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# Invisible Ink: Erasures and Revelations of Valide Han

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Büyük Valide Han is the place for everyone who is poor, fallen, dilapidated and looking for a stage. It is attractive not for its historical importance and architectural features, but for the misery that has stuck with it for many years[;] and of course, despite everything, it is photogenic. It is like the adage “cami yıkılmış da mihrap hala yerinde [the mosque is in ruins, but the mihrab still stands proud].”

—*Tarihi Belleğimiz İçinde Büyük Valide Han* (p. 91)

The question of erasures in Istanbul is what we might call a “softball” question—a question that practically answers itself. There is no doubt that there has been erasure, and it is not hard to stumble onto cases of it. There are so many cases and kinds of erasure in Istanbul that the difficulty lies only in finding an instance that can be clearly tracked, and the process of erasure documented with empirical evidence. Even when physical structures have been allowed to survive, the cognitive frame that would allow them to make sense has been annihilated for anyone outside the scholarly community, and often even for those within it. So when we speak of erasure, we are talking not just about the erasure of buildings and people, but also about words, narrative frameworks, and even cognitive paradigms premised on this erasure. Once we find a case that can be tracked with empirical evidence, once we have tracked it and brought it and the process by which it was erased to light, the erasure becomes so obvious that it is hard to believe it was never noticed before. In this way, the patterns of memory, the formulation of research questions, and the ways of thinking that allowed the erasure to happen in the first place become just as interesting as the thing or the people that were erased. In what follows, I consider the case of Valide Han—the ways it and its history have been studied and discussed, erased and partially reimagined, and the specificities with which it has been associated. Furthermore, I demonstrate the actors and social processes that spring to the surface when we closely examine some of the empirical evidence about it from the Ottoman era, in this case the early nineteenth century.

The physical structure of Valide Han has persisted despite all odds, surviving natural disaster, active ruin, and passive neglect since the mid-seventeenth century. Scholars of social and cultural/historical memory in Turkey have crafted a historical personality for Valide Han, marking Valide Han as unique, in large part because of its nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of having been occupied by some kinds of “others”—Iranians and, to some extent, Armenians. In working to bring these aspects of Valide Han’s history to light, scholars are responding to some of its erasures. But there are still some missing episodes to the story of Valide Han. The actors and the social relations to which it was home in an era that is consistently passed over by scholars—the early nineteenth century—have been erased in ways that are emblematic of the much larger process of erasure in Istanbul.

The personality of Valide Han—as a haven for the downtrodden of late, and as home to mysterious Iranian/Shi’i Others in the past—has been constructed out of at least three historical narratives or strains of scholarship about the building: that of cultural and historical memory in the republican present; that of the Ottoman(ist) past, looking at the hans as sites of local economy and guild activities, and leaving the path from the Ottoman past to republican present unexamined; and that of a Persian/Iranian story, which is at once rather exoticizing (when written about by Ottomans and republican-era Turks) and puts Valide Han into a different and larger regional or even global context, while also perching between present and past. All these stories and lenses that have gone into the construction of Valide Han’s personality serve to perpetuate the erasure of non-Muslims, and particularly the Greek-speaking Ottoman community, the Rum. Studies of this space treat it as Muslim by default (albeit in a broad sense that makes room for “heretical” Shi’i and foreign Iranian/Azeri Muslims), and by doing so, they not only occlude and erase Rum inhabitants but also preclude a more nuanced understanding of Ottoman economy and society. This is

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all strikingly demonstrated when we dip into the well of invisible ink on Valide Han in the Ottoman archives, which we shall do below.

### Büyük Valide Han

Büyük Valide Han is the largest of the historic hans (urban caravanserais) in Istanbul, in the “han district” of the Historic Peninsula. As a han, it was a mixed-use space: a place of residence for migrants and passers-through; a site of production, storage, and wholesale and retail sale for artisanal and imported goods; and a self-contained community with a barber shop, coffeehouse, and tavern, where services were provided for those living in and occupying its rooms (*oda*). Valide Han is located on the main thoroughfare (Çakmakçılar Caddesi) leading down the hill from Mercan and the İç Bedesten and Sandal Bedesteni, the fifteenth-century core of the Grand Bazaar (fig. 1-2). This han, a key point in the urban fabric of the Historic Peninsula, “was ideally situated to serve as the crossroad where overland and transoceanic merchants could meet.”<sup>1</sup> Proceeding down the hill from Valide Han, we arrive at Sirkeci and ultimately the Yeni Cami and Mısır Çarşısı (formerly known as Valide Çarşısı), built shortly after Valide Han in the seventeenth century. This quarter is home to significant architectural works patronized by sultans, valide sultans, and grand viziers from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. It lies, for example, between the Süleymaniye and Nuruosmaniye complexes (the latter built after Valide Han itself)—and Valide Han is just down the hill from Etmeydanı, once the central barracks for the Janissary corps and now the campus of Istanbul University. It is an area associated with the core, not just of the economy of the Ottoman capital and, by extension, the empire, but of Ottoman/Muslim hegemony. It is not an area that features churches or synagogues, and thus is not associated with a communal presence of non-Muslims. And yet their presence in several eras, and likely continuously through the nineteenth century, is documented and would have been vital to the everyday running of the economy. This raises questions about the erasure of the many individual non-Muslims who will appear below and were recorded in seemingly

Figure 1–2: Views from  
Büyük Valide Han.  
Photos: Christine Philliou.

1 Rhoads Murphey, “The Growth in Istanbul’s Commercial Capacity, 1700–1765: The Role of New Commercial Construction and Renovation in Urban Renewal,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 61, no. 1/2 (2008): 154.

invisible ink in Ottoman registers. If they were never supposed to be there, collectively at least, perhaps they were invisible in the first place, and never had to be erased? Let us see.

