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Same Event, Different Dates: Ottoman Records of Royal Deaths, 1703 and 1736

Olay Aynı, Tarihler Farklı: Osmanlı Kaynaklarında Padişah Ölümleri, 1703 ve 1736

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı kaynaklarındaki Hicri tarih farklılıklarının katip hatası olarak göz ardı edilmemesi, bunun yerine müzakereye dayalı ve çoğulcu bir zaman anlayışının kanıtı olarak anlaşılması gerektiğini savunur. Çalışma, müneccimler tarafından hazırlanan ve teorik hesaplamaya dayalı takvimler ile devlet görevlileri ve vakanüvisler tarafından kullanılan pratik, gözleme dayalı zaman tutma pratiği arasındaki yapısal gerilimi inceler. 1703'te Sultan II. Mustafa ve 1736'da Sultan III. Ahmed'in ölümlerine odaklanan bu makale, bu dönemde yazılmış kronik, günlük ve arşiv belgelerindeki çelişkili tarihleri analiz ederek neden aynı olayın ayın farklı günleriyle kaydedildiğini açıklar. İmparatorluk başkentinde bile, birbiriyle çelişen birden fazla kameri tarihlendirme pratiği bulunmasına rağmen, kaynaklar haftanın günü konusunda fikir birliği göstermektedir. Bu durum, yedi günlük hafta döngüsünün, esnek zaman tutma sisteminin kaosa sürüklenmeden işlemesini sağladığını ortaya koyar. Bir vakada resmi saray tarihçisinin kasıtlı olarak muğlak tarih vermesi, bu zamansal tutarsızlıkların üstesinden gelmek için kullanılan sofistike bir tarihyazımı stratejisi olarak düşünülebilir. Bu tarz farklılıkları anormallik olarak göz ardı etmek yerine birincil kanıt olarak ele alan bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda merkezi otoritenin sınırları, kayıt tutma pratiklerinin doğası ve tarihsel anlatıların inşası hakkında yeni bakış açıları sunar. Bu yaklaşım, diğer modern öncesi toplumlar üzerine yapılan zamana dair çalışmalar için de daha geniş çıkarımlar ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Zaman Ölçümü, Hicri Takvim, 18. Yüzyıl, Tarihyazımı, Kronoloji.

ABSTRACT

This study argues that Hegira date differences in Ottoman sources should be understood as evidence of a negotiated and pluralistic understanding of time, rather than be dismissed as scribal errors. It examines the structural tension between calendars based on theoretical calculations, prepared by court astronomers (*müneccimbaşı*), and the practical, observation-based timekeeping employed by state officials and chroniclers. By focusing on the deaths of Sultan Mustafa II in 1703 and Sultan Ahmed III in 1736, this article analyzes the contradictory dates found in chronicles, diaries, and archival documents to explain why a single event was recorded on different days of the month. The sources demonstrate that

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This article is dedicated to Bilal Petek, who introduced me to "the Rashomon Effect."

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even within the imperial capital, multiple and often conflicting lunar dating practices coexisted. However, they show a firm consensus on the day of the week, revealing that the seven-day cycle provided a stable framework that prevented this flexible timekeeping system from descending into chaos. In one instance, an official court historian's deliberate use of an ambiguous date can be interpreted as a sophisticated historiographical strategy for navigating these temporal inconsistencies. By treating such discrepancies as primary evidence rather than anomalies, this study offers new insights into the limits of central authority, the nature of recordkeeping, and the construction of historical narratives in the Ottoman Empire. This approach holds broader implications for the study of time in other pre-modern societies.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Timekeeping, Hegira Calendar, 18th Century, Historiography, Chronology.

Extended Summary

In the study of Ottoman history, scholars frequently encounter chronological discrepancies in primary sources. Events recorded by different chroniclers or administrative bodies often bear conflicting Hegira dates, even when referring to the same moment in time. The conventional historiographical approach has been to treat these variations as incidental like scribal errors, lapses in memory, or anomalies to be "corrected" by modern editors seeking a single, authoritative date. This article challenges this long-standing assumption, arguing that these chronological inconsistencies are not mistakes but are, in fact, primary evidence of a dynamic and negotiated temporal regime. It posits that Ottoman timekeeping was a system of "temporal pluralism," characterized by the coexistence of multiple, parallel methods for counting the days of the lunar month.

The study investigates the structural tension between two modes of timekeeping: the "calculated" time of state experts, such as the imperial chief astronomer (*müneccimbaşı*), who produced ideal calendars with predictable month lengths; and the "sighted" time of officials, scribes, and the public, whose demarcation of months depended on the practical, and often variable, act of observing the new crescent moon (*rüyet-i hilal*). While the calculated model offered theoretical precision, this article demonstrates that its authority was far from absolute, even within the highest levels of the state.

To explore this tension, the article employs a micro-historical methodology, focusing on two politically sensitive and meticulously documented events: the deaths of the deposed sultans Mustafa II in 1703 and Ahmed III in 1736. By concentrating on the recording of imperial deaths in the capital, the study deliberately examines a context where one would expect maximum chronological uniformity. The finding that significant discrepancies exist even here proves that temporal plurality was not a peripheral phenomenon but a systemic feature of Ottoman administrative and historiographical practice.

The first case study analyzes the records surrounding the death of Sultan Mustafa II on 29 December 1703. Contemporary sources, written by high-ranking officials and chroniclers, record the event on three different dates: 20, 21, and 22 Şaban 1115. A close reading reveals a crucial piece of data: the sources that specify the day of the week all agree it was a Saturday. This consensus serves as a "calibration anchor," proving that all authors were witnessing the same moment but were operating on different monthly counts based on when they considered the month of Şaban to have begun.

The second case study, the death of Sultan Ahmed III on 23 June 1736, presents an even more complex scenario, with sources citing four different dates: 11, 12, 13, and 14 Safer 1149. This case reveals a direct chronological conflict between different branches of the central administration: the sultan's private secretariat (*sır katibi*) recorded the 13th, while the office of the acting grand vizier (*sadaret kaymakamı*) recorded the 14th. Once again, however, the sources

converge on the weekday, Saturday, confirming the underlying coherence of the system. This demonstrates that different state institutions could simultaneously inhabit slightly different temporal realities.

