesi olduğunu vurguladı. Her ne kadar eserinde bazen bu yapılardan bahsetse de en-Nehrevâlî yolculuk güzergahında bulunan İskenderiye ve Kahire şehirlerinin harap duruma düştüğünü belirtir. 1536-1537 yıllarında İstanbul'a yaptığı ilk seyahat sırasında İskenderiye'yi görmüş olan en-Nehrevâlî, İskenderiye'nin eskiye nazaran çok daha haraplaşmış olduğunu vurgular. İstanbul ihtişamlı yapılarıyla bu iki şehirden oldukça farklıdır. Tursun Bey'in belirttiği üzere, Fatih Sultan Mehmet İstanbul'a ilk girdiğinde İstanbul yıkık dökük bir haldeydi. Ancak, Kanunî'nin zamanında İstanbul özellikle Süleymaniye Külliyesi gibi yapılarıyla ihtişamlı bir şehre dönüşmüştür. Evliya Çelebi ve Mimar Sinan gibi pek çok kimse Süleymaniye hakkında övgü dolu sözler sarf etmiş ve bu külliye imparatorluğun ihtişamını ve yenilmezliğini temsil eden bir yapı olarak görmüştür. Her ne kadar en-Nehrevâlî bu seyahat yazısını Süleymaniye Külliyesi'nin inşası biterken ortaya koymuşsa da eserinde bu külliye neredeyse hiç bahsetmez. Bu konu hakkında verdiği tek bilgi ise İskenderiye'deki mermer kalıntıların İstanbul'a nakledilmesi ve bu kalıntıların Süleymaniye'nin inşası için kullanılmasıdır. Başta, en-Nehrevâlî'nin seyahati, Arapça methiyelerde gözlemlenen yolculuk modeline uyuyor gibidir; zira bu şiirlerde şair harabelerle dolu ıssız mekanlardan geçip huzur ve güvenlik temin eden hükümdarın divanına varır. İstanbul başka şehirlerden elçiler kabul eden ve görkemli yapıları olan kozmopolit ve ihtişamlı bir şehir olarak gözükür.

Ancak, İstanbul hakkındaki kısım daha dikkatli bir şekilde incelendiğinde şehrin zannedildiği kadar ihtişamlı olmadığı fark edilir. Şehir hastalıktan muzdariptir ve Hürrem Sultan ile Ahmet Çelebi gibi önemli kişiler vefat etmiştir. En-Nehrevâlî de İstanbul'a vardığında hastalanır. Ayrıca, en-Nehrevâlî Hürrem Sultan'ın ölümünden sonra imparatorlukta anlaşmazlıkların ortaya çıktığından söz eder. Saçları kırılmış Sultan Süleyman yeşil kaftan giymiştir; böylece, ilk yıllarındaki heybetinin aksine sultan ölümü bekleyen hüzünlü birisi olarak tasvir edilir. Ahmet Çelebi, el-Mütenebbî'nin beytine üç dize ekleyerek en-Nehrevâlî'ye Arapça bir tahmis okur. En-Nehrevâlî, Ahmet Çelebi'den gayet etkilenir; ancak sonra Ahmet Çelebi'nin kazasker Sinan Efendi ile anlaşamadığını, aniden hastalandığını ve genç yaşta vefat ettiğini öğrenir. Bütün bu detaylar, İstanbul'un kasvetli havasını pekiştirir. En-Nehrevâlî sultanı över ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu açıkça eleştirmez. Yine de eseri, her ne kadar imparatorluk merkezileşmeye çabalasa da bu çabaların her zaman istenilen sonucu vermediğini gösterir. İmparatorluk ideal bir düzene sahip değildir; çünkü İskenderiye gibi şehirler harap duruma düşmüştür ve Arapça diliyle şiirine önem veren Ahmet Çelebi kendisini saray içi anlaşmazlıkların içinde bulmuştur.