Today Valide Han is in a dilapidated state, although its “bones” are still discernible, unlike many of the other historic hans (Kürkçü Hanı, the oldest han, for example). In the middle of Valide Han’s large courtyard, which is mostly used as a car park, sits a mosque. It is today an explicitly Shi’i mosque, labeled with a modern plaque that says “İranlılar Mescidi” (the masjīd of the Iranians). The plaque on the outside of the mosque claims that it was built in 1641, which is roughly when the han was built.<sup>2</sup> Yet historical accounts and visual evidence do not describe a mosque in the courtyard until about the early nineteenth century, and after that point it is described as a private mosque. A further plaque in the interior hall of the mosque states that it burned down and was rebuilt in 1947, which is true. The mosque alone invites a separate and fascinating conversation about erasures, in fact, but it is one that falls outside the scope of the present discussion.

The first element of the personality of Valide Han has to do with the lore surrounding its construction. The han is said to have been built by 1651 on the ruins of Cerrahi Mehmed Paşa’s palace (which itself was built on the site of an older Byzantine structure) by Kösem Mahpeyker Valide Sultan, consort of Ahmed I and mother of Sultans Murad V and the notorious Deli İbrahim. Profits from the han were used to finance the maintenance of Çinili Hamamı in Üsküdar, which had already been built by Kösem and which is still functioning today. Kösem Sultan herself, a very significant player in the intrigues of imperial politics in the early- to mid-seventeenth century, was assassinated in September 1651. The Ottoman chronicler Naima (and later Reşat Ekrem Koçu, citing Naima) claimed that she had hidden jewels and gold coins in Valide Han, and this is plausible, as one of the functions of hans such as these was as a place for the elites to store their valuables. When we look at the events leading up to her death, we also see that the capital was plagued by rebellions of merchants in precisely this area, the han district, culminating in 1649–1650. It seems possible that the construction of Valide Han was an attempt by key stakeholders in the political conflicts at the time—Kösem, grandmother of the very young Mehmed IV, and Hatice Turhan Sultan (who had Yeni Camii built later in the seventeenth century), Mehmed IV’s practically-teenage mother—to assuage the merchants’ discontent, though this link does not seem to be spelled out in the scholarship.<sup>3</sup> If the construction of Valide Han was indeed an attempt at appeasement, it seems to have failed, for the rebellions continued. In any case, the han’s construction, and therefore its birth as a physical structure, was bound up with the drama and disorder of the mid-seventeenth century, marking it as a site of both grandeur and misery from its very inception.

### Memory and History

Fast forward to Valide Han today, still standing but in a very different social and historical context from the seventeenth century. In the early years of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era, this han drew the attention of Turkish scholars of urban space interested in exploring the social, economic, and cultural life of Valide Han in the present, and in reconstructing as much as they could about its history.<sup>4</sup> From 2006 to 2008, the Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Council sponsored a project by these scholars devoted to the “cultural and social memory” of Büyük Valide Han, culminating in an edited volume published by the Tarih Vakfı in 2014.<sup>5</sup> It is in this volume that, I argue, a personality, and a very interesting one, was assembled for Valide Han.<sup>6</sup>

2 Beneath the plaque are listed the dates AH 1020–1052, which correspond to AD 1611–1641. This suggests that the mosque’s construction took some thirty years. Murphey lists 1646 as the date Valide Han was completed. See *ibid.*, 149.

3 See, for example, Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46. Baer’s description is based on chroniclers’ accounts, such as that of Karaçelebizade.

4 I do not mean to imply that these scholars were necessarily AKP supporters, but rather that this early twenty-first-century moment set up a context of expanded spaces of inquiry into history and memory that were a feature until about 2015. It was a moment when it was safe for scholars to explore many kinds of erasures, up to a point.

5 Aysegül Baykan, Zerrin İren Boynudelik, Burak Sevingen, and Belkis Uluoğlu, *Tarihi Belleğimiz İçinde Büyük Valide Han* [Büyük Valide Han in our historical memory] (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2014).

6 For their part, Ottomanists have touched on Valide Han in studies about the commercial activities in the Ottoman

110 The Tarih Vakfı volume, devoted entirely to Büyük Valide Han, includes a chapter on social theory and urban space, an ethnography and oral history of Valide Han, and an extensive architectural history and analysis of the han. For the ethnography portion of the project, the researchers began with the Valide Han in its present state (ca. 2006–2009), interviewed and formally surveyed its inhabitants/tenants, and gleaned information from as far back as the 1940s, including glimmers of information that take us further back than that. The chapter on the han's history uses Ottoman chronicles and late-Ottoman- and republican-era press coverage to reconstruct important turning points and events that took place within the han and its courtyard. Other chapters use Ottoman documentation about the restoration history of the han, which was damaged by earthquakes (such as in 1894) and fires (such as in 1926) and repaired at several points in the later nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries. Frequently used across several chapters are sources such as a 1948 *Akşam* exposé on hans and on Valide Han in particular, Reşat Ekrem Koçu's *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* from the 1950s–1960s (a source rich in lore and select, vivid details about the han), studies by Turkish scholars from about the 1970s and later regarding the architectural history of hans, and even the popular *İstanbul Gezi Rehberi* (Istanbul tour guide) by Murat Belge from the turn of the twenty-first century. Not once are Rum mentioned as having anything to do with Valide Han's emergent personality.