The most telling piece of evidence emerges from the official court historian (*vakanüvis*), Subhi Efendi. Tasked with producing the single authoritative record of the reign, Subhi was confronted with conflicting dates from multiple sources. His solution is a masterful display of historiographical craft: he omitted the day of the month entirely, stating only that the death occurred in "Safer 1149." This article interprets his omission as a deliberate "chronological silence," rather than an error or evasion. It was a conscious methodological choice to acknowledge the documentary ambiguity and refuse to privilege one account over another, thereby preserving the integrity of the official chronicle by embracing a different standard of accuracy.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the functionality of the Ottoman timekeeping system was rooted in its flexibility. A clear hierarchy of temporal units guaranteed its stability. At the base was the constant and unchanging seven-day week, which provided a fixed, universally reliable framework. Layered on top was the variable and negotiable lunar day, determined by local observation. This design, where a fluid unit operates within a rigid one, allowed for short-term diversity in lunar dating while maintaining long-term chronological integrity, thus preventing the system from collapsing into chaos.

This study constitutes a direct intervention in Ottoman historiography, which has often overlooked these nuances. It reframes chronological variations as primary sources that illuminate the limits of central authority, the nature of recordkeeping, and the complex process of constructing an official historical narrative. Ultimately, the article suggests that this methodology has broader implications. By treating calendrical inconsistencies as valuable data rather than as errors to be corrected, historians can gain a richer understanding of the lived, practical realities of time in other pre-modern societies reliant on observational calendars, transforming apparent chaos into a new source of historical insight.

Introduction

In the Ottoman world, one of the central rhythms of temporal life, the demarcation of lunar months, was shaped by the direct and often communal act of moon sighting rather than by abstract astronomical calculations. The onset and duration of each month in the Hegira calendar, the empire's primary temporal framework, depended on the naked-eye sighting of the crescent moon rather than on pre-calculated astronomical models. This reliance on sighting introduced a degree of temporal flexibility that, although broadly acknowledged, remains underexplored in modern scholarship. As a result, apparent inconsistencies in how lunar months were counted, recorded, and interpreted across various regions and social contexts are often mischaracterized as anomalies or scribal errors. In fact, they point to a deeper structural tension between the idealized models of timekeeping proposed by experts and the practical realities encountered by everyday users in a premodern society.

This study investigates that tension by analyzing Ottoman timekeeping practices through a close reading of conflicting date entries. It argues that variations in the Hegira dating of events should not be dismissed as mistakes to be corrected but rather recognized as evidence of a negotiated and pluralistic temporal regime. While official calendars and the theoretical frameworks prepared by timekeeping experts, such as the imperial chief astronomers (*müneccimbaşı*), and mosque-based timekeepers (*muvakkit*) enjoyed considerable prestige, their authority often fell short, even within the palace walls, when it came to the practical demarcation of lunar months.

This article focuses exclusively on the sphere of imperial death records to highlight how the durations of Hegira months were measured and recorded in diverse ways, even by men writing

in the same city, about the same event, for the same state. This narrow focus allows for a deep, micro-historical analysis of how the Ottoman state itself managed and, at times, struggled with temporal multiplicity. The cases under examination are the passing of Sultan Mustafa II in 1703 and Sultan Ahmed III in 1736, both in Istanbul. These examples, drawn from a range of eighteenth-century sources including chronicles, diaries, and archival documents, offer a window into the complexity of Ottoman temporal culture and call for a reconsideration of how we interpret conflicting dates in historical narratives.

By centering the analysis on these two critical events, this study emphasizes that even figures located at the very center of the administrative system were not immune to discrepancies in the dating of events. These variations point to the limits of centralized authority in enforcing uniform temporal standards and expose the inherent variability among eyewitnesses recording the same event.

The article is organized into five parts. Following this introduction, which outlines the central questions and arguments, the second part examines the Ottoman timekeeping system with a particular focus on how the days of the Hegira months were counted. It critically examines the boundaries of authority between timekeeping experts and other actors, such as official and individual record-keepers like chroniclers or diarists. This section also explores the correction and synchronization mechanisms within the system and the inherent tension between calculated and sighted time. The third part situates the research within the broader field by providing a literature review and identifying a key gap in the current scholarship: the tendency of modern historians to correct or ignore the very discrepancies that are the subject of this study.

The fourth section forms the analytical core of the paper, presenting a detailed micro-historical investigation of the two case studies. It first analyzes the conflicting records for the death of Sultan Mustafa II in 1703, comparing the contemporary accounts. It then conducts an even more granular analysis of the striking discrepancies surrounding the death of Sultan Ahmed III in 1736, revealing a direct conflict between the records of the Sultan's private secretariat, the office of the Grand Vizier, and the deliberate ambiguity of the official court historian.

The study concludes by revisiting the tension between theory and practice in Ottoman historical experience. It argues that these discrepancies are not signs of a failed system but of a highly functional, pluralistic one that balanced precision and flexibility. It posits that the seven-day week, not the lunar day, was the true anchor of Ottoman chronology, allowing this polyphonic system of timekeeping to operate without collapsing into chaos. By taking these discrepancies into account, we gain new insight into the nature of Ottoman timekeeping.

1. Authority and Correction in Ottoman Timekeeping

Timekeeping is a fundamental system of measurement, comparable to those used for distance, weight, or volume.[1] Just as the measurement of length can vary between metric and imperial units, numerous calendar systems have emerged to mark the passage of time, each tailored to local religious practices, cultural traditions, and environmental rhythms. Although they share common units like years, months, days, and hours, the ways these units are defined and counted vary significantly due to unique historical and cultural considerations. Which moment launches a new day, sunset, sunrise, or midnight? Should a year keep step with the Sun, the Moon, or both? And what narrative anchor warrants "year one"? Answers to such questions generate distinct counting styles that make time a cultural artifact rather than a neutral framework.

While Ottomans employed multiple calendars, the Hegira calendar was central to their temporal framework, distinguishing it from solar-based systems like the Julian and the Ottoman

[1] Jeffrey Huw Williams, *Defining and Measuring Nature: The Make of All Things* (Bristol: IOP Publishing, 2020).

