

An Ottoman Historian in an Age of Reform:

Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi (ca. 1730–1806)

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family,  
who never once questioned the wisdom of a career in history.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Ali Emiri
A.RSK.d	Bâb-1 Asâfî, Rûûs Kalemi Defterleri
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, İstanbul
C.DH	Cevdet Dahiliyye
D.BŞM.d	Bâb-1 Defterî, Başmuhâsebe Kalemi Defterleri
DİA	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi
EP	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition
GOW	Babinger, <i>Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke</i>
HAT	Hatt-ı Hümâyûn
İA	İslâm Ansiklopedisi
İÜ	İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, İstanbul
MEHÂSİN 1	<i>Mehâsinü 'l-Âsâr ve Hakâikü 'l-Ahbâr</i> , İstanbul Arkeoloji Müzesi Kütüphanesi nr. 355
MEHÂSİN 2	<i>Mehâsin</i> , İÜ nr. 5978
MEHÂSİN 3	<i>Mehâsin</i> , İÜ nr. 5979
MEHÂSİN 4	<i>Mehâsin</i> , İÜ nr. 6013
MEHÂSİN 5	<i>Mehâsin</i> , İstanbul, 1804. 2 vols
MEHÂSİN 6	<i>Mehâsin</i> , TOP nr. 1406
MEHÂSİN (EGYPT)	<i>Mehâsin</i> , İÜ nr. 6012
MAC	<i>Muhassenât-ı 'Asker-i Cedîd</i> , Abdullah Uçman, ed., <i>Sekbanbaşı Risalesi, Hulâsat el-Kelâm fi Red el-Avam</i> . İstanbul, 1975.
SO	Sürreya, <i>Sicill-i Osmânî</i>
TOP	Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul
ÖN	Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna
UT	University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
Y.EE	Yıldız Esas Evrakı

## GLOSSARY

<i>amedcî</i> –	Receiver-general of the Grand Vezir’s provincial correspondence.
<i>anadolu muhâsebecisi</i> –	Accounting officer for the province of Anatolia.
<i>baş muhâsebeci</i> –	Chief accounting officer.
<i>beylikçi</i> –	Chancery official responsible for promulgation of all edicts and regulations except those of a financial nature; a subordinate of the <i>reis efendi</i> .
<i>büyük rûznamçe/tezkireci</i> –	Secretary and paymaster of the imperial council.
<i>defterdâr</i> –	The empire’s chief treasury official.
<i>fetvâ emîni</i> –	Head of the office dealing with religious opinions or fatwas.
<i>hacegân</i> –	Bureau chiefs of the Ottoman administration; the highest level of the chancery.
<i>kethüdâ bey</i> –	The Grand Vezir’s deputy, who acted as his secretary and managed his correspondence.
<i>kapıcıbaşı</i> –	Head of the palace doorkeepers
<i>kapudan-ı deryâ</i> –	The Grand Admiral of the Ottoman navy.

<i>kaymakam</i> –	A proxy, here for the Grand Vezir when on campaign. During wartime the Ottoman government accompanied the army in the field and proxies were left in the capital to duplicate their normal functions.
<i>mektûbî</i> –	Official who managed the correspondence bureau of the Grand Vezir.
<i>reisülküttâb</i> –	Official in charge of the chancery scribes and secretaries in the financial administration. The reis was the head of the chancery and also, in the eighteenth century, assumed direction of foreign affairs.
<i>sefâretnâme</i> –	The official report of an Ottoman ambassador, submitted after his return from abroad.
<i>serasker</i> –	Military commander.
<i>şeyhülislâm</i> –	The highest religious official in the empire; the chief jurisconsult.
<i>sırkâtibi</i> –	Privy secretary to the sultan.
<i>tevkâ'î</i> –	Chancellor; responsible for validating official documents and affixing the sultan's seal thereto.
<i>vekâyi'nüvis</i> –	Official court chronicler.

## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This study uses a modified Modern Turkish script to render Ottoman Turkish names, titles, terms, and constructs. In general, I adhere to the original orthography and indicate long vowels with a circumflex (Â, â, Î, î, Û, û); I omit the glottal consonants *‘ayn* (‘) and *hamza* (’), which are unvoiced in Turkish, except where absolutely necessary, as in the transliteration of extended passages and key technical terms. For non-specialists the following letters may be unfamiliar:

- C,c – pronounced “j” as in “jam.”
- Ç,ç – pronounced “ch” as in “cheese.”
- Ğ,ğ – this “soft g” is mostly unvoiced and lengthens the preceding vowel.
- I,ı – pronounced like the first syllable in “early.”
- Ö,ö – pronounced as in German “schön” or the French “seul.”
- Ş,ş – pronounced “sh” as in “shoe.”
- Ü,ü – pronounced as in German or the French “tu.”

For Arabic and Persian names, terms, and text, I have followed the transliteration system employed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*, which uses diacritics to more accurately reflect the script. In all cases I have preferred, where they exist, Anglicized versions of place names and titles like “sultan,” “sufi,” and “ulema.” Unless otherwise noted, all source translations are my own.

## INTRODUCTION

In his work *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, the Ottoman moralist Kınâlızâde Ali Çelebi (d. 1571) reckons two distinct types of ignorance: simple and compound. The first type means simply not knowing something, which alone is not blameworthy. The second is more pernicious. Compound ignorance is two-fold in that the individual does not know something and thinks they do; it is a vice because they are willfully ignorant of their own ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation, an investigation into the life and work of the eighteenth century historian and statesman Ahmed Ebûlbekâ Hasan al-Harbûtî (d. 1806), called Vâsîf Efendi, might be described as a testament to both simple and compound ignorance. On one hand, it tries to evoke the intellectual effervescence of a little-known milieu. For all the attention devoted to eighteenth century Ottoman reform, particularly to the reigns of Mustafa III (1757-1774), Abdülhamid I (1774-1789), and Selim III (1789-1807), and for all the scholarship on these early attempts at European-style administrative and military modernization, very little research has explored the underlying moral and mental climate – a peculiar outpouring of energy in response to the shock of defeat and imperial collapse. Jane Hathaway has called intellectual history the biggest “lacuna” in the study of the Ottoman eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing Vâsîf and his

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<sup>1</sup> Kınâlızâde Ali, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, ed. Mustafa Koç (İstanbul, 2007), 170-174. Also Gottfried Hagen, “The Order of Knowledge, the Knowledge of Order: Intellectual Life,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey* (Cambridge, 2013), 2: 407.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Hathaway, “Rewriting Eighteenth Century Ottoman History,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19 (2004): 38-42. Some notable exceptions to this statement are Virginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmî Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden, 1995); Kemal Beydilli, “Küçük Kaynarca'dan Tanzimat'a Islâhât Düşünceleri,” *İlmî Araştırmalar* 8

voluminous body of writing, this study seeks to dispel some of our simple ignorance of late eighteenth century intellectual life.

On the other hand, I became dimly aware during my research that this work would inevitably suffer from a good deal of compound ignorance, my own. Probably this is common to all biography. Although my original intention had been a strictly historiographical study, evaluating Vâsîf's historical output in view of his life and career, he seemed to recede in the same measure that I moved forward. The more personal detail I unearthed, the fuzzier he became; the more I learned about the man, the more I realized how little I knew or indeed could ever know. The once familiar historian grew less distinct. What is more, there seemed to be many missing pieces even where my knowledge about him was more certain, arguments without context, barbs without targets, and addresses without a clear audience. Gradually I shifted away from Vâsîf strictly as an individual to Vâsîf as a member of and an important contributor to a wider intellectual milieu, and it was there that the project crystallized in its present form. Rather than study Vâsîf as an isolated mind, I have tried connect his work to the larger controversies that occupied the empire's late eighteenth century elites. I do not pretend that this treatment is comprehensive. But, at the least, I hope that it will provide the outlines for fuller, future study.

### ***Ahmed Vâsîf: His World and Corpus***

Before moving to the subject of this study, Vâsîf Efendi, it is necessary by way of introduction to say a few words about his world. Norman Itzkowitz once wrote that “success spoiled the

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(1999): 25-64; Kahraman Şakul, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd Düşüncesinde Batılılaşma ve İslami Modernleşme,” *İlmî Araştırmalar* 19 (2005): 117-150; Fatih Yeşil's detailed biography, *Aydınlanma Çağında bir Osmanlı Kâtibi: Ebubekir Râtib Efendi (1750-1799)* (İstanbul, 2010); and Aysel Yıldız, “Vaka-yı Selimiyye or the Selimiyye Incident: A Study of the May 1807 Rebellion.” (Ph.D. diss., Sabancı Üniversitesi, 2008).

Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century.”<sup>3</sup> There is certain truth to this sentiment. While the century began inauspiciously in 1699 at Karlowitz, which ended the vitiating War of the Holy League (1683-1699), for the next seventy years the empire enjoyed enough success to breed a false sense of security. Abroad, they balanced losses at Karlowitz and Passarowitz (1718) with the capture of Azov (1711) and the Morea, regained in 1715 from Venice. The 1739 Treaty of Belgrade rewarded their three-year struggle against Russia and Austria with Belgrade, parts of Wallachia, and thirty years of peace. At home, meanwhile, Ottoman fiscalism triumphed. Alongside general economic expansion, contracted tax-farm yields grew tenfold between 1703 and 1768 and accounted for upwards of fifty percent of total revenues,<sup>4</sup> prosperity that was reflected in Istanbul, where the elite built waterfront villas and pleasure domes and followed the royal household up and down the Bosphorus on seasonal villegiaturas. They would look back on this time as an Edwardian summer of unending feasts, garden parties, and entertainments.<sup>5</sup>

The Ottoman elite, of which Vâsîf was one, were the instruments of eighteenth century change. They belonged not just to the dynasty and imperial administration but represented a number of interest groups that identified as Ottoman, recognized the legitimacy of the dynasty, and, aligning their interests with Istanbul, “cemented” a consensus that held the regime together.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Itzkowitz and Max Mote, eds., *Mubadele: An Ottoman-Russian Exchange of Ambassadors* (Chicago, 1970), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ariel Salzmann, “An Ancien Régime Revisited: ‘Privatization’ and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Politics and Society* 21 (1993): 405. Cf. the remarks of Bruce McGowan in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge, 1994), 710-739.

<sup>5</sup> Shirine Hamadeh evokes this zeitgeist well, though I am less convinced of the empirical basis of her other claims. *The City's Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> On a consensus at the heart of the Ottoman regime, see Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, ix-x; Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany, NY, 1991); Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden, 2004); Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2010).

The empire's success or failure in meeting its challenges depended in large measure on their reaction. The eighteenth century elite was moreover larger and more diffuse than in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. The rise of great households and growth in tax-farming, especially with lifetime *malikâne* grants in 1695, meant that power no longer concentrated only at the center. Decentralization bound provincial "interlocutors" – tax-farmers, Janissaries, semi-autonomous magnates called *a'yân*, and others – to the regime, making for a flexible if precarious coalition. The eighteenth century, then, at least in part, is the story of holding this consensus: "a hundred-year struggle of the Ottoman dynasty and its affiliated households to preserve the old order."<sup>7</sup>

Although scholars once regarded the eighteenth century as the era of decline par excellence, today most prefer to view it through a model of "crisis and change" whereby the empire responded dynamically to internal and external pressures.<sup>8</sup> There is much to commend in this view. "Crisis and change" permits us to see Ottomans as active, rational agents working for their own and the realm's preservation and interests. Accordingly, fiscal decentralization was a rational adaptation and, at least for a time, a very successful one. Yet it must be said that "change" is too vague a term to be very useful and far too nondescript to satisfy. It says little, for

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Also Gottfried Hagen's remark that legitimacy of the governor "is founded upon a consensus between government and governed," "Legitimacy and World Order," in *Legitimizing the Order: Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Marcus Reinkowski (Leiden, 2005), 56.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Aksan, "War and Peace," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey* (Cambridge, 2006), 3: 113-114. See also Carter Findley, "Political Culture and the Great Households," in *ibid*, 3: 65-66; Engin Akarlı, "Ottoman Historiography," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 30 (1996): 34-36.

<sup>8</sup> Aksan and Hathaway forcefully argue this model. *An Ottoman Statesman*; *idem*, "Locating the Ottomans Among Early Modern Empires," in *Ottomans and Europeans: Contacts and Conflicts* (Istanbul, 2004), 81-110; Hathaway, "Problems of Periodization in Ottoman History: the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20 (1996): 25-31; *idem*, "Rewriting Eighteenth Century Ottoman History," 29-53.



example, about how these individuals specifically responded to their world. More to the point of this study, it says nothing about how, during the century's turbulent end, Ottomans, especially the elites, understood and rationalized the empire's reverses, or about how well they faced the frailty of their worldviews. "Change" as a model says nothing of this. In fact, to Vâsîf and his peers the world did not appear to be changing; it seemed to be sliding inexorably into chaos.