The volume's valuable theoretical and empirical contributions create a portrait of Valide Han and its personality as a building, "memleket" (which is how one 100-year-old Iranian resident referred to it in 1926), and microcosm. But something, or someone, is still missing: non-Muslims, and particularly Rum, which is interesting when we consider the source I will discuss below. In chapter two of the Tarih Vakfı volume, "Kentsel Doku İçinde Büyük Valide Han," about Valide Han in the urban fabric of Istanbul, we do find mention of Armenians, not from the Ottoman period but the 1950s, yet always unhistoricized, displaced from any other social context outside the han. From the *tapu* records of the Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, we learn that "young Armenians migrated to Istanbul and worked as apprentices under the Armenian metalworkers there [in Valide Han]. They came from various parts of Anatolia, with those from Kastamonu, for example, working in the textile trade." We further learn that ever since the "Ottoman period" (a rather hazy demarcation), "many citizens of Iranian ancestry maintained a presence [there], adapting to the new economic conditions" of the day (p. 24). Until the 1950s, the account continues, "an important portion of the shop owners were of Iranian and Armenian descent." In fact, according to "ethnographic studies," many of the instruments/tools (*aletler*) still in use in Valide Han were passed down from Armenian masters to their apprentices. So many ellipses. Where did all the Armenians go? There are even men with Armenian names in the photos taken by the ethnographers in the 2000s (Garbis Bey, Havadish Bey, Vartan Usta). Who are these people?

In this early AKP-era exploration into the social and cultural memory surrounding Valide Han, we find evidence from current inhabitants' oral histories that there was an influx of migrants from Malatya to Valide Han in the 1940s. These migrants seem to have replaced many Azeri tenants from northern Iran. In the historical chapter (p. 49), based on sources cited in the 1948 *Akşam* piece, we are told that Iranians ceased to use Valide Han as a place of residence in 1931 because of an ordinance from the *vilayet* (*vilayetçe karar verilmesi*), and that at that time the han "was emptied out" (*han boşaltıldı*). Yet they seem to have continued as owners of some of the shops. This appears to contradict the evidence cited above from the previous chapter of the same volume, which asserted that Iranians were present in Valide Han until at least the 1950s.

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capital in the seventeenth century, as in Murphey's 2008 article cited above. More recently, Ahmet Yaşar has discussed Valide Han in the larger context of Istanbul hans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period which saw fascinating social and economic changes and expansion of hans in the capital. See Ahmet Yaşar, "İstanbul Hanları: 18. Yüzyıl Sonu ve 19. Yüzyıl Başı," in *Osmanlı İstanbulu IV: IV. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu Bildirileri, 20–22 Mayıs 2016, İstanbul 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi*, ed. Feridun Emecen, Ali Akyıldız, and Emrah Safa Gürkan (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2016), 511–523. These studies mention non-Muslims because of the nature of the Ottoman sources which provide the data on hans, but the main topic and concern is the economy of the hans and the information such registers provide about the role and presence of guilds.

Perhaps the most curious feature of Valide Han's history has to do with the Iranian/Azeri presence there. This presence dates to the 1823 Treaty of Erzurum between the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran, and after that date Iranians/Azeris maintained a continuous presence in the city, where they had access to global/European markets and would eventually play a role in political discussions about constitutionalism. The nexus of their community in nineteenth-century Istanbul was none other than Valide Han. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall reported in 1822 that the number of Persians in Istanbul was still miniscule, and because of their heterodox/heretical religious affiliation, they were "nowhere allowed to raise their heads. And as heretics they are more hated than the Jews by the fanatic, i.e. orthodox Sunnis."<sup>7</sup>

Yet within a few decades—the same decades, let us remember, that witnessed the Greek rebellions, the abolition of the entire Janissary establishment, a tectonic shift in trade conditions after the 1838 Anglo-Ottoman trade agreement, and many other massive upheavals—Persians (mostly Azeris from Tabriz, reportedly) had not only grown in number, to several thousand, but also in economic power. Andrea Duranti, in one of the few English-language studies focusing specifically on Valide Han, calls them an "economic 'lobby'" and writes that 80 percent were Azerbaijani, "mainly involved in the trade of carpets, silk, books, and other imported goods, or in the rising industrial entrepreneurship."<sup>8</sup> In the scholarship on the Iranian constitutional movement, we see the crucial role played by Tabrizi merchants and intellectuals, particularly those in Istanbul, and particularly those in Valide Han. Fariba Zarinebaf describes the community in Istanbul as having "its own caravansary in Valide Han [sic], shops, schools, mosques, even coffeehouses, and a cemetery in Üsküdar."<sup>9</sup> Duranti echoes this, stating that Valide Han played a pivotal role in bringing prominent Persian merchants into contact with ideas of Westernization which they then brought back to Iran "that eventually determined the birth of the Iranian constitutional movement."<sup>10</sup> Several Persian-language newspapers were edited and printed in Valide Han, the most important being *Akhtar*, which began publication in 1876.<sup>11</sup> For Duranti, the eclipse of the Persian community in Valide Han was slow in the early twentieth century, and then abrupt in the early republic, as Mustafa Kemal in 1928 forbade the celebration of the Shi'i rituals of Muharrem (although Duranti says these rituals continued to be practiced in private and were reintroduced in the 1980s).<sup>12</sup>

From the 1860s, it seems that Ashura was performed at Valide Han, and the public performance of rituals such as *zanjeer* and *ta'ziyah* attracted a range of non-Shi'i spectators, and even became occasions for diplomatic dialogue. By the late nineteenth century, Valide Han had become a significant site for the Iranian ambassador, who had a permanent space there with chairs and carpets for his guests. By the 1890s, Ashura at Valide Han was even mentioned as a tourist destination in the guidebooks. If we think of a han as a village or small town within a city, and if we keep in mind that distinct towns had their own customs and rituals (recall Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*), the performance of Ashura and other Muharrem rituals became a unique custom of Valide Han. By the time such religious rituals were forbidden in 1928, Valide Han had long been a crucial and well-known hub of the Iranian community in Istanbul. The "İranlılar Mescidi" in the courtyard remains the official mosque for Iranians in Istanbul and is associated with the nearby Iranian consulate.

7 Quoted in Andrea Duranti, "A Caravanserai on the Route to Modernity: The Case of the Valide Han of Istanbul," in *The Bazaar in the Islamic City: Design, Culture, and History*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 237.