Rumi.[2] The Hegira calendar consists of twelve lunar months, each beginning with the observation of the crescent moon. Days are reckoned from sunset to sunset. Unlike earlier Arabian calendrical systems, which incorporated intercalary months to reconcile the lunar cycle with the solar year, the Hegira calendar dispensed with intercalation entirely, maintaining a strict adherence to lunar cycles.[3] Additionally, it uniquely marks the starting point of its yearly count from the Hegira, the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, highlighting its distinct cultural and religious origins.

The expansion of Islam after the seventh century played a pivotal role in advancing timekeeping practices, driven by the demands of religious obligations. These included the performance of five daily prayers at designated intervals oriented toward Mecca, the observance of fasting from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan (the ninth month), and the execution of pilgrimage rites and animal sacrifices on specific days of Zilhicce (the twelfth month). The accurate observance of these time-sensitive rituals necessitated precise temporal measurement and coordination, which in turn spurred the development and refinement of timekeeping techniques across the Islamicate world.[4]

From the Mediterranean basin to the Indian Ocean and Central Asia, the first half of the second millennium witnessed the transmission, synthesis, and enhancement of diverse timekeeping traditions.[5] This body of expertise laid the foundation for the roles of both imperial astronomers and local *muvakkits* in the Ottoman world. Architectural and institutional structures, such as observatories and *muvakkithanes* (mosque-adjacent buildings dedicated to timekeeping), served as concrete embodiments of this specialized knowledge. These institutions stood at the forefront of timekeeping practice among their global contemporaries. Ahmad Dallal highlights the interconnected tradition of major observatories in Isfahan, Maragha, Samarkand, and Istanbul, and Jaipur.[6] John Steele notes in his study on historical observation and prediction of eclipses, the technical sophistication achieved in this era was remarkable.[7]

Despite the advancements in astronomy and the establishment of observatories and *muvakkithanes* before and during the Ottoman era, a detailed review of these developments is beyond the scope of this discussion for two main reasons. First, the vast and expanding body of research on this topic deserves a separate, thorough examination beyond the confines of this article. Second, and crucial to the focus of this study, the practical influence of these scholarly advancements was somewhat limited. For instance, while imperial astronomers determine the start of the lunar month in advance, their decisions were not strictly enforced by administrative or financial officers.

In the Hegira lunar system, two primary methods were employed to determine the duration of months: "calculated" (ideal) and "sighted" (practical). While the total number of months and years followed a consistent sequence, the precise length of any given month often remained uncertain. This stemmed from the lunar cycle's average length of approximately twenty-

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[2] Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, "Various Eras and Calendars Used in the Countries of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 9/4 (1939), 903–922. Richard B. Rose, "The Ottoman Fiscal Calendar," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 25/2 (1991), 157–167. Filiz Çalışkan, "Osmanlı Diplomatikasında Mali Tarihin Kullanılışı," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 14 (1994), 51–57. Bonnie Blackburn - Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year: An Exploration of Calendar Customs and Time-Reckoning* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 738. Mustafa Özsaray, "Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kullanılan Tarih Türleri," *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (2019), 27–41. Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, "Osmanlı Belgelerinin Tarihlerine Dair," *Belgeler* 38/42 (2023), 1–30.

[3] Kevser Başar, *Cahiliye Dönemi Arap Takviminde Nesi* (Marmara University, MA Thesis, 2006).

[4] David A. King, *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* (Norfolk: Variorum, 1993).

[5] Stephen P. Blake, *Astronomy and Astrology in the Islamic World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2016).

[6] Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (Dordrecht: Yale University, 2010), 24–25.

[7] "Overall, the medieval Islamic astronomers of the Near East achieved a considerable level of accuracy in timing eclipses. At no earlier period of history, be it in Mesopotamia, Alexandria, or China, had it been possible for eclipses to be timed with an accuracy of better than 10 minutes." John M. Steele., *Observations and Predictions of Eclipse Times by Early Astronomers* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000), 123.

nine and a half days, which required a decision about whether to round a month to twenty-nine or thirty days.

The calculated method, which took shape in the centuries following the expansion of Islam, relied on astronomical calculations to predict the first visible appearance of the new moon. As Stephen Blake writes,[8] astronomers in the Islamicate world eventually adopted a schematic calendar in which the months were given a definite, alternating number of days: 30, 29, 30, 29, and so on.

The second, far more widespread method was the "sighting" approach, reflecting the deep connection to Islamic tradition, which places great importance on first-hand visual confirmation of the new moon, *rüyet-i hilal*.[9] This localized practice introduced a range of uncontrollable factors, from geographic vantage points and weather patterns to the subjective skill of the observers themselves.

The complexity intensified within the realm of recordkeeping. Imperial scribes, judges, chroniclers, and diarists routinely recorded the same events on different days of the month, despite a shared reference to the supposedly uniform Hegira calendar. Central to these discrepancies was the question of authority: Who held ultimate responsibility for setting lunar calendar dates?

On the surface, the answer appears straightforward: the empire's chief astronomer, known as the *müneccimbaşı*. Based at the imperial court, the *müneccimbaşı*'s duties encompassed formulating the official calendar, deciding month lengths, identifying leap years, converting between lunar and solar dating systems, and predicting significant celestial events such as eclipses and astrological alignments. Beyond these astronomical responsibilities, the *müneccimbaşı* was entrusted with selecting auspicious dates for imperial ceremonies. These decisions carried considerable political and cultural significance.[10]

In practice, however, the situation was far more nuanced. Although imperial astronomers and local timekeepers were capable of projecting the start dates for Hegira months, sometimes decades or centuries in advance,[11] the reality on the ground was far more complex. Current studies often emphasize the authority of these experts in regulating daily prayer schedules, highlighting the role of the *müneccimbaşı* and *muvakkit*, in maintaining temporal order. Yet this authority was not absolute when it came to setting the precise start of each new lunar month.