In this regard, the 1768-1774 war with Russia can be considered the century's turning point. It is fair to say that many Ottomans had been overconfident and were shocked by the war's outcome. It is also accurate to date to 1774 a cascading series of crises in the empire, both political and ideological.<sup>9</sup> The Ottoman military had not kept pace with new European technologies and tactics. Moreover, decentralized power proved dysfunctional in war and a hindrance to efficiently raising men and revenue, functions contracted to provincial notables. Preserving the old order required some modicum of reform. The problem, however, was that reform must shift the balance of power in the "loosely maintained federation" of Ottoman elites.<sup>10</sup> Restructuring the military or provincial administration would impinge on Janissary, *a'yân*, or other interests and provoke opposition. Rulers like Ahmed III (1703-1730), Mahmud I (1730-1754), Abdulhamid I, and even Selim III were only too aware of this fact. Eighteenth century reform was hence ad hoc and partial, sufficient to preserve the status quo and hold consensus, but rarely much more.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century the Ottoman elite struggled mightily against itself. The turbulent political life of the period suggests a breakdown in consensus as well

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<sup>9</sup> On the war as the turning point of the eighteenth century, I follow among others Aksan, "War and Peace," 3: 81-117; Beydilli, "Islâhât Düşünceleri," 25-64; McGowan, 639-645; and Christoph Neumann, "Political and Diplomatic Developments," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 3: 44-64.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase belongs to Aksan, "War and Peace," 3: 117.

as a deep moral and intellectual crisis. Wars with Russia, Austria, and France threatened to dispel the illusion of Ottoman military exceptionalism, the elite's ideological glue. And though frequent policy shifts in the 1770s and 1780s gave way to a measure of stability under Selim III, who oversaw ambitious reforms, the situation remained fragile. Selim's eventual deposition, murder, and the purging of his supporters suggest that the crisis went unresolved. By 1808 the regime was beset by paralysis and failing legitimacy, the old order unable to support itself.

If this is a grim picture,<sup>11</sup> it should nonetheless not obscure the fact that important changes were occurring in the eighteenth century. Ottomans of all stripes and characters – military commanders, propagandists, statesmen, shills, intellectuals, earnest objectors, and cynical opportunists – all responded creatively to preserve the old order, even if, ultimately, political action proved ineffectual. This study attempts to investigate how they did so and what their main concerns were, concentrating on the efforts of Vâsîf Efendi, perhaps the most towering of their number.

Born in Baghdad in the 1730s, Vâsîf served the empire for nearly forty years as a chancery scribe, negotiator, ambassador, and court historian (*vekâyi'nüvis*). As we shall shortly see, he was well-traveled and highly-placed, his duties bringing him into contact with a

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<sup>11</sup> In light of recent treatments, I fully realize that this interpretation of the eighteenth century might be controversial. For this I make no apologies. Although I am no declinist, the attempts of revisionists to portray the eighteenth century as a period of Ottoman resurgence, or even one of renaissance, deserves push-back. It is true, for example, as Ariel Salzman and others have pointed out, that decentralization does not make “decline.” Yet it is much less certain that there was, in her words, “rarely a net devolution of state power” in the arrangement (“Ancien Régime Revisited,” 405). If judged only on the state's ability to defend itself and project power over borders, the late eighteenth century empire was weaker than the late seventeenth century empire. Indeed, it was enfeebled. My own reading of the century neither attributes this weakness to intrinsic cultural factors nor discounts the empire's adaptability, but it does see an Ottoman elite stumbling from one crisis to the next, enacting ad hoc reforms enough to allow them to preserve the status quo and hold consensus. By 1808 they were virtually paralyzed. Does the eighteenth century, then, bring us to the limits of “crisis and change”? I have yet to be convinced otherwise.

surprising number of Enlightenment-era personalities: Russian generals Piotr Rumiantsev and Nikolai Repnin, Carlos III of Spain, the English littérateur William Beckford, the Spanish admiral Don Federico Gravina, and Catherine the Great. As an intellectual Vâsîf was meanwhile one of the most formidable Ottomans of the eighteenth century. His corpus includes a divan of poetry, an embassy report (*sefâretnâme*), and short works of belles-lettres, geography, and printing in addition to a history covering the entire second half of the century (roughly, 1753-1805). By all lights he was willful, opinionated, and highly involved in the political and intellectual controversies of his day.