8 Ibid.

9 Fariba Zarinebaf, "From Istanbul to Tabriz: Modernity and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (2008): 158. See also Thierry Zarcone and Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, eds., *Les iraniens d'Istanbul* (Louvain: Peeters, 1993).

10 Duranti, "A Caravanserai on the Route to Modernity," 238.

11 A similar role was played by Bulgarian merchants and intellectuals in Balkapanı Han (near Rüstem Paşa Mosque) in the 1860s. The first Bulgarian printing press was established there in 1849, and the han became a site for Bulgarian-language newspaper publishing and nationalist agitation from the 1850s and particularly 1860s. For general information, see Mary Neuberger, *Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

12 Duranti, "A Caravanserai on the Route to Modernity," 244.

112 The presence of Iranians/Persians/Azeris in Valide Han is an important part of the han's personality and the feature which makes it unique, as we see in Ottoman sources from the later nineteenth century and as reconstructed by the authors of the 2014 *Tarih Vakfı* volume. While this feature was never erased from memory, it existed and continues to exist in tension with the normative story of Ottoman hans as Muslim/Turkish spaces with the odd Armenian, and has not been well integrated into "historical memory" today. The Iranian presence dates from the early nineteenth century, but no one in the scholarship ventures a guess as to why this particular han became the hub of Iranian life in the Ottoman capital at that particular moment. I have a hypothesis below.

Historians who focus on how Valide Han has changed over time couch the establishment of hans, and of this han in particular, in the context of the "Islamization—and Ottomanization—of the urban space" of the capital.<sup>13</sup> Hans are among the "traditional buildings associated with social life within Islamic urban centers."<sup>14</sup> This is all true. The personality of Valide Han is Muslim and Ottoman, for sure. But again, we have a major gap in the story: we learn about the fifteenth-century rationale for the construction of hans by Mehmed II; the economic growth that spurred the expansion in concentric circles around the two *bedestens* in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which included seventeenth-century hans such as Valide Han; and then we jump to the earthquake of 1894 and the damage suffered by the Grand Bazaar and surrounding area; and then the renovations in 1954 after another earthquake, and the repainting of the interior walls of the Grand Bazaar after 1980. Iranians/Azeris are inserted somewhere in between, having entered the scene and the han after the 1823 Treaty of Erzurum. But why Valide Han? What was the sudden large-scale vacancy that made their entrance possible?

So the story of Valide Han is implicitly a Muslim one, though a rather curious one. Armenians are around, but their presence is not analyzed or historicized, leaving many questions open, not quite constituting a complete erasure but not fully incorporating them into the personality of Valide Han. None of this about the Muslim/Turkish character of Valide Han is surprising when we recall the points made above about its location in the socioeconomic and confessional landscape of the Ottoman capital. Its peculiarity, identified by scholars and by modern-day residents, has to do with its Persian/Azeri Shi'i residents and the remaining mosque that demonstrates their historical presence. But amid all these fascinating episodes in the life and emerging personality of Valide Han sits a complete erasure. Let us turn now to the archival documents written in seemingly invisible ink.

### **Invisible Ink: A Detailed Accounting of the Non-Muslims of Valide Han from Spring 1821**

Examining the admittedly small body of scholarship on the cultural and social memory of Valide Han today and recent efforts to more systematically document the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chapter of the han's history, one finds scarce mention of non-Muslims. The *Tarih Vakfı* volume does mention Armenians as occupants of the han, but the fact of this non-Muslim presence is treated as incidental, not as the starting point for any exploration into the personality or history of Valide Han. The same holds for other recent Turkish-language scholarship (since 2016), which notes that non-Muslims were present there and in other hans, but only by way of explaining why the registers that supply relevant data were compiled. They are still just mentions, faceless numbers which tell us about the size and shape of Valide Han and reveal information about the guilds that had members there, among all the other hans in the district. But what else does the ink in these *defters* tell us about Valide Han and its erasures?