For instance, the early eighteenth-century historian Uşşakizade İbrahim Efendi notes that, according to the official calendar, Şaban of the year 1121 was expected to last 29 days, with Ramadan (November 1709) set to begin on Sunday. However, since the new moon was not sighted on that day in Istanbul, the month of Ramadan commenced on Monday instead:

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[8] "In the first centuries after the death of Muhammad, the beginning of the month and the number of its days varied. A new month could not be declared until the first slim crescent had appeared and predicting this event was a major motivation behind the early Muslim interest in astronomy. Soon, however, in order to simplify astronomical calculations and to establish specific dates for rituals and celebrations, Islamic astronomers adopted a schematic calendar in which the months were given a definite number of days: (1) Muharram, thirty days; (2) Safar, twenty nine days; (3) Rabi I, thirty days; (4) Rabi II, twenty nine days; (5) Jumada I, thirty days; (6) Jumada II; twenty nine days; (7) Rajab, thirty days; (8) Shaban, twenty-nine days; (9) Ramadan, thirty days; (10) Shawwal, twenty-nine days; (11) Zu al-Qada, thirty days; and (12) Zu al-Hijja, twenty-nine or thirty days. The extra day was sometimes necessary because twelve revolutions of the moon totaled about 354.25 days. In a thirty-year cycle, the additional day was added in the second, fifth, seventh, tenth, thirteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth, twenty-first, twenty-fourth, twenty-sixth, and twenty-ninth years." Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires* (New York: Cambridge University, 2013), 8.

[9] İrfan Yücel, "Hilal," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1998).

[10] Ahmet Tunç Şen, *Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s-1550s* (The University of Chicago, PhD Dissertation, 2016). R. Hakan Kırkoğlu, *Sultan ve Müneccimi: 18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Sarayında İlm-i Nücum* (İstanbul: Doğan, 2017).

[11] Günay Kut et al., *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Kandilli Rasathanesi ve Deprem Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Astronomi, Astroloji, Matematik Yazmaları Kataloğu 1: Türkçe Yazmalar* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, 2007), 319–358.

> "Although the calendars stated that Shaban would be twenty-nine days and that the noble month of Ramadan would begin on Sunday, since this was not legally confirmed, it began on Monday instead."[12]

Another record appears in the diary of Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi, who records the beginning of Ramadan 1166 (July 1753) in the imperial capital as follows:

> "According to the statement of the chief astronomer of his majesty, the first day of Ramadan was recorded in the calendars as Tuesday. However, it was not taken into consideration, and fasting was observed on Monday."[13]

These examples show that even in the imperial capital, the "calculated" time of the state's chief astronomer could be overridden by the "sighting" method. This created a state of temporal diversity. A recordkeeper within the Ottoman world thus faced a critical choice: do they follow the *müneccimbaşı*'s ideal calendar, which was neat, predictable or do they follow the observed calendar of the street, the court, and the kadı, which was practical but variable?

This choice becomes profoundly significant when recording an event like a sultan's death. Does the official court historian (*vakanüvis*) date the event according to the calculated calendar the *müneccimbaşı* has published? Or does he date it according to the observed calendar that the palace officials who witnessed the death were using? What if the Grand Vizier's office uses one, and the sultan's private secretary (*sır katibi*) uses another?

This is not a simple matter of error. It is the individual decision of a recordkeeper about which temporal regime to privilege. The resulting discrepancies in the historical records are therefore not "mistakes" but evidence competing, parallel systems operating simultaneously, even at the highest levels of the state.

How, then, did the empire avoid descending into chronological chaos? Fundamental to this system was the lunar calendar's inherent self-correcting mechanisms. Given that lunar months alternate naturally between 29 and 30 days, persistent differences in month-length preferences among various communities were bound to arise. However, the very practice of local crescent sightings ensured these discrepancies were short-lived. If one community consistently observed shorter months, eventually they would encounter delayed crescent visibility, prompting a subsequent shift toward longer months. Conversely, communities frequently opting for longer months would eventually realign themselves upon earlier sightings. This cyclical oscillation allowed divergent local calendars to converge gradually, maintaining general alignment across the empire while still permitting short-term divergence.

Complementing the flexibility of lunar observation, communication played a critical role in synchronizing the lunar calendar across the empire. Crescent-sighting reports moved along established channels: testimonies were given before the kadı's court; court scribes circulated notices to mosque officials, and information traveled by official couriers (*ulak* or *tatar*) through the imperial postal network connecting major towns to the capital. This widespread reporting created feedback loops, allowing communities to calibrate their lunar dates based on broader observational consensus. Collectively, these natural oscillations, and deliberate communicative practices allowed the empire to maintain temporal order amidst inherent short-term variations.

Besides these correction mechanisms, the unchanging structure of the seven-day week played the primary role. It provided a stable and universally accepted temporal anchor. Unlike the

[12] "Gerçi tekavimde Şaban yirmi dokuz olmak üzre Ramazan-ı şerif yevm-i Ahad olmak musarrah idi. Lakin şer'an sabit olmamağla İsneyn'den oldu." Raşit Gündoğdu, *Uşşakizade Tarihi Tahlil ve Metin (1106-1124 / 1694-1712)* (İstanbul University, PhD Dissertation, 2000), 554.

[13] "Be-kavl-i ser-münecciman-ı şehriyari gurreyi 'Salı gündendür' diyü takvimlerinde tahrir olunmuş idi. Velakin beş hesabı Pazarirtesi olmak üzre yevm-i Salı günine itibar olunmayup Pazarirtesi saim olundı." Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi, *Tarih-i Göynüklü*, ed. Songül Çolak - Metin Aydar (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), 526.

fluctuating lengths of lunar months, the weekly cycle remained constant and undisputed throughout the Ottoman Empire, as it had for over fifteen centuries across the broader Mediterranean world. While local debates might arise over whether a given date marked the 10th or 11th day of the month, no such disputes emerged concerning the day of the week. This consistency ensured that Muslims across Ottoman lands performed the obligatory Friday prayer, a central ritual and communal gathering, on the same day, regardless of regional differences in lunar month demarcation.

This hierarchy, a fixed, reliable weekly cycle and a flexible, negotiable monthly date, is the central mechanism that allowed Ottoman temporal culture to function. It provided a "calibration anchor," allowing users to cross-check and realign floating lunar dates without compromising the larger chronological framework. As we will see in the case studies, recordkeepers might disagree on the lunar date of a sultan's death, but when they provide on the day of the week, they always agree. This single fact proves they are describing the same moment but counting it differently.

2. Current Scholarship and Its Historiographical Limitations

Despite their importance for understanding historical temporal regimes, calendrical variations have occupied a surprisingly marginal position in modern scholarship on the Ottoman Empire. This is particularly true in the field of political and administrative history, where the messy reality of temporal negotiation is often flattened to fit modern expectations of a uniform, centralized state.