Sonuç olarak, düzen, kontrol ve ihtişam ile özdeşleşen bir dönem için en-Nehrevâlî, eserinde erken modern Osmanlı İmparatorluğu hakkında alışılmadık bir tablo ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Böyle bir sonuca varmak ise bu esere farklı bir metodolojik bir açıdan yaklaşıldığında mümkün olabilir. El-Fevâ'idü's-seniyye, sadece en-Nehrevâlî'nin ziyaret ettiği yerler ve sunduğu hediyeler hakkında bilgi veren bir tarihî kaynak değildir. En-Nehrevâlî'nin seyahat yazısı, aynı zamanda on altıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu hakkında değişik bir panorama ortaya koyan zengin bir anlatıdır.

### Introduction

During his stay in Istanbul, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī (1511/12-1582) meets Celalzâde Mustafa Çelebi (d. 1567), who makes the following remark about his work *Tabakât ül-memâlik ve derecât ül-mesâlik* (Layers of kingdoms and levels of routes): “The sultan (God the exalted protect him!) has under his dominion 1,200 fortresses. Whenever in mentioning one of them, I have employed a description and rhyming prose, especially in reference to [its] grandeur, strength, and sturdiness” (al-Nahrawālī, 2005, pp. 199-200).<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Çelebi’s work is one of the many sixteenth-century texts that celebrate sturdy constructions that were built during the rule of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566). Al-Nahrawālī’s work on his travel between Mecca and Istanbul, *Journey to the Sublime Porte (al-Fawā’id al-saniyya fî al-riḥla al-Madaniyya wa-l-Rūmiyya)*,<sup>2</sup> starkly contrasts with these texts, because it mentions almost nothing about these constructions and instead extensively describes ruins across the Ottoman Empire.

In particular, the lack of any reference to the Süleymaniye Complex in al-Nahrawālī’s descriptions of Istanbul is striking, because al-Nahrawālī returns from Istanbul to Mecca in 1558, which is also the year when the Süleymaniye was completed. This complex signified for many the Ottoman Empire’s longevity and even its indefatigability. For example, Mimar Sinan told Sultan Süleyman that the Süleymaniye Complex “will remain on the face of the earth until the Day of Judgment” (Evliya Çelebi, 1896, p. 157). Likewise, Mimar Sinan carved in stone Qur’anic passages about paradise above the lateral gates of the Süleymaniye Mosque (Necipoglu, 2010, p. 217). Yet al-Nahrawālī remains surprisingly silent about this complex. While he lists some architectural constructions in his travel between Mecca and Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī provides almost no information about Istanbul’s monuments. Only in Alexandria during his return from Istanbul, he provides the single information regarding the Süleymaniye. He observes that marble ruins in Alexandria were transported to Istanbul so that these ruins can be used for the construction of the Süleymaniye Complex (al-Nahrawālī, 2005, p. 217).

This particular observation on Alexandria is taken as a point of departure to understand the panorama of the Ottoman Empire that al-Nahrawālī’s work provides. Ruins from Alexandria become incorporated into the Süleymaniye Complex that signifies for many the empire’s glory and longevity. Istanbul seems like a central hub into which resources and people from different parts of the empire flow. At the same time, al-Nahrawālī notes that cities such as Cairo and Alexandria have fallen into a ruinous state. Thus, the text features a juxtaposition between ruins of Alexandria and Cairo and construction projects of Istanbul that signify political longevity. Furthermore, even though Istanbul may at times seem to have achieved the height of its glory, this article also demonstrates that al-Nahrawālī does not give readers a rosy picture of Istanbul.

Unlike many other early modern texts such as Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatnâme* and Celalzâde Mustafa Çelebi’s *Tabakât ül-memâlik ve derecât ül-mesâlik*, al-Nahrawālī’s work suggests that the empire is not experiencing a golden age. The earlier scholarship has focused on early modern travel writings on the Ottoman Empire by European authors (Longino 2015) or the Ottoman courtly and cultural elite such as Evliya Çelebi. This study gives a close reading of *Journey to the Sublime Porte* to provide new insights on vast transformations of the early modern Ottoman Empire from an alternative vantage point. Al-Nahrawālī’s work reveals key insights on power dynamics among