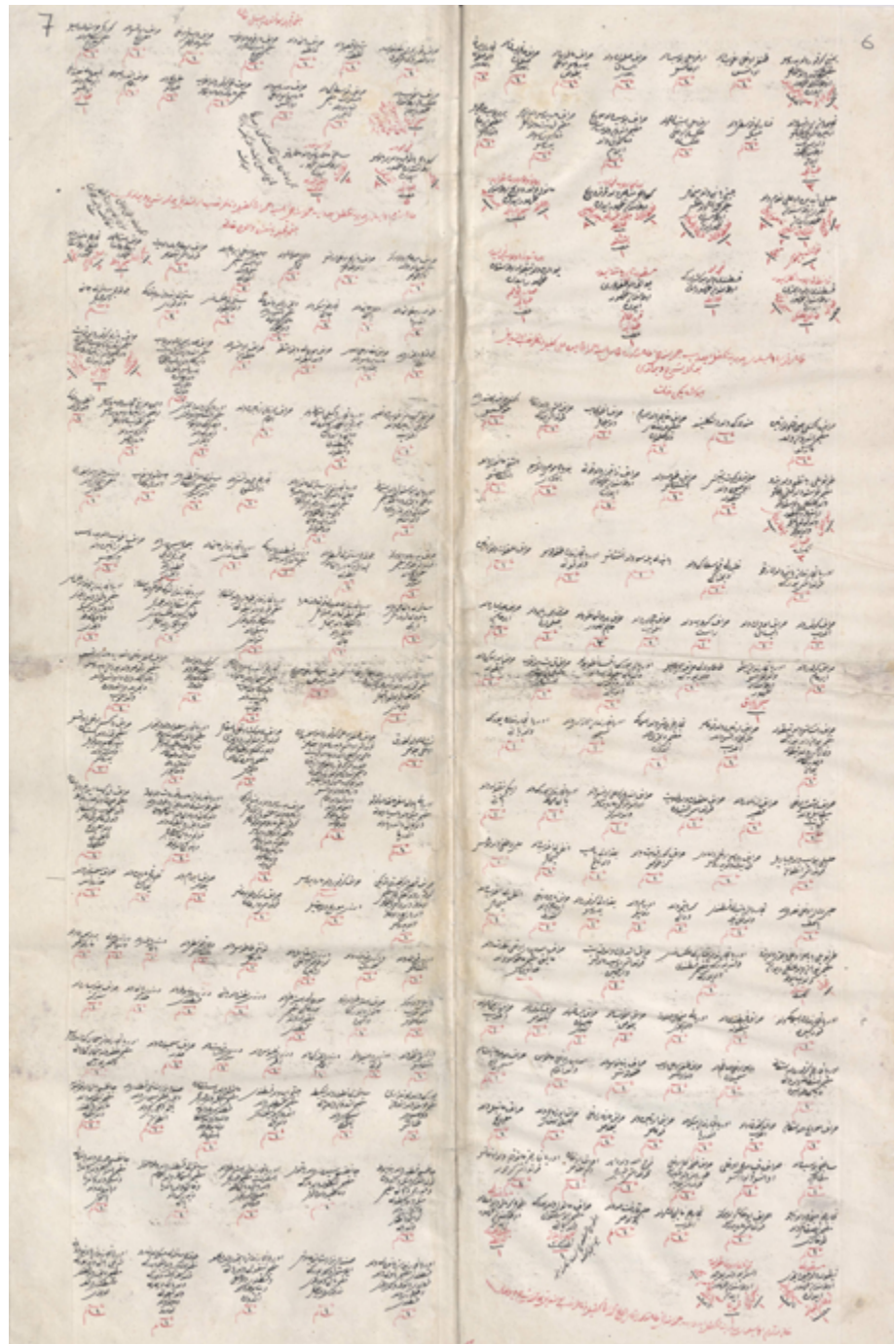
For one thing, the occupants of the han were not just numbers—they had names, and these names were recorded. One register of particular relevance was compiled upon the outbreak of the 1821 Greek rebellions (which became the Greek War of Independence) in an effort to collect information about who the non-Muslims in the capital were and which of them

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

Figure 3: Excerpt from the *defter*, 4a-b. BOA, NFS.d.0008 (21 Cemaziyelahir 1236 [March 26, 1821]).



presented a danger as holders of firearms.<sup>15</sup> This register lists the non-Muslim occupants of 145 hans in the “han district” of Istanbul, including Valide Han. When we read the register, and take seriously the individuals who are named therein, we find an erased world in Valide Han, one distinct from the Persians/Azeris of the mid-nineteenth century, the odd Armenian master with the tools he left behind, and the Turkish Muslims from Malatya that seem to have poured into the han and reinvigorated it in the 1940s.

<sup>15</sup> The register in question is held at the Presidential Ottoman Archives (BOA), NFS.d.0008 (1236).



There were 383 non-Muslims resident in Valide Han, grouped in 126 rooms/shops (*oda*). A recent study cites 248 as the total number of rooms/shops in Valide Han, drawing from another early nineteenth-century register.<sup>16</sup> If that is true, we can say that a significant portion, about half, of the rooms/shops in Valide Han at this time were occupied by non-Muslims. There was one Muslim, a Janissary named İbrahim Ağa (ibn Ahmed), listed among the dhimmis as the *nazır*. The watchman (*odabaşı*), who was also the guarantor (*kefil*) for the han, was an Armenian named Bogos, son of Haçadur.<sup>17</sup> The other 381 occupants recorded in the defter consisted of 277 Rum, 103 Armenians, and one Jew, a broker (*dellal*) named Aslan, son of Kamal. In all cases, the occupants of each shop/room (*oda*) are either all Rum or all Armenian (i.e., not mixed Rum and Armenian).<sup>18</sup> The number of occupants of each *oda* ranges from one to thirteen. Within each *oda*, for those that were occupied by more than one person, the men had business relationships with one another, with seventy-four listed as renters (*mukim*) and thirteen as partners (*şeriki*); they were also bound by family ties, with fourteen listed as brothers (*karındaş*), five as sons (*oğlu*), two as sons-in-law (*damad*), and one as a cousin (*amcasıoğlu*).

Of those with professions listed, the most common profession was *sarrafi* (money changers), most of whom were Armenian (27 of 29). The governance of the *sarrafi* guild, at least in Valide Han at this time, seems to have been dominated by Armenians, as the “*Valide sarrafi*” (Haçadur, son of Mardros), *sarraflar kahyası* (Artin, son of Agop), *sarrafi yazıcı* (Gevorg, son of Karabet), and *sarrafi karakahya* (Abram, son of Ohan) were all Armenian. As for other occupations, there were seventeen tailors (*terzi*), mostly Rum; and twelve, all Rum, were “European merchants” (*Avrupa tüccarı*), meaning they had special status and privileges and traded with Europe and/or in European goods. There were exclusively Rum professions related to textiles, such as *canfesci* (8), *çuhacı* (7), and *kalpakçı* (1), and *basmacı* (1), as well as a Rum cook (*aşçı*), an Armenian barber (*berber*), an Armenian window washer (*camşocu*), and an Armenian purchaser of grains (*mübayaacı*).

The tavern keeper (*meygede ustası*) in spring 1821 was one Yovan, son of Lazari. I might add that ten years later, in another *defter* exclusively devoted to the *meyhane* staff in all the hans in 1831, we find one Lazari, son of Yovan, age 25, who was listed as a shareholder (*hissedar*) of the *meyhane* in Valide Han, likely indicating that despite all the upheaval in the 1820s—which included not just the Greek rebellions and the retaliatory violence against Rum throughout Istanbul but also the violent destruction of the Janissary corps and the many layers of social and economic relations in which they were embedded—the proprietorship of the *meyhane* in Valide Han still passed from father Yovan (son of Lazari) to his son (Lazari, son of Yovan). The 1821 *defter* also reveals that despite the intense presence of Rum from Chios and a few other islands in 1821, there were nevertheless many Karamanlı Rum from central Anatolia already present in the hans before 1821, often tavern keepers and employees but also in many other sectors.