Historians often acknowledge that the Hegira calendar, based on lunar cycles, exhibited a degree of flexibility, but rarely explore how this variability shaped practical life at the imperial center. Most studies treat these irregularities as incidental, either dismissing them as anomalies or assuming they were resolved by a centralized, standardized system. This tendency has resulted in a literature that is rich in theoretical exposition but limited in empirical depth and interpretive range. This section offers a critical reassessment of that literature, highlighting two major limitations that have constrained a broader exploration of timekeeping flexibility in the Ottoman context.

The first limitation concerns the brevity and generality with which calendrical variation is explained. Many handbooks, encyclopedias, and introductory texts note the existence of two parallel methods for determining the lunar month: the calculated method and the sighting method.[14] However, these acknowledgments are rarely followed by detailed investigation. The theoretical distinction is thus presented without sufficient empirical grounding, fostering an illusion of coherence.

This tendency is reinforced by the routine default to the "ideal" alternating sequence of 30- and 29-day lunar months when modern editors or historians interpret historical dates. A telling example appears in the editing of the 1596 Ottoman campaign diary of Eger in northeastern

[14] Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Vergleichungs-Tabellen Der Muhammedanischen Und Christlichen Zeitrechnung* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1854). Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Takvimü'l-Edvar* (İstanbul: Ebüzziya, 1882). Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Takvimin Tarihi - Takvimü'l-Edvar*, ed. Mustafa Zahit Öner (İstanbul: Büyüyen Ay, 2023). Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Islahu't-Takvim* (Cairo: Muhammed Efendi Mustafa, 1891). Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *La Reforme Du Calendrier* (Leiden: Brill, 1893). Sherrard Beaumont Burnaby, *Elements of the Jewish and Muhammadan Calendars* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901). Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Takvimü's-Sinin* (İstanbul: Ceride-i Havadis, 1915). Wolseley Haig, *Comparative Tables of Mubammadan and Christian Dates* (London: Luzac, 1932). Faik Reşit Unat, *Hicri Tarihleri Miladi Tarihe Çevirme Kılavuzu* (Ankara: Maarif, 1940). Mihail Gueoglu, *Tabele Sincronice: Datele Hegirei Si Datele Erei Noastre Cu o Introducere in Cronologia Musulmana* (Bucharest: Directiunea Arhivelor Statului, 1955). Greville Stewart Parker Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars* (London: Rex Collings, 1977). Yücel Dağlı - Cumhure Üçer, *Tarih Çevirme Kılavuzu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997).

Hungary.[15] The diary's anonymous scribe recorded an irregular month sequence—30–30–29–30–29–29–30 days—for the period between Şevval 1004 and Rebiyülahir 1005. A modern editor, presuming error, retroactively corrected the sequence to the idealized 29–30–29–30–29–30 pattern. While the scribe may have committed certain dating mistakes, as carefully noted in this study,[16] yet his adherence to a non-ideal lunar month sequence was not among them.

A second major limitation in the existing scholarship lies in its narrow thematic scope, particularly its overwhelming focus on ritual months, most notably Ramadan and Zilhicce. Studies that address variability typically center on these months, highlighting their pivotal role in organizing religious observance.[17] This scholarly emphasis is further reinforced by the patterns found in archival records. Indeed, most documented instances of date adjustment, whether through official decrees or marginal annotations, occur just before or during Ramadan.[18]

These moments of recalibration are often treated in isolation, as if such synchronization efforts were temporally confined to Ramadan alone. As a result, the determination of the first day of fasting period has become the centerpiece of much of the literature on Islamic timekeeping.[19] Within this framework, the topic is frequently approached through the lens of theology, as scholars examine how scriptural interpretation, religious authority, and legal pluralism intersect with astronomical knowledge and geographic difference in the determination of sacred time.

This approach has fostered a rich, interdisciplinary dialogue, particularly among scholars of Islamic law, astronomy, and the history of science. Debates often center on whether the start of Ramadan should be established through naked-eye observation, astronomical calculation, or a hybrid of the two. The credibility of moon-sighting reports, the admissibility of witnesses, and the reconciliation of different legal schools' positions with empirical data from astronomers continue to generate extensive scholarly discussion. These debates are not only historically rooted but also ongoing in many contemporary Muslim societies, reflecting the continued relevance of temporal authority and religious legitimacy in the public sphere.[20]

This focus, however nuanced, has had unintended consequences. By concentrating so

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[15] Anonymous, *Macaristan'da Bir Osmanlı Padişahı: Sultan III. Mehmed'in Eğri Seferi Ruznamesi (1596)*, ed. Günhan Börekçi (İstanbul: Okur Kitaplığı, 2016).

[16] Anonymous, *Macaristan'da Bir Osmanlı Padişahı: Sultan III. Mehmed'in Eğri Seferi Ruznamesi (1596)*, nn. 42, 66, 79, 120, 139.

[17] Nesimi Yazıcı, "Osmanlı Dini Hayatından Bir Kesit: Rüyet-i Hilal Meselesi," *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* 35/1 (1999), 55–82; Recep Çiğdem, "Osmanlı Mahkeme Kayıtlarına Göre Rüyet-i Hilal," *Türk Hukuk Tarihi Araştırmaları* 9 (2010), 23–36.

[18] Ertuğrul Yıldırım, *Arşiv Belgelerinden Hareketle 18. Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Ramazan* (Marmara University, MA Thesis, 2013); Gül Bezci, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Ramazan Kültürü* (Dumlupınar University, MA Thesis, 2018); Mutlu Toparslan, *XIX. Yüzyıl İstanbul Kültüründe Ramazan Eğlenceleri* (İstanbul University, MA Thesis, 2018); Fadime Aşık, *Osmanlı İstanbulunda Ramazan Kültürü ve Ramazan Sofraları* (Sakarya University, MA Thesis, 2019).

[19] Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 80–99; Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *The Day Begins at Sunset: Perceptions of Time in the Islamic World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 20–25; Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950* (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 2015), 149–176. On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (California: University of California, 2013), 115–126. Daniel A. Stolz, *The Lighthouse and the Observatory: Islam, Science, and Empire in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2018), 243–270.