Vâsîf's most important work, however, is his vast court chronicle *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakâikü'l-Ahbâr* (*The Charms and Truths of Relics and Annals*). Perhaps the most extensive Ottoman histories of the eighteenth century belong to the office of the court historian. The *vekâyi 'nüvis* recorded the dynasty's contemporary history as a salaried official, usually while serving simultaneously in other posts, and submitted his work to the sultan in regular installments. During the eighteenth century over thirteen men served as court historian. Their efforts, like Vâsîf's, number thousands of folios and remain mostly unpublished.<sup>12</sup>

Current literature on Ottoman court historians leaves much to be desired. For one, there have been very few attempts at all to study them individually or as a group. Only one monograph on an eighteenth century *vekâyi 'nüvis* exists, which, though brilliant, is now some seventy years old. To this we can add another admirable study of the nineteenth century historian Ahmed Cevdet.<sup>13</sup> There is also a persistent misunderstanding surrounding how these men, as it were,

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<sup>12</sup> Bekir Kütükoğlu's long article remains the most useful survey, "Vekayi 'nüvis," in *Vekayi 'nüvis Makaleler* (İstanbul, 1994), 103-138.

<sup>13</sup> Respectively, Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima* (New York, 1972); Christoph Neumann, *Araç Tarih, Amaç Tanzimat: Tarih-i Cevdet'in Siyasi Anlamı*, trans. Meltem Arun (İstanbul, 1999). Itzkowitz lamented this lack of scholarship in his 1959 doctoral dissertation. Little has

“did history.” The view that *vekâyi nüvises* were colorless scribes, amanuenses who recorded the past in a neutral, Rankean light, can for instance be found in a number of studies. Rhoads Murphey claims that court historians gave “minutely-detailed, factually accurate description; in other words to attempt to portray the world *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.”<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lewis remarks approvingly on their “frankness” in a tradition that, on the whole, “[told] it like it was.”<sup>15</sup> Most recently, and most problematically, Baki Tezcan has asserted on multiple occasions that Ottoman court historians, anticipating von Ranke, provided “secular” and “positivist” accounts and were seen as “neutral...bearers of historical truth.”<sup>16</sup>

Such conclusions appear to have been made without a sound understanding of Ottoman historiographical traditions or serious recourse to the histories themselves. This dissertation attempts quite the opposite – to evaluate Vâsîf’s work as the self-contained product of an individual operating within a distinct intellectual milieu. To Vâsîf, as to others, history was inherently didactic and useful above all for its political and moral examples. He was by no means

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changed in the interim. “Mehmed Raghib Pasha: the Making of an Ottoman Grand Vezir” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1959), 180-181. During my final edits for this work, I came across a treatment by Robert Charles Bond, “The Office of the Ottoman Court Historian or Vak‘anüvis, 1714-1922: an Institutional and Prosopographic Study” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2004), but was unable to consult it. Nor, it seems, has Bond ever published on the topic.

<sup>14</sup> Rhoads Murphey, “Ottoman Historical Writing in the Seventeenth-Century: A Survey of the General Development of the Genre after the Reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617),” in *Essays on Ottoman Historians and Historiography* (İstanbul, 2009), 93.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis, “Reflections on Islamic Historiography,” *Middle East Lectures* 2 (1997): 77.

<sup>16</sup> Tezcan, “The Politics of Early Modern Ottoman Historiography,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge, 2007), 180, 183, 196-197; idem, “Ottoman Historical Writing,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ed. José Rabasa et al (Oxford, 2011), 3: 200-201; idem, *The Second Empire*, 196, 198. For dissenting views, Gottfried Hagen and Ethan L. Menchinger, “Ottoman Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2014), 92-106; Ethan L. Menchinger, “‘Gems for Royal Profit’: Prefaces and the Practice of Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Court History,” *Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2:2 (2010): 127-151.

“neutral” but actively interpreted history. What is more, unlike earlier court historians Vâsîf, commissioned by Sultan Selim III, edited and rewrote the work of at least seven predecessors. He was, quite literally, rewriting the history of his empire. Seen in this way, his corpus expresses a set of values and concerns, a way of viewing the world, shared by his patron the sultan and a powerful part of Ottoman society.