Very few men have a place of birth/origin listed. Of those, the greatest number (10) were from Sakız (the island of Chios). Probably many more than these ten were from Chios, judging from the Italianized variants of many of the other names (Corci instead of Yorgo, Cani instead of Yani, etc.), implying descent from Chios or another formerly Genoese/Venetian region. We even find one Luka Mavrogordat (Loukas Mavrogordatos), likely from the lesser branch of the Chiot Mavrogordatos (alt. Mavrocordatos) clan, who we know

16 Yaşar, “İstanbul Hanları,” 283, appendix B (citing BOA ED.d.39554 and 39894). Rhoads Murphey records the number of rooms in the han as 300 circa 1675 (citing Evliya Çelebi) and 366 in the late eighteenth century (citing P. Ç. İnciyan), although these numbers may be inclusive of both Büyük Han and Sagir Valide Han. For this, see Murphy, “The Growth in Istanbul’s Commercial Capacity,” 149.

17 The Tarih Vakfı volume points out the special nature of the *odabaşı* in the world of the han as a position passed down from father to son.

18 It is important to note that the Ottoman scribes did not differentiate between Rum and Armenians, but only marked Jews as such (*Yahudi*). Through our reading we can differentiate between Rum and Armenian names, so we are the ones that are making the distinction significant.

were from Chios; but he is not listed here as such, instead recorded merely as “a European merchant” (*Avrupa tüccarından*) and as the head of one of the largest *odas*, with eight men. This is interesting because the island of Chios had a special status, its mastic villages having been *mukataa* land.<sup>19</sup> One wonders if there were historical, economic, and patronage connections that facilitated the use of Valide Han by merchants and artisans from Chios. It is also interesting that the places of origin for the many who were likely Karamanlı are not listed, suggesting perhaps that only those men who were not Turkish-speaking had their places of origin listed. None of the Armenians had a place of birth/origin listed.

Sixteen men are listed as having surnames (8 Armenians and 8 Rum). This is a fascinating moment to capture information about individuals, as it was a moment when surnames were beginning to be used more frequently, at least among non-Muslims. The surnames include Rodokanaki (a very well-known Rum family from Chios), Yazıcioğlu (Armenian), Mübayaacıoğlu (Armenian), İshakoğlu (Armenian), and Lambikoğlu (Rum). As we can already see, these are men who were part of a larger social and economic fabric, and individuals who can be historicized, if we expand our understanding and our questions about the history and the personality of Valide Han.

While the reason for this *defter*'s compilation had to do with locating which non-Muslims were in possession of firearms, it is interesting how few were actually recorded as having firearms across the hans, and particularly in Valide Han. The only Ottoman subjects who had weapons were two Armenian *sarrafs* and one Rum merchant (*tüccardan*). But there were four foreign subjects among the non-Muslims of Valide Han in spring 1821, listed last in the *defter*, and three of them—two Armenians and one Rum—had weapons.<sup>20</sup> The two Armenians (Ovanes, son of Osip, and Haçadur, son of Haçadur) were under Russian protection (*Moskov patentali*), and both of them possessed arms. There were two Rum (Dimitri Rakofotlu and Luka Takımsız) who were Austrian subjects (*Nemçelü*), and one of them (Luka) possessed arms. These six men, and the Armenian watchman (*odabaşı*), were the only ones recorded as possessing weapons.

So what happened, whereby this whole world of Rum and Armenian occupants of Valide Han was erased, making way for the Persians/Azeris of the later nineteenth century and then the Turkish and stray Armenian occupants of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries? The origin myth for the presence of Persian/Azeri merchants and the existence of the Shi'i mosque in the han's courtyard is missing an explanation, and the 1821 *defter* offers a fascinating answer. Let us consider the historical timing and relationship between the two groups—the Rum and Armenians on the one hand, and Persians/Azeris on the other.

We know from the Ottoman *defter* above that in spring 1821, there were 126 *odas* listed as occupied and/or held by non-Muslims (Rum, Armenian, and, in one case, a Jew). In 1948, Cemalettin Bildik published a study in *Akşam* about Valide Han, evaluating its current state, and posited that there were originally 153 rooms/shops (*oda*) in the first and second courtyards (*avlu*) of the han (the third *avlu* was known as Küçük Valide Han) and that there had been precisely 126 shareholders (*hissedar*).<sup>21</sup> He implies that all 126 shareholders were Iranian as of 1948, and that almost all were residing in Istanbul at the time, aside from a few residing in Iran.

Interestingly, we find precisely 126 rooms/shops owned and/or occupied by non-Muslims in spring 1821. More than one hundred years later, we find the same number of shareholders in Valide Han, now of Persian/Azeri extraction. Let us step back from Valide Han to consider

19 See Dilara Dal, “XVIII. Yüzyılda Sakız Adası” (master's thesis, Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, 2008).

20 This does not preclude any presence of Persian/Azeri merchants, since they would have been counted as Muslim, and so presumably would not have been included as dhimmis. We do know, however, that as of 1822, Persians had not yet come to Valide Han or Istanbul in large numbers. Those who were in the city are said to have congregated at a different han in Eyüp.

21 “This inn, which the Iranians consider a trade center, is the property of 126 shareholders. There are 40 owners of 57 ruined and abandoned rooms, and 86 owners of the other 153 rooms. Only 4 owners of 4 rooms are in Iran, and the other 122 owners are here.” Cemalettin Bildik, “İstanbul'un Hanları,” *Akşam* (Istanbul), February 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, and March 10, 1948. Also see Baykan et al., *Tarihi Belleğimiz İçinde Büyük Valide Han*, 49–50.