[20] Baltacı, "Rüyet-i Hilal Münakaşaları"; Ekrem Keleş, "Rüyet-i Hilal Meselesi," *Marife*, no. 2 (2002): 35–52; İsmail Köksal, "Ruyet-i Hilal Meselesi," *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13, no. 1 (2008): 1–11; Ahmet Özdemir, "Kameri Ayların Tespitindeki İhtilafın Sebepleri ve Çözüm Önerileri," *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergis* 10, no. 1 (2010): 195–206; Mustafa Karataş, "Rereading the Hadith From the Perspective of Observing the Crescent," *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 16, no. 3 (2012): 85–93; Mehmet Bulut, "Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde Takvimler ve 'Ruyet-i Hilal' Üzerine Bir Müzakere," *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* 49, no. 3 (2013): 95–112; Hafız Salihuddin, "Modern Teknolojilerle Hilalin Gözetlenmesi Problemine Eleştirel Bir Bakış," trans. Abdullah Acar, *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2, no. 2 (2015): 259–68; Abdullah Acar, "Kameri Ayların Tespitinde Hesap Metodunun Meşruiyeti ve Uluğbey Takvimi," *İslam Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 31 (2018): 443–67; Nihat Tosun, "Dini Gün ve Geceleri Tespitte Yöntem Problemi," *Uşak Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2021): 224–41; Fatih Mehmet Yılmaz, "Hadislerde Yevm-i Şek (Şek Günü) Orucu," *Tasavvur - Tekirdağ İlahiyat Dergisi* 8, no. 1 (2022): 107–32.

heavily on certain times of the lunar calendar, the current scholarship has inadvertently sidelined equally important temporal variations occurring in non-ritual months and non-religious contexts. The assumption that calendrical irregularities were confined to religious months does not hold up. Lunar discrepancies almost certainly influenced a wide spectrum of activities central to imperial administration and public life, including tax collection, judicial procedures, salary disbursements, debt deadlines, and the recordkeeping practices of state officials and literate individuals.

The neglect of cases beyond Ramadan reflects a broader tendency in the literature to prioritize theological or scientific interpretations over social and administrative realities. For example, Necati Akgür's often-cited entry in the Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi asserts that, "…except for Ramadan and the month of Zilhicce, which is also the time of Eid al-Adha, no adjustments were usually made in other months."[21] While this claim captures the conventional wisdom, it is contradicted by a growing body of empirical evidence from Ottoman archival sources. Numerous documents, ranging from court registers and financial ledgers to imperial correspondence, include corrections, annotations, and retrospective changes in dates that span the full lunar year.

Even specialized studies of institutional actors have not sufficiently addressed this complexity. David King's extensive research on Islamic astronomical instruments and prayer-time computation has illuminated the intellectual sophistication of Muslim timekeeping traditions. Yet, in this study, the lunar calendar and its observation-based nature receive only cursory treatment, and the lived tensions between theoretical models and observational practices remain largely unexplored.[22] Likewise, Salim Aydüz's research on Ottoman *muvakkits* outline their official duties, such as preparing annual calendars and announcing Ramadan,[23] but rarely probe the constraints they faced when recordkeepers made decisions independently of their recommendations.

Fortunately, recent historical research has begun to challenge this overly coherent portrayal by foregrounding the empirical diversity of Ottoman timekeeping. Colin Heywood's 2006 study of the 1678 Chyhyryn campaign offers a compelling demonstration of the kinds of inconsistencies that proliferated in contemporary sources.[24] His work compares multiple narratives of the same event and reveals significant variation in the recorded lunar dates. This evidence strongly suggests that such discrepancies were not isolated errors, but systemic features of Ottoman temporal life. Similarly, Ali Akyıldız's 2021 investigation into nineteenth-century Ottoman administrative documents highlights widespread calendrical inconsistencies, even within a period of increasing bureaucratic centralization.[25] These findings underscore the need to

[21] "Hicri takvimde gün sayısının belirlenmesi, özellikle rü'yet farklılıkları olması ve otuza tamamlama değişiklikleri yapılması sebebiyle karışık bir durum gösterir. Eskiden ramazan ile kurban bayramı ayı olan zilhiccenin dışındaki diğer aylarda pek düzeltme yapılmadığından…"A. Necati Akgür, "Takvim," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2010), 39/489.

[22] David A. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1/465–468.

[23] "The precise calculation of the prayer times, as well as of the beginning and the end of the daily fast in the month of Ramadan, also fell naturally within the province of the astronomer… The main occupation of the muwaqqits was to provide precise information not only about the astronomically determined times of prayer, but also about the regulation of the lunar calendar and the determination of the direction of qiblah when this was needed… Some timekeepers would prepare annual calendars and determine the precise day to begin the Ramadan fasting." Salim Aydüz, "Office of The Muwaqqit and the Munajjimbashi," *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Science and Technology in Islam*, ed. İbrahim Kalın et al. (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 2/66–67. Also see, Salim Aydüz, "Ottoman Time Keeping Houses: Muwaqqitkhanas," *Etudes Balkaniques* 8/2 (2017), 214–229.

[24] Colin Heywood, "The Shifting Chronology of the Chyhyryn (Çehrin) Campaign (1089/1678) According to the Ottoman Literary Sources, and the Problem of the Ottoman Calendar," *The Ottoman Empire: Myths, Realities and 'Black Holes' (Contributions in Honor of Colin Imber)*, ed. Eugenia Kermeli - Oktay Özel (New York: Gorgias, 2012), 283–295. Also see, Kahraman Şakul, *Çehrin Kuşatması* (İstanbul: Timaş Akademi, 2022), 18–19.

[25] Ali Akyıldız, "19. Yüzyıl Belgelerinde Hicri Takvim Sorunu: Hicri Tarihler Doğru Zamanı Mı Gösterir?," *Tarihçilik ve Yöntem Üzerine* (İstanbul: Timaş Akademi, 2021), 91–110.

treat temporal inconsistency as a historical phenomenon worthy of serious investigation.

What is required, then, is a fundamental shift in focus, from a top-down view of timekeeping to a bottom-up approach that emphasizes temporal negotiation. Such reorientation would allow historians to better understand how time was experienced, not just how it was intended to be measured. It reframes discrepancies in lunar dating not as anomalies or editorial problems to be corrected, but as core features of the Ottoman temporal realm. Such historiographical approach would elevate these moments from marginalia to central evidence. This is never more true than when dealing with the pinnacle of the state narrative: the death of the sultan. The following section will do just that, treating the discrepancies in the records of two sultans' deaths not as errors, but as the central focus of investigation.