The biggest challenge of this study has been to establish these concerns, for Vâsîf and his peers drew on an immense cultural and intellectual heritage in philosophy, theology, law, and ethics, all with specialized vocabularies. Keeping well in mind, to quote an eloquent phrase, that “the critical mind must also be joined with the sympathetic heart to get the most out of an Ottoman chronicle,”<sup>17</sup> I have tried to isolate some of these strands and at the same time present them comprehensibly both in their intellectual genealogy and in the author’s immediate context. The reader will therefore notice continuity as one recurring theme. Vâsîf and his fellows were not engaged in the radical re-making of their society but drew on tried and true conceptual frameworks, some of them very ancient, to understand and attempt to solve the empire’s plight. A work of this sort has to proceed on the assumption that these frameworks and their keywords were not deployed as clichés or empty rhetoric, but served a definite purpose in contemporary intellectual discourse. They are signposts that orient us in an otherwise forbidding wilderness.

Another major theme, carried through all chapters, is a basic disagreement among eighteenth century Ottomans over the legitimate place of human reason and action across life’s many spheres. Whether in their discussions of fatalism and historical agency, in the conduct of war and peace, in personal ethics and responsibility, or in political reform, Vâsîf and his peers were deeply engrossed in a contest over human limitations, the place of man in the universe, and

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<sup>17</sup> Itzkowitz, “Mehmed Raghîb Pasha,” 182.

the boundaries of the earthly and heavenly, the secular and the divine. This is perhaps the most striking discovery of the study and, at least for the moment, one I cannot fully explain.

Nonetheless, it is there, and leads us to the consideration of how the eighteenth century shaped Ottoman minds, how it undermined many of very same conceptual frameworks we will discuss, and how it ultimately contributed to the makings of a distinctly Ottoman modernity. These are not considerations I will fully try to answer; I thankfully leave them to other, less fortunate souls.

In addition to Vâsîf's work and secondary studies, I have relied heavily in my research on archival sources, contemporary histories, and works of Ottoman ethics, law, political thought, philosophy, and theology in both Turkish and Arabic. The archival sources come largely from the Prime Minister's Archives (BOA) in Istanbul. I have also had to access many non-archival primary sources in manuscript, in Istanbul, Vienna, and elsewhere, although some of these have been published or are at least edited as theses and dissertations. Vâsîf's corpus presents an especial challenge in that, as will be seen below, it is almost entirely unedited and unpublished and its pieces are scattered among different volumes throughout the world's major manuscript libraries. I need to reiterate my thanks for the help I received in collecting these pieces.

The dissertation consists of five chapters, each focused on a major element in Vâsîf's work. Chapter One introduces his life and career, including a biographical section on his travels, posts, and publications, a discussion of his history's overall structure and content, and an analysis of his epistemology and conceptualization of history as a field of knowledge. Chapter Two looks more closely at Vâsîf's "philosophy of history," proposing that the way in which he presents historical dynamics stresses human agency and the importance of action, or what we might call a "reformist philosophy of history." Chapter Three treats war, peace, and peacemaking, and the way in which the historian justified peace throughout his career. Chapter

Four moves to Vâsîf's view of the moral universe, how he joined history, knowledge, and morality in the Persianate tradition of "practical philosophy" or *hikmet-i 'ameliyye*, and to his understanding of political thought, including the ideal ruler and order. Finally, in Chapter Five I examine Vâsîf's views on political reform. In all instances, the historian proves to represent only one facet of a very diverse spectrum of Ottoman opinion.

## CHAPTER ONE

### History as *Magistra Vitae*: Ahmed Vâsîf's Life and Work

Writing over the course of twenty years, Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi left one of the largest Ottoman chronicles of the eighteenth century: over 1,800 folios in manuscript, of which most remains unpublished and, hence, under-utilized. Before exploring this immense work's themes more closely, it is necessary to describe its development within the author's life and career.

This chapter reconstructs Vâsîf's biography, intellectual formation, and approach to historical writing. Based on an array of archival and narrative sources, it places his chronicle firmly in a tradition of moralizing, didactic historiography. Vâsîf, like other Ottomans, held that history should impart lessons. Indeed, he considered his work valuable precisely for the guidance it offered to statesmen on a variety of subjects – ethical, practical, political – and made an explicit link between historical knowledge and morality. It is no surprise, then, that the chronicle engages with partisan questions and provides commentary on many of the pressing issues of the late eighteenth century. Far from a “neutral” record, this was history as *magistra vitae* – a “teacher of life.”