116 the timing of the entrance of Persians/Azeris into the han, which occurred in 1823, thanks to the more favorable terms for merchants from Qajar Iran specified in the Treaty of Erzurum.<sup>22</sup> The Treaty of Erzurum concluded the 1821–1823 war between the Ottomans and the Qajars, a war instigated by Russia in order to open another front in addition to the Greek rebellion which flared up at the same time.

Simultaneously, we know from other studies, there was tremendous upheaval for non-Muslims and particularly Rum in Istanbul and elsewhere—retaliatory violence and collective punishment for the outbreak of the Greek rebellions in Moldavia and then Morea in spring 1821.<sup>23</sup> We also know that it was right around this time, in AH 1238 (AD 1822/23), that the properties of a swath of Istanbul-based Phanariot Rum were confiscated across the empire.<sup>24</sup> While we do not at this time have the specific mention of Valide Han or any of the other hans, we may presume that in addition to the massacres of Rum and other non-Muslims from the late spring and summer of 1821 in Istanbul, there were also large-scale confiscations of assets and displacements of Rum. This is all the more compelling when we consider that the massacres of Chios happened in spring 1822 and that many of the merchants in Valide Han in spring 1821 were from Chios and likely involved in trade from/with Chios, trade that would have been violently disrupted from spring 1822 onward.

Circumstantial evidence, then, suggests that Valide Han was suddenly emptied of its Rum occupants (we do not know how or if Armenians were affected, but given that the *defter* does not differentiate between them, it would make sense if they were also dispossessed at this moment) just as Persian/Azeri merchants were being allowed into the marketplace on more favorable terms than ever and needed a space in the marketplace that could be their hub. Rather than a gradual demographic shift from Rum/non-Muslim to Muslim, this may have been a case of a sudden transfer of assets and of space from Rum/non-Muslim to Persian/Azeri. Scholars focusing on Valide Han in the nineteenth century (post-1820s, that is) consistently point to its unique association with Persian/Azeri and Shi'i life and customs and, later, constitutional politics. They do not seek to understand how this came about, or why it was Valide Han and not another site that suddenly became available just as Iranian subjects were coming to trade on favorable terms and looking for a place to store and produce goods, and often to reside. Valide Han became a place for Persians/Azeris to congregate, to enact rituals such as Ashura, and of course to worship at the masjid in the central courtyard of the han which was built around this time for them.

Why Valide Han? Why it and not one of the other hans whose non-Muslim occupants, collectively numbering in the thousands, were likely also displaced and dispossessed at this moment? Valide Han was not only conveniently located between land and maritime trade routes, as mentioned above, but was and is also the largest of the hans. It seems unique in the 1821 *defter* in that it featured the most Rum who were from areas more remote from the capital, particularly Chios, so it could very well have offered the most space for this community of Persian/Azeri merchant newcomers. We have general confirmation of this hypothesis in the form of two travel accounts, one from 1810 and one from 1834. In 1810, English nobleman John Cam Hobhouse described the grandeur of Valide Han, mentioning nothing special about the inhabitants, and mentioning the structures of the han and courtyards, but no mosque at all. Just over two decades later though, in 1834, Anglican priest Richard Burgess noted that the “rooms on the ground floor were chiefly occupied by Persian merchants,” and that “in the midst of the court [there is] a private mosque, and a fountain.”<sup>25</sup>

Even despite this mass displacement of Rum, we have some evidence that non-Muslims, and Rum in particular, did not disappear altogether from Valide Han after the tumult and

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22 Bruce Masters, “The Treaties of Erzurum (1823 and 1848) and the Changing Status of Iranians in the Ottoman Empire,” *Iranian Studies* 4, no. 1/4 (1991): 3–15.

23 See, for example, Christine M. Philliou, “Worlds Old and New: Phanariot Networks and the Remaking of Ottoman Governance, 1800–1850” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2004); Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

24 Unpublished *defter*.

25 Quoted in Duranti, “A Caravanserai on the Route to Modernity,” 229–230.

dispossession of the early 1820s. In 1831, according to a *defter* that recorded information about the *meyhanes* in all the hans of the capital, we find that all six of the *meyhane* workers/owners in Valide Han were Rum. In the spring 1821 *defter*, there were six men listed as occupants of the *oda* of the *meygede ustası*, so presumably one owner/*usta* and six employees of the *meyhane*. Two of them could have been brothers, with one Filipos and Toma both listing Kiryako as their father; and in 1831, a possible third brother or cousin, Kozma, son of Kiryako, age 45, is listed as the *usta*. Five of them were from the town of Ferteke (Niğde region) and one from Maden (Elazığ region?), indicating that at least five and probably all six were Karamanlı, or Turcophone Orthodox Christians. Two of the six in 1831 were father and son (Kozma, son of Kiryako, age 45 in 1831; and Dimyat,<sup>26</sup> son of Kozma, age 15 in 1831); another was likely the son of the very individual who was the tavern keeper (*meygede ustası*) in spring 1821, as mentioned above. Their customers had likely changed from mostly, or at least half, Rum and Armenians to mostly, or at least half, Persian/Azeri (let us keep in mind that the other half to two-thirds of the han's occupants must have been Ottoman Muslims in 1821 and after, but these are not listed in the 1821 *defter*, which was limited to non-Muslims). But we might imagine that, if the tavern keepers were Turcophone Karamanlı Rum, they would have continued to speak Turkish, now with Azeris, who spoke a Turkish that would likely have been intelligible to the Karamanlı, and, as they always had, with Armenians, who were likely also Turcophones.