<sup>1</sup> In regards to citations from *Journey to the Sublime Porte*, this study uses Richard Blackburn’s English translation, which is accompanied with a CD of the Arabic manuscript. For Arabic transcriptions, the article follows the IJMES guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> A more literal translation of the Arabic title is “The Splendid benefits in the journey of Medina and the Rum lands.” Since Richard Blackburn decided to translate the title as *Journey to the Sublime Porte*, this article also uses Blackburn’s English title when referring to the text.

different communities within the empire. Unlike many other works from the same time period, *Journey to the Sublime Porte* suggests that the increasing centralization efforts of the empire that turn Istanbul into a central hub may not have achieved a complete success. Instead, *Journey to the Sublime Porte* fleshes out characteristics of entropy—ruins, sickness, dilapidation, and death—as features of a time period that much of the current scholarship often characterizes as orderly and centralized.

*Journey to the Sublime Porte* includes crucial information for historians. After all, many historians such as Richard Blackburn (1979), Adem Arıkan (2009), and Guy Burak (2017) have cited al-Nahrawālī's sources to provide important insights on the sixteenth-century Islamic world. Al-Nahrawālī's extensive descriptions of gifts can be useful for material historians and his description of the sickness that kills Hürrem Sultan would be of interest for historians of medicine. However, this article does not analyze *Journey to the Sublime Porte* as a historical source to generate new information on the sixteenth-century Ottoman and Islamic society. Likewise, it does not analyze this text to provide more biographical information on al-Nahrawālī. Rather, this study, like a work of literary criticism, gives a close reading of *Journey to the Sublime Porte* as a narrative and hence maps out key textual patterns in the work. In particular, it provides important insights on the structure of the text and representations of gifts and ruins, both of which have had important significations in the Arabic literary heritage.

At first, *Journey to the Sublime Porte* seems to be useful for researchers only because it provides a list of places that al-Nahrawālī visited, people that he met, and gifts that he gave to these people. However, analyzing the structure of the work as a whole also provides crucial insights. Before he comes to Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī encounters ruins, which symbolize death and dilapidation in classical Arabic poetry with which he had deep familiarity. When al-Nahrawālī visits Istanbul, he presents precious gifts to palace officials and ceases writing about ruins. Initially, the travelogue's structure seems to have key similarities with the bipartite structure of Arabic panegyric poetry, in which the poet often travels through barren lands full of ruins and then reaches the court of the political ruler who assures longevity and munificence. Yet a more careful close reading undermines this initial observation. When he is in Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī writes about sickness and death, undermining the city's veneer of longevity. The description of Istanbul as a place of danger and sickness demonstrates that al-Nahrawālī's voyage does not fit into the archetypal pattern of travel that starts at barren lands and ends at a land of safety and longevity.

The first section of this article focuses on representations of ruins and gifts and demonstrates that Istanbul seems to function as a central hub that affirms the Ottoman Empire's might and glory. The second section of the article shows, however, that when one focuses on particular details in descriptions of Istanbul, the city does not seem as glorious and perfect as a visitor might initially assume it to be.

### **Istanbul as a City of Glorious Constructions**

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī was a man of great learning. Most likely born in Nahrawala in the sultanate of Gujarat of western India, al-Nahrawālī went to Mecca when his father took up a teaching position there. Al-Nahrawālī had the opportunity to study with the most prominent scholars and attained an excellent command of Turkish. He wrote numerous important works such as *Journey to the Sublime Porte* and *Lightning over Yemen: A History of the Ottoman Campaign (1569-71)* (1573, *al-Barq al-Yamānī fī al-faḥ al-'Uthmānī*). He went to Istanbul for the first time in 1536-1537 to seek assistance against the Portuguese military presence that threatened the Gujarat. In *Journey to the Sublime Porte*, al-Nahrawālī visits Istanbul to secure the removal of the Istanbul-appointed official, Delü Piri, the garrison commander at Medina who had a notorious

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reputation for disrespecting the sharifs, the Ottoman local vassal rulers. Yet, al-Nahrawālī fails his mission, as Sultan Süleyman does not accept al-Nahrawālī's request.