3. Recording the Moment of Royal Death

To demonstrate that discrepancies in timekeeping extended well beyond ritual months and into the very heart of the state's record-keeping apparatus, this section examines their presence in the historical records of two Ottoman sultans: Mustafa II and Ahmed III. Both cases highlight how even the deaths of former monarchs, events of major political and ceremonial significance, were subject to chronological confusion in the sources. The former, who had been deposed at Edirne in August 1703 during the Edirne Incident, died four months later in December of the same year while under house arrest in Istanbul. His brother and successor, Sultan Ahmed III, ruled for nearly three decades before being dethroned during the revolt in September 1730. He then lived in seclusion within the imperial palace for six years, until his death in June 1736.

Despite the official and public nature of their deaths, chroniclers and recordkeepers from both their own time and subsequent generations present conflicting accounts regarding the exact dates. These discrepancies, which center not on the Hegira year or month but on the specific day within the month, reveal the broader challenges of synchronizing time in the Ottoman world. By comparing these inconsistencies, this study underscores not only the variances in observational methods and local reporting but also the enduring tensions between idealized calendar systems and practical timekeeping realities in Ottoman historiography.

In the final days of December 1703, Sultan Mustafa II drew his last breath, closing a chapter in Ottoman history. His death was a politically charged event. He had been deposed just four months earlier in Edirne during the "Edirne Incident," a major revolt that brought his brother, Ahmed III, to the throne. Mustafa II died under house arrest in Istanbul. His death, while perhaps expected, needed to be handled with care to finalize the legitimacy of the new regime. One might assume that the new administration of Ahmed III would be meticulous in recording the passing of the man he had replaced. Yet, a comparison of contemporary sources reveals a striking divergence on the specific day of the month.

The task of overseeing the funeral arrangements fell to Silahdar Mehmed Ağa, a senior palace official and a historian in his own right. He was, quite literally, the man in charge of the event. In his chronicle, he recorded the sultan's death as occurring on 21 Şaban 1115. Other key sources from the period, however, provide different dates. Mehmed Raşid Efendi, who would later be appointed as the official court historian, recorded the event as occurring a day earlier, on 20 Şaban 1115. He was not alone; Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, a high-ranking finance official and chronicler, also marked the 20th Şaban. Uşşakizade İbrahim Efendi, another contemporary historian, likewise used the 20th Şaban. To complicate matters further, an anonymous chronicle offered yet another alternative: 22 Şaban 1115. The table below summarizes this clear disagreement among contemporary observers in the imperial capital.

Table 1. Hegira dates for the death of Sultan Mustafa II, 1703

Ottoman Sources	Hegira Date	Day of the Week
Uşşakizade Efendi[26]	20 Şaban 1115	Saturday
Defterdar Mehmed Paşa[27]	20 Şaban 1115	-
Raşid Efendi[28]	20 Şaban 1115	-
Silahdar Mehmed Ağa[29]	21 Şaban 1115	Saturday
Anonymous[30]	22 Şaban 1115	-

How can this be explained? Are these simply "errors"? That is highly unlikely. A more plausible explanation emerges when we analyze the roles of the authors and the critical piece of data: the day of the week.

Two sources, Uşşakizade and Silahdar, provide the weekday: Saturday. This is the anchor. It confirms they are all describing the same day. The Gregorian conversion for this event is Saturday, 29 December 1703. The conflict, therefore, is not about when the sultan died, but about what that Saturday was counted as.

The discrepancies in the Hegira date, ranging from the 20th to the 22nd of Şaban, can be attributed to differing calculations of when the lunar month began. While the weekday served as a stable referent anchoring these accounts, the inconsistencies in the count of lunar days reveal the interpretative nature of Ottoman timekeeping. Uşşakizade, Raşid, and Defterdar appear to have marked the beginning of Şaban 1115 as a Monday, whereas Silahdar counted from Sunday, and the anonymous chronicler from Saturday. These differences reflect not only the calendar's dependence on moon-sighting but also the broader historiographical variability in how Ottoman recordkeepers interpreted time.

A parallel, and arguably even more revealing, episode unfolded thirty-three years later with the death of Sultan Ahmed III. Enthroned after Mustafa II's deposition in 1703, he was himself removed from power in the 1730 revolt. He spent his final six years confined to the Topkapı Palace during the reign of his nephew, Mahmud I.

Ahmed III died in June 1736. As with his brother, the death of a deposed monarch was a sensitive state event, representing a definitive break with the previous era and securing the legitimacy of Mahmud I's reign. And, as with his brother, the administrative and historical records for this event are riven with chronological contradictions.

Subhi Efendi, the official court chronicler for this period, is curiously vague. Serving from 1739 to 1745, he was tasked with compiling a narrative for the years 1730-1744 and editing the works of his predecessors. When recording the event, he notes only the month and year (Safer 1149), omitting the specific day. This omission, far from being an oversight, appears to be a conscious historiographical choice.

Other sources, however, were more precise, and they fundamentally disagree. Hıfzi Ağa,

[26] Gündoğdu, *Uşşakizade Tarihi Tahlil ve Metin (1106-1124 / 1694-1712)*, 359.
[27] Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-i Vekayiat, Tahlil ve Metin (1066-1116 / 1656-1704)*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), 835.
[28] Raşid Mehmed Efendi - Çelebizade İsmail Asım Efendi, *Tarih-i Raşid ve Zeyli*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan et al. (İstanbul: Klasik, 2013), 716.
[29] Mehmet Topal, *Silahdar Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, Nusretname Tahlil ve Metin (1106-1133/1695-1721)* (Marmara University, PhD Dissertation, 2001), 657.
[30] Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), *Anonim Osmanlı Tarihi (1099-1116 / 1688-1704)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), 275.

the private secretary (*sır katibi*) of Mahmud I, recorded the death in the sultanic diary as occurring on 13 Safer 1149. Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi, the treasurer of the galleons (*kalyonlar defterdarı*) at that time, concurred, also recording 13 Safer 1149. However, Numanpaşazade Ahmed Paşa, the acting grand vizier (*sadaret kaymakamı*), recorded the death as occurring on 14 Safer 1149. An anonymous recordkeeper also reported 14 Safer 1149. Further variations appear. The diary of Mustafa Efendi, scribe to the chief of the bombardiers (*humbaracıbaşılık katibi*), noted the death as 11 Safer 1149. Şemdanizade Efendi, writing retrospectively in the late eighteenth century but drawing on contemporary sources, cited the date as 12 Safer 1149.