Finally, an additional *defter* listing the non-Muslim inhabitants of hans from circa 1857 (AH 1273) is an even clearer illustration of the displacement of Rum (and possibly Armenians, if they were not recorded in their own *defters* by this point) in Valide Han.<sup>27</sup> Here, drastically down from the 383 non-Muslims in 1821, we see only twenty-four non-Muslims in Valide Han in 1857, a decrease of more than 90 percent. Only three of these have recognizably Armenian names: one Yakof, son of Karabet, from Karahisar (age 20) and one Agop, son of Mardiros, from Divriği (age 13), both of whom were *koltukçu* (lit. chair makers/sellers);<sup>28</sup> and one İftar, son of Aram, from Germir (age 19), listed without a profession but as part of a group of Rum from Germir. The remaining twenty-one non-Muslims in the *defter* were all Rum: seventeen were from the Karamanlı areas of Central Anatolia, with twelve from Germir and other towns of Kayseri and five from Niğde and surrounding towns; of the rest, two were from Erzurum, one from Trabzon, and one from Darıca. The *meyhane* counterman (*destgah*, i.e., *tezgah*) was still from Ferteke, as in 1831, but was a different person (Yorgi, son of Hacı Zima), and two of the four *miços* at the *meyhane* were from the Balkans: one each from the Manastır and Tırnova areas, and the other two from the Niğde and Kayseri areas. The professions are far more limited in this group from 1857, including *malifatura tüccarı* (2), *tüccar* (2), *meyhane* staff (6 once again, as in 1831), *bakkal esnafından* (4), *hizmetkar* (1), and a seventeen-year-old *kaymakçı* from Kayseri (Hristo, son of Petro). The Rum presence in Valide Han (and, we might conclude, in much of the economic core that was the “han district”) was obliterated—and erased—after 1821, a phenomenon which opened space for Rum/Karamanlı migrants from Central Anatolia, and surely for Persians/Azeris. The segment of the economy where they could still be found in 1857 was also much narrower, mainly encompassing the import and sale of food (*bakkal*, *meyhane* staff), and reflected only one new category, that of “malifatura tüccarı.”

### Taking Stock

What has been and is being erased when it comes to the case of Valide Han, even with recent efforts to address the han's history and sculpt a personality for it? Certainly the presence of non-Muslims, particularly Rum, was erased altogether, and even those Turkish scholars looking to address the erasures surrounding Valide Han have not addressed this one. As I have demonstrated, these Rum appear by name, down to each individual, in Ottoman *defters* like the ones examined here. I would argue that this is not an intentional erasure,

<sup>26</sup> This name is unresolved but could be some form of diminutive for Dimitrios, Dimos, etc.

<sup>27</sup> The following data is taken from BOA NFS.d.00493. I thank Hilal Cemil Tümer for her help in transcribing this *defter*.

<sup>28</sup> It could also have denoted either an auctioneer of second-hand clothing or keeper of small wine-shops according to contemporary dictionaries. See James W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon*, 1890, s.v. “qoltuqju.”

118 but one caused by the cognitive frame in which we are led to understand and “see” the marketplace in this Muslim-dominated segment of Istanbul. These Rum are being erased partly because scholars privilege the history of the building, as an architectural entity, over the people who inhabited the building. Their erasure is perpetuated because their presence is at once taken for granted and unimaginable in the historical memory of late republican Turkey. The erasure of Armenians is even more complex, for it is not a complete erasure. They are mentioned in contemporary ethnographies, but their presence is not explained or historicized, and interestingly, even when they are listed individually, as in the 1821 *defter*, their places of origin are not listed, making it difficult if not impossible to reconstruct how and when they got to Istanbul or to Valide Han. When scholars do discuss the people who occupied Valide Han, they begin with the present and look back, and in the case of Valide Han, this takes us only as far back as the Persian/Azeri presence which began in 1823 and extended at least into the 1940s. When Ottomanists come across non-Muslims in *defters* regarding hans, they seem to see them as incidental, not as clues to understanding the larger social and economic fabric of the marketplace.

Beyond the erasure of non-Muslims per se, I argue that the erasures surrounding Valide Han are a microcosm of the larger problem of the erasure of Ottoman economy and society as an integral whole. When we erase non-Muslims, we are erasing the manifold relationships and connections embedded in Valide Han, as well as the links between so many provincial points of origin and Valide Han as a destination and a place of dwelling, production, and exchange. When we write non-Muslims back in, by naming them and by reconstructing their patterns of occupation and migration and the relationships between them, we begin to see how inextricably bound they were to their social and historical context and how violent the act of extracting them was. This is true whether we are talking about the context of Valide Han as a microcosm or the context of Istanbul as the nerve center of Ottoman economy and society.

Those who take the han in its present state and construct a personality for it by looking back can hardly discern any non-Muslim presence, and when they do discern one, it is followed by ellipses because that presence does not fit into any cognitive frame. They can and they do start to make out the social/governing structure of the han as a micro-community and microcosm, examining the range of classes, professions, places of origin, and maybe ethnicities there. Those scholars who start in the Ottoman past and look forward, basing their studies on Ottoman sources, have only recently begun to take note of the presence of non-Muslims, and then only occasionally, but they do not attempt to reconstruct the social reality of the han based on the individual identities of its occupants. This raises productive questions about the presence and role of non-Muslims in the “core” areas of the Muslim/Ottoman economy, particularly in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. What did it mean that so many individual non-Muslims were occupants in these hans, and yet not as part of the corporate/communal life of their respective confessions? Finally, underneath the origin myth of Persians/Azeris in Valide Han sits the upheaval brought on by the Greek rebellions of 1821—another story that has stood apart from the dominant narrative of Ottoman history. To return to the adage “Cami yıkılmış da mihrap hala yerinde,” we might modify it for the case of Valide Han to say “Toplum yıkılmış da cami hala yerinde [society is in ruins, but the mosque still stands proud].”