One should not interpret this refusal as Sultan Süleyman's complete negligence of Mecca. Zekeriya Kurşun (2017) and 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Majīd (2018, pp. 748-749) have already written about the numerous construction projects that were built in Mecca during the Ottoman period. Sultan Süleyman repaired Ka'ba, renewed the Arafat water channel, and constructed in Mecca a madrasa for four legal schools. All these acts show the perspicacity of a ruler who understood the importance of marking his presence in Mecca and putting emphasis on his role as the caliph. He also renovated the hajj route extending from Rumelia to Syria and fortified desert caravanserais. Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Sultan Süleyman, had similarly grand ambitions. She wished to become associated with Zubayda bint Ja'far (d. 831), the wife of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809). Zubayda bint Ja'far was remembered particularly for constructing a series of wells, reservoirs, and caravanserais along the hajj route from Baghdad to Mecca and Medina. Hürrem Sultan renovated the conduit of 'Ayn Zubayda, which carried water to the Ka'ba from Mount Arafat. An endowment deed dated 1560 referred to Hürrem Sultan as "the Zubayda of [that] age" (Necipoğlu, 2010, p. 270). Construction projects that declared the Ottoman Empire's longevity served to invoke a glorious past. They also generated affiliations between the Ottoman Empire and the Abbasids.

Al-Nahrawālī sometimes writes about empire's changing architectural landscape in his travelogue: "Shortly before the time of the afternoon prayer, we came to a fort by the sea erected by Sultan Süleyman as a means of protecting the road. . . .So the sultan dispatched people to this place, erected in it an imposing citadel containing shops, and channeled to it fresh water" (2005, p. 103). However, shortly after he writes about Sultan Süleyman's construction projects, he starts to describe ruins: "We then crossed over an old bridge, before which was a large fortress in ruins and, near it, another strong point. Then we forded more streams before coming to Kıran Kapı, which is a large dilapidated gateway, a narrow pass between two mountains" (2005, pp. 103-104). Al-Nahrawālī repeats the image of dilapidation and ruins within the short span of two sentences: The bridge is old, the fortress in ruins, and the gateway dilapidated.

The vast geographical span of al-Nahrawālī's journey gives him the opportunity to visit cities such as Cairo, Damascus, and Alexandria, which once experienced glorious moments throughout history; however, these cities have fallen into ruins. During his return back from Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī observes: "Alexandria is a splendid city with magnificent marble-tiled structures. But it is now in a ruinous state, its populated part being less than a tenth of it. It used to possess wondrous things that were mentioned in the books of history" (2005, pp. 215-216). It was not just al-Nahrawālī who observed Alexandria's ruination. Al-Nahrawālī quotes an anonymous poet who makes similar remarks:

Concerning it the poet says,  
The stranger [*nazīl*] to Alexandria is not offered the food of hospitality,  
Save for [sea] water and the viewing of the [Pillar of] Columns.

So, don't long to see a crust of bread,  
For Alexandria has no one offering that (2005, p. 218).

The word "stranger" [*nazīl*] already suggests that the poet does not feel a sense of familiarity with Alexandria. Unlike history books that praise Alexandria's former glory, these lines describe Alexandria as a deserted land. The exhausted traveler who craves socialization after going through deserted spaces should not expect "food of hospitality." Even if al-Nahrawālī meets in Alexandria few shaikhs and qadis who receive him hospitably, the city has been etched into poetic imagination as a deserted milieu.

Furthermore, al-Nahrawālī had traveled to Alexandria and Istanbul also in 1536-1537 when he sought assistance from Ottomans against the Portuguese military presence in Gujarat. Therefore, he can point out crucial transformations that Alexandria underwent since his first visit:

I observed Alexandria to have become more ruinous than when I had known it previously; for I passed through there whilst going to Turkey (al-Rūm) in the year 943 [1536-7], accompanying the *'umdat al-malik* (support of the sovereign), the vizier to the late Sultan Bahādur, lord of Gujarāt (God almighty show them mercy!). Among my companions then was our master Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-'Usaylī, one of Egypt's outstanding scholars and famous sons. At that time, we strutted about in youth's costume and, with the hand of *jeunesse*, plucked off life's sweet fruit (2005, p. 219).