Table 2. Hegira dates for the death of Sultan Ahmed III, 1736

Ottoman Sources	Hegira Date	Day of the Week
Mustafa Efendi[31]	11 Safer 1149	-
Şemdanizade Efendi[32]	12 Safer 1149	-
Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi[33]	13 Safer 1149	Saturday
Hıfzi Ağa[34]	13 Safer 1149	Saturday
Numanpaşazade Ahmed Paşa[35]	14 Safer 1149	Saturday
Anonymous[36]	14 Safer 1149	Saturday
Subhi Efendi[37]	(-) Safer 1149	-

Once again, the weekday anchor resolves the apparent chaos. The four sources (Göynüklü, Hıfzi, Numanpaşazade, and Anonymous) all agree the day was Saturday. This allows the event to be synchronized with Saturday, 23 June 1736. The discrepancies, therefore, are not factual errors about the event, but different counting styles. Mustafa Efendi likely considered the first day of Safer 1149 to have fallen on a Wednesday, Şemdanizade on a Tuesday, Hıfzi Ağa and Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi on Monday, and Numanpaşazade Ahmed Paşa and the anonymous writer on Sunday.

This brings us back to Subhi Efendi, the official court historian. His job was to write the single, authoritative history of the reign for posterity. He was thus faced with a classic historian's dilemma: what does one do when multiple sources directly contradict each other? The Sultan's private secretary records the 13th, while the office of the Grand Vizier records the 14th.

His solution is a masterful display of historiographical craft. By omitting the specific day, he refuses to privilege one high-level state record over another. He simply states the death occurred in "Safer 1149," a fact that no source could dispute. This "chronological silence" should

[31] Muammer Karan, *Humbaracıbaşılık Katibi Mustafa Efendi'nin Ruzmerre Mecmuası (1143-1180/1730-1767) İnceleme-Çeviriyazı* (İstanbul University, MA Thesis, 2022), 29.
[32] Şemdanizade Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi, *Müri't-Tevarih*, ed. M. Münir Aktepe (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1976), 1/44.
[33] Göynüklü Ahmed Efendi, *Tarih-i Göynüklü*, 425.
[34] Selman Soydemir, *Sultan I. Mahmud Ruznameleri (1730-1754) (İnceleme ve Çeviriyazı Metin)* (İstanbul University, 2022), 382.
[35] Elif Sabır, *Sadaret Kaymakamı Numanpaşazade Ahmed Paşa'nın Yazışmalarını Havi Bir Mecmua* (Marmara University, MA Thesis, 2022), 143–144.
[36] Anonymous, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, Defter, 2066, 1a.
[37] Subhi Mehmed Efendi, *Subhi Tarihi Sami ve Şakir Tarihleri Ile Birlikte*, ed. Mesut Aydıner (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2007), 298.

be read not as evasion, but as a deliberate methodological choice. To choose a date would be to inscribe a contested fact into the official record. Instead, Subhi, as a historian, chose a different kind of accuracy: the precision of acknowledging ambiguity. His strategic silence, which merits its own future study on the dating habits of court historians, reveals a sophisticated method of navigating historical complexities.

Taken together, these two episodes illuminate more than isolated inconsistencies; they reveal the interpretive and negotiated character of Ottoman timekeeping. The divergences do not reflect error or confusion but rather underscore the flexibility inherent in a lunar calendar system. In both 1703 and 1736, we observe a common pattern: although the numerical day of the lunar month varies across sources, convergence around the day of the week offers a stabilizing mechanism. This coexistence of variation and coherence exemplifies the temporal pluralism that characterized the Ottoman experience of time.

Conclusion

This study has explored the inherent flexibility and negotiated nature of Ottoman timekeeping by focusing on the seemingly precise and politically crucial moment of a sultan's death. Far from being a marginal issue or a simple administrative inconsistency, the variability observed in the imperial records for the funerals of Mustafa II and Ahmed III provides vital insights into the practical realities of temporal experience, bureaucratic culture, and official historiography in a premodern empire.

This research has demonstrated that temporal discrepancies were not anomalies to be corrected but were, in fact, structurally embedded phenomena. The core of the issue was a persistent tension between the calculated, ideal timekeeping models advanced by state astronomers and the sighted, practical timekeeping of eyewitnesses and palace officials. Daily life, even within the palace, was often governed by local sightings rooted in immediate sensory experience rather than abstract calculations.

The case studies reveal how these temporal differences were systemic products of parallel, coexisting calendar practices. While both deposed sultans died on a Saturday, the question of which day of the month is answered differently. The Ottoman records for the death of Sultan Mustafa II in 29 December 1703 reveal a variation of three Hegira dates in circulation, while the death of Sultan Ahmed III in 23 June 1736 include four alternative dates.

These insights portray Ottoman timekeeping not as a single, top-down system, but as a dynamic and negotiated field of practice. The system's functionality was a direct result of this flexibility. Its coherence relied on a universally acknowledged hierarchy of temporal units: the seven-day weekly cycle provided the essential, invariant anchor, allowing the floating lunar days to be calibrated and cross-referenced. The recordkeepers' agreement on "Saturday" proves that the system worked, allowing for short-term pluralism while maintaining long-term coherence.

Current scholarship, particularly in political and administrative history, has often overlooked these nuances, dismissing such discrepancies as errors or anomalies. This study has argued for the opposite: such variations in lunar dating are primary sources. They are windows into the limitations of central authority, the tensions within the state bureaucracy, and the complex process of constructing an official historical narrative. By taking temporal pluralism into center, we gain a far richer and more accurate understanding of Ottoman timekeeping as a polyphonic and negotiated realm rather than a monolithic, centralized entity.

Ultimately, this approach has implications that extend far beyond the Ottoman context. By treating chronological inconsistencies not as errors to be corrected but as valuable historical evidence, scholars can uncover the practical, lived realities of time in other pre-modern societies reliant on observational calendars. This framework invites a re-examination of administrative and social histories across the broader Islamicate world and beyond, transforming apparent chaos into

a new source of historical insight.

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