#### *A Portrait of an Eighteenth Century Historian*

Very little is known about Ahmed Vâsîf's birth, family, or youth.<sup>18</sup> Rather uncharacteristically, the author says nothing whatsoever about his early life. One certainty is that he was born in

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<sup>18</sup> There is no need here for a full narrative of Vâsîf's life. The following section relies heavily on İlgürel's pioneering work in *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakâikü'l-Ahbâr*, ed. Mücteba İlgürel (İstanbul, 1978), xix-xxvii and İA, s.v. “Vâsîf,” but also on Kütükoğlu, “Vekayi'nüvis,” 103-



Baghdad in the early decades of the eighteenth century, but the exact date is not known. Judging from estimates of his age made by later European and Ottoman contemporaries, it is probably reasonable to place his birthdate around the year 1730.<sup>19</sup> We also have precious few details about Vâsîf's family. According to some sources, Vâsîf's full name was Ahmed b. Ebûlbekâ Hasan al-Harbûtî. His father, one Ebûlbekâ Hasan, was a religious scholar (‘*âlim*) who taught in Baghdad. The adjective al-Harbûtî or “the one from Harput” indicates that the family may have originally hailed from the city of Harput in eastern Anatolia, near present-day Elâzığ. On the whole they were of modest means.<sup>20</sup>

A bit more evidence exists concerning Vâsîf's education and early activities. For one, he seems to have excelled in language from a young age. Ahmed Âsım relates that he studied with local scholars and inclined naturally to literature and epistolography, cultivating the Arabic linguistic sciences (‘*ulûm-ı ‘arabiyye*). Later, forced upon his own resources, Vâsîf applied these skills as a scribe and copyist to a number of Baghdadi magnates, perhaps members of the local Mamluk elite, and soon became known for his skilled pen.<sup>21</sup>

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138, and cited primary sources. I intend shortly to publish an updated bibliography and biography of Vâsîf.

<sup>19</sup> Spanish sources in 1787 put him between 45 and 54 years old, Antonio Jurado Aceituno, “18. Yüzyılda Bir Osmanlı Elçisinin İspanya'yı Ziyareti,” *Tarih ve Toplum* 36 (2001): 34; Mehmet Necati Kutlu, “İspanyol Belgelerine Göre İspanya Nezdinde Görevlendirilen (Eyüp'te Medfun) İlk Osmanlı Elçisi Ahmet Vâsîf Efendi,” in *Tarihi, Kültürü ve Sanatıyla IV. Eyüpsultan Sempozyumu Tebliğler, 5-7 Mayıs 2000* (İstanbul, 2000), 109. Ottoman sources claim he exceeded 70 years of age at his death in 1806, Süleyman Fâik, *Sefînetü'r-Rüesâ* (İstanbul, 1853), 149.

<sup>20</sup> Ismâ‘îl Bâshâ al-Baghdâdî, *Hadiyyat al-‘arîfîn: asmâ al-mu‘allifîn wa âthâr al-muşannifîn min kashf al-zunûn* (Beirut, 2008), 1: 166; M. Nuri Çınarcı, ed., “Şeyhülislâm Ârif Hikmet Bey'in Tezkiretü'ş-Şu‘ârâsı ve Transkripsiyonlu Metni,” (master's thesis, Gaziantep Üniversitesi, 2007), 108; Mehmed Nâil Tuman, *Tuhfe-i Nâilî: Divân Şâirlerinin Muhtasar Biyografileri* (İstanbul, 2001), 2: 1139.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed Âsım, *Târih-i Âsım* (İstanbul, 1870), 1: 255.