Later, al-Nahrawālī describes Cairo in similar terms: "I witnessed there the transformation of the community at large in most recent times and the triumph of ruination over the city's quarters and their inhabitants" (2005, p. 223). *Journey to the Sublime Porte* was written around the same time with *Tabakāt ūl-memālik*; however, there is a clear distinction between the two texts. While Celalzāde Mustafa Çelebi celebrates the increasing number of construction projects in Ottoman lands, al-Nahrawālī points out the extensive dilapidation throughout the empire.

At the same time, Istanbul, unlike Cairo and Alexandria, does not seem to be in a ruinous state in al-Nahrawālī's account. According to *Tarih-i Ebū'l Feth* (History of the Conqueror) by Tursun Bey, Sultan Fatih the Conqueror saw many ruins when he first entered Istanbul (Tursun Beg, 1978, p. 64); however, Istanbul seems to have changed significantly since then. Likewise, Pierre Gilles, who came to Istanbul in 1544 as a member of the French diplomatic embassy, writes about the city's dizzying transformation:

Everything is so changed that not only are we unable to say what ancient things remained above ground in the memory of the living, but also, we cannot say what ancient things can be said to be above ground in the course of a single summer. Indeed, every day the ancient things are so laid to waste that an old man does not know what a boy sees. Not only are ancient buildings destroyed, but even their place names have been lost (Gilles, 2008, p. 224).

Istanbul, as a city that includes no ruins, has a completely new, glossy veneer, as it becomes the center of many construction projects.

Al-Nahrawālī notes that ruins from Alexandria are transported to Istanbul so that they can be used for the construction of the Süleymaniye Complex (al-Nahrawālī, 2005, p. 217). Ruins can be used as *spolia* for construction projects that signify the empire's might. As Gülru Necipoğlu notes:

The elaborate search for columns and precious marble panels . . . augmented the imperial prestige of the [Süleymaniye] mosque and its paradisiac allusions. The waqfiyya, which refers to the patron of the mosque as "the second Solomon and Alexander of the age," compares it to the legendary Iram (an ancient columnar garden palace built by the emperor Shaddad to imitate paradise on earth, the columns of which were reused by Alexander). The appropriation of marbles associated with Solomon (from Cyzicus and Baalbek), with Alexander (from Alexandria), and with the Byzantine emperors (from Constantinople) echoed Justinian's use of *spolia* in the Hagia Sophia (Necipoğlu, 2010, pp. 220-221).

Ruins can evoke a feeling of decay and wistfulness. However, when these ruins are transported into the towering imperial center and become used for construction projects, they serve the ambition of the Ottoman sultan who wishes to affiliate with great kings such as Solomon, Alexander, and Justinian. Indeed, "Ottoman visual politics played an important role in the construction of a cohesive communal identity" (Necipoğlu, 2010, p. 40). At the same time, the construction of the Süleymaniye incorporates *spolia* from different parts of the empire.

Thus, one observes a stark contrast between Istanbul with its glorious constructions and other cities such as Alexandria with their ruinous state. Al-Nahrawālī's journey from Alexandria to Istanbul recalls many Arabic panegyric poems in which the poet undertakes a similar journey. In the panegyric ode, the poet faces ruins that remind one of time's destructive effects in *nasīb*, then undertakes an arduous journey, and finally praises his sovereign in the *madīh* section. The

poet eulogizes the ruler as a guarantor of stability who resists against ruination (Sumi, 2004, p. 117). *Journey to the Sublime Porte* at first seems to have a similar structure. In the beginning, al-Nahrawālī encounters ruins in places like Alexandria. These ruins remind one of the passing of time. Later, when he reaches Istanbul, al-Nahrawālī ceases speaking about ruins. Thus, the Ottoman Empire has the image of an ideal Islamic polity.

This particular image of the empire is further substantiated when al-Nahrawālī presents numerous and lavish gifts to the Ottoman sultan and his envoy. Prominent rulers have often expected to receive gifts from their visitors. *Book of gifts and rarities (Kitāb al-hadāyā wa-l-tuḥaf)*, a work from the eleventh century that provides invaluable perspectives about gifts and related correspondence exchange in Islamic history, emphasizes how gifts become preserved for centuries in palaces and undergo no dilapidation. For example, the following sentence from *Book of gifts and rarities* makes a juxtaposition between the transience of people's lives and the longevity of gifts: "When Shirawayh died, things remained the same, and when [his son] Ardashir b. Shirawayh died, things [again] remained as they were" (1996, p. 225). Al-Nahrawālī also extensively describes the palace decorum when he presents gifts to palace officials. After he offers gifts to Sultan Süleyman, one reads: "They dealt out all of that into the hands of pages (*'acem-i oglan*), two pieces to each; and the pages stood before the chamber in a long file, while a detailed register of that was recorded" (2005, p. 189). Like ruins, gifts come from different parts of the empire. Similarly, like the construction of the Süleymaniye, the act of registering gifts shows the high level of bureaucratization and order that the empire has attained.

#### **Istanbul as a City of Sickness and Death**

Although al-Nahrawālī first seems to emphasize the sense of control and centralization that characterizes the early modern Ottoman period, a closer reading of the sections in which he describes Istanbul reveals an alternative perspective. Al-Nahrawālī exposes the prevalence of death and sickness at the heart of the empire. First, al-Nahrawālī gets sick immediately when he arrives to Istanbul. Interestingly, many years before al-Nahrawālī visited Istanbul, the Meccan Sharif Muḥammad Abū Numayy II had also gotten sick and he caught this sickness from his envoy who had visited Istanbul. In 1539, the sharif sent an envoy to request the removal of another garrison appointed by the Governor of Cairo, Sulaymān al-Khadīm. Plague was prevalent in Istanbul at that time. Many people in the envoy eventually got sick and died. The sharif's own son Aḥmad too got afflicted with sickness. Although Aḥmad returned to Hijaz safely, he could never recover from his illness to his father's immense agony (De Gaury, 1951, p. 129). Many years later, history repeats itself. The head of an envoy designated to request the removal of Delü Piri, al-Nahrawālī himself, gets sick. Many travel writings during the sixteenth century may have emphasized the Süleymaniye Complex's longevity and Istanbul's glory. In contrast, Istanbul stands out as a milieu of sickness in *Journey to the Sublime Porte*.

Al-Nahrawālī's sickness is not too severe. At the same time, Istanbul is the only place throughout *Journey to the Sublime Porte* in which al-Nahrawālī comes across the death of other people. Hürrem Sultan passes away during his stay in Istanbul, as she dies from colic because she consumed fresh fish. Al-Nahrawālī notes that when she died, "cohesion split apart and dissension occurred" (2005, p. 201). He notes several times that many people in the palace wished to keep Hürrem Sultan's death as a secret: "Although each day I attended the grand vizier in his council (*dīvān*), the sultana's illness had worsened, something I was unaware of since they were keeping it secret" (2005, pp. 193-194). After hearing about her death, al-Nahrawālī informs the reader about her background: "It is alleged that she was of Russian nationality. She was the servant of Sultan Süleyman's paternal aunt, Hancerlu Sultan, who brought her to Süleyman when he was still a prince (*ṣehzāde*) and offered [*a'ṭat*] her to him" (2005, p. 201). *Journey to the Sublime Porte* also uses the

term “offered” [*a‘tā*] to describe the act of giving gifts to palace officials. This particular word choice then suggests that Hancerlu Sultan introduces Hürrem Sultan to Sultan Süleyman almost like a gift. Like gifts that come from different geographical places to the imperial capital, Hürrem Sultan who has Russian nationality testifies to the cosmopolitan imperial identity that Ottomans wish to claim at the height of their power. However, Hürrem Sultan’s sudden death also suggests that the empire cannot maintain its flawless veneer of might and glory. Even Istanbul cannot ward off sickness and demise that seems to have already characterized cities such as Alexandria and Cairo.

Ahmet Çelebi, the son of Ebussuud Efendi (1490-1574), shares a similar fate with Hürrem Sultan. Ahmed Çelebi tells al-Nahrawālī that he transformed the ode of the prominent 10<sup>th</sup> century Arab poet, al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), into a quintain or *takhmīs* (*tahmis*)—a poetic form in which three hemistiches are added by a poet to each *bayt* (two hemistiches) of an existing poem. Al-Nahrawālī notes that one quintain particularly stayed in his mind:

The pearls of my necklaces o’er the horizons have I strewn.  
And my instructive thoughts have I set to verse in the path of poetry.  
Who, then, would my equal be, when such are my singular gems of poesy?

Time is but one of my odes’ reciters;

Whenever I a poem utter, Time becomes a reciter (2005, p. 182).

The first three lines belong to Ahmed Çelebi, while the last two are those of al-Mutanabbī. Through comparing poetry with necklaces, these lines describe poetry as akin to an object. Just like ruins that are used as columnar pillars for the construction of the Süleymaniye Complex, al-Mutanabbī’s lines turn into a foundation for another Ottoman work, Ahmet Çelebi’s *takhmīs*.

Al-Mutanabbī, like Zubayda, is a key figure that allows Ottomans to forge affiliations with Abbasids. At the same time, al-Mutanabbī lived in a politically tumultuous age when the Abbasid caliph was unable to defend the empire against foreign powers such as Byzantines. Margaret Latkin notes that “[i]n an era when the dominant poetic mode was panegyric, and when poets made their living by eulogizing wealthy and influential patrons, the diminishment of the powerful cultural center of Baghdad was significant” (2008, p. 13). Ahmet Çelebi’s *takhmīs* hinges upon the work of another poet who witnessed the decline of the Abbasid caliphate. Furthermore, al-Mutanabbī never had a stable, long-standing relation with his patrons. Like al-Mutanabbī, Ahmet Çelebi also experiences calamities. He too dies soon after composing this *takhmīs*. The kazasker Sinan Efendi invokes God against Ahmed Çelebi upon a tension between the two; afterwards, “the strength of this learned young man’s youth [snapped just] when he was flourishing and in bloom; and thus was his life’s source of light eclipsed [just] when it was more perfect than the radiant full moon” (2005, p. 186), causing much agony for his father, Ebussuud Efendi. Ahmet Çelebi confronts the same fate with Hürrem Sultan. Sultan Süleyman too will soon face the same end. The sultan, who has white hair and wears a green woolen garment when al-Nahrawālī sees him (2005, p. 190), leads a much more humble and ascetic life than before. Süleyman the Magnificent seems to have fully transformed since his earlier rule when he wore an ostentatious Venetian golden helmet to signify his empire’s splendor in 1532 (Necipoglu, 1989), around the time in which al-Nahrawālī first visited Istanbul. All these examples demonstrate that just as glorious constructions fall into ruins, magnificent people can experience deteriorating health and ultimately death.

Despite the prevalent sense of decay and ruination in *Journey to the Sublime Porte*, al-Nahrawālī’s work suggests that poetry is a key treasure that can stand the test of time. Although al-Mutanabbī and Ahmet Çelebi may face horrible calamities and pass away, they both assume a key authority when they claim that their words shape what time recites. *Journey to the Sublime Porte* seems to put more value on poetry than on architectural construction. While al-Nahrawālī

makes no mention of the Süleymaniye Complex as he writes about Istanbul, he lavishly praises Ahmed Çelebi's works: "I was greatly moved by it: from its cup was I intoxicated by licit wine which reproached the daughter of the vine; and from the garden of its language did I harvest blossoms of culture and refinement" (2005, p. 182).

Just as the Süleymaniye Complex incorporates ruins from diverse parts such as Alexandria, the *takhmīs* that Ahmet Çelebi recites builds upon verses from al-Mutanabbī's poem. In other words, both the complex and the *takhmīs* are imperial works that incorporate elements from earlier periods and different cultures. Nevertheless, *Journey to the Sublime Porte* suggests that construction projects ultimately confront with the fate of dilapidation, as al-Nahrawālī already observed in Cairo or Alexandria. However, poetry resists dilapidation and, in Ahmet Çelebi's words, "time becomes its reciter." Therefore, the Ottoman Empire, like any political entity, could experience demise; however, true works that stand the test of time could be works like Ahmet Çelebi's *takhmīs* that builds upon al-Mutanabbī's work. *Journey to the Sublime Porte* ultimately seems to value poetry composition more than architectural construction, perhaps because Ahmet Çelebi's work pays homage to the Arabic poetic heritage. Despite what Sultan Süleyman may have wanted, al-Nahrawālī chooses to record Ahmet Çelebi's words rather than describe glories of the Süleymaniye Complex. At the same time, not everyone shows the same level of respect for Ahmet Çelebi, as one also reads that Sinan Efendi wants to invoke God against Ahmet Çelebi.

Although his text undermines the glossy veneer of the Ottoman Empire, the structural analysis of this article does not claim that al-Nahrawālī had a strong dissent with the sultan. In the beginning of his travelogue, al-Nahrawālī praises Sultan Süleyman as the "august and magnificent ruler, master of the kings of Arabs and non-Arabs alike, pre-eminent sultan of the age, pride of the Ottoman monarchs, Sultan Süleymān Ḥan (God almighty make him triumphant and render permanent his rule!)" (2005, p. 2). In addition, al-Nahrawālī praises Hürrem Sultan as "the founder of splendid pious foundations in the two exalted Holy Places, in Jerusalem, and in many of the grand cities [of the state]" (2005, pp. 200-201). Later in life, al-Nahrawālī had a prodigious career under the Ottoman rule, which appointed al-Nahrawālī to a qadī position in a prestigious madrasa in Mecca. When al-Nahrawālī writes *al-Barq al-Yamānī fī al-faḥ al-'Uthmānī (Lightning over Yemen: A History of the Ottoman Campaign [1569-71])* about the military campaign of Ottomans in Yemen, he eulogizes Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) as the righteous defender of the shariah and hopes that his rule extends to all parts of the world (al-Nahrawālī, 1967, p. 6).<sup>3</sup>

Al-Nahrawālī then does not openly provide a critique of the Ottoman sultan and his rule; however, *Journey to the Sublime Porte* provides a less than perfect panorama of the empire. The empire strives for more centralization as it undertakes construction projects and appoints military garrisons in places like Medina. Yet, al-Nahrawālī's work also suggests that these centralization efforts do not always achieve the desired outcomes. After all, cities like Cairo and Alexandria fall into a ruinous state, the appointed garrison in Medina disrespects the Sharif, and Ahmet Çelebi, who shows a high command of Arabic language and poetic heritage, does not necessarily receive the high veneration that he deserves. This panorama of dilapidation is hard to see from the vantage point of Istanbul, which boasts of an increasingly robust architecture; however, al-Nahrawālī can point out such a portrayal of the empire through his travel itinerary that includes places such as Mecca, Cairo, and Alexandria.

Cornell Fleischer observes that the late 1530s and 1540s saw the "energetic compilation, codification, and modification of imperial ordinance, its regularization, universalization, and

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Nahrawālī finished the first version of *Lightning Over Yemen* in 1573 and later completed the slightly modified second version. Al-Nahrawālī praises Sultan Murad III in the second version.

reconciliation with the dictates of the Holy Law” (1992, p. 167). He also notes that this period witnessed “the rapid extension and deepening of the machinery of government based on new articulated principles of hierarchy, order, meritocracy, regularity, and replicability of basic structures based on function rather than on persons” (1992, p. 167). The descriptions of ruins and sickness in al-Nahrawālī’s travelogue provide the reader with a different panorama of the early Ottoman period as opposed to the image of unity and control that the empire’s centralization efforts aimed to propagate. *Journey to the Sublime Porte* may initially seem to provide only a list of gifts that al-Nahrawālī offered to the sultan and charter the itinerary from Mecca to Istanbul, but a close reading of the text suggests that the work provides many deep insights. Scholars can perceive these insights when they cease viewing the travelogue only as a source of historical data. *Journey to the Sublime Porte* is also a rich narrative that offers important reflections on the empire.

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