At some point as a young man Ahmed Vâsîf left his natal city of Baghdad. He himself gives no indication why this was. It may be that the city had little to offer him. Baghdad in the early eighteenth century was something of a provincial backwater, sitting in Persian marches that during the 1730s and 1740s, after the collapse of Safavid power, suffered from brigandage and periodic military incursions.<sup>22</sup> In any event, biographical sources agree that the young man traveled west and north to Aleppo, Kars, and Van to continue his education. Almost certainly this means he was seeking out scholars in the storied Islamic tradition of “travel in search of knowledge (*rihla fi talab al-‘ilm*).” Although sources do not specify what or with whom Vâsîf studied, it is possible to speculate given the region’s intellectual life. Theology thrived in eighteenth century Syria and Anatolia in networks of pietistic Nakşbendî sufi scholars like Davûd-ı Karsî (d. 1755/6), Saçaklızâde Mehmed Maraşî (d. 1732/33), and Ebusaid Mehmed Hâdîmî (d. 1762), all of whom wrote extensively on will-power and human agency, subjects crucial to Vâsîf’s mature thought.<sup>23</sup> Anatolia was also known for the high level of its logic, philosophy, semantics, and other rational sciences (*‘ulûm-ı ‘akliyye*), particularly among Kurdish teachers, and attracted students from Baghdad, Aleppo, and elsewhere abroad.<sup>24</sup>

This is one obstacle in sketching Vâsîf’s formation as a thinker. It is hard to associate him with any one “type” of intellectual figure. He was not a religious scholar like his father, though

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<sup>22</sup> On Baghdad in the early to mid-eighteenth century, T. Niewenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq* (The Hague, 1982); Robert Olson, *The Siege of Mosul and Ottoman-Persian Relations, 1718-1743: a Study of Rebellion in the Capital and War in the Provinces of the Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1975).

<sup>23</sup> Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Particular Will (*al-irâdat al-juz’iyya*): Excavations Regarding a Latecomer in Kalâm Terminology on Human Agency and its Position in Naqshbandi Discourse,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2011), 2-20. Hilmi Kemal Altun has cataloged a large number of such scholars and their works in “Osmanlı Müelliflerince Yazılan Kazâ ve Kader Risâleleri ve Taşköprüzâde'nin *Risâle Fi'l-Kazâ ve'l-Kader* Adlı Eseri” (master's thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, “The Myth of ‘the Triumph of Fanaticism’ in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Die Welt des Islams* 48 (2008): 210-216.

he was deeply familiar with the religious or “transmitted” sciences (*‘ulûm-ı nakliyye*). He was not a philosopher, despite, as will be seen, the space he devoted to philosophical concepts in his work. Neither did he have formal training as a scribe (*kâtib*), even though this was to become his eventual profession. Vâsîf’s education was certainly wide-ranging, profound, but does not seem to have been directed to any of these specific ends. If anything he might best be considered a *littérateur* (*edîb*); at least, his interests in history, poetry, and ethics place him securely in this ambit.

Vâsîf’s movements in Aleppo, Kars, and Van are chronologically obscure. We also do not know for sure in what order he resided in these cities. It seems most likely that he first followed the caravans west from Baghdad to Aleppo, called “the Grey,” an ancient city dominated by its huge medieval citadel. Vâsîf was there by 1761/62 at the latest.<sup>25</sup> It is then likely that he traveled northeast into Anatolia. In April of 1767, for example, he claims that while studying near Kars and Van he witnessed riots in Kars which led to the murder of the local warden, Gürcü Mehmed Paşa.<sup>26</sup>

At this point Vâsîf entered the service of a provincial governor, a connection that began his career. This man was Kel (or Gül) Ahmedpaşazâde Ali Paşa. A powerful minister and former Grand Admiral (*kapudan-ı deryâ*), Ali Paşa had once nearly ousted and replaced Koca Ragîb Paşa as Grand Vezir on the death of Osman III in 1757, but the plot fell apart and Ali was dismissed, expropriated, and exiled to the island of Kos. On 6 March 1767 he was appointed to Aleppo, and then transferred to Kars on 27 April and İçel a month later.<sup>27</sup> Vâsîf probably encountered him at this juncture in Aleppo or Kars. His services to Ali Paşa were of a scribal

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<sup>25</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 268a; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 345.

<sup>26</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 289-290. Cf. Çeşmizâde Mustafa, *Çeşmizâde Tarihi*, ed. Bekir Kütükoğlu (İstanbul, 1993), 25-26.

<sup>27</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 96-97, 181, 290, 294. Cf. *Çeşmizâde Tarihi*, 19, 27, 37.

nature, described as either that of a librarian or accountant, but he also tutored the governor and helped him through works like the odes of the sixteenth century Persian poet ‘Urfî and the *Makâmât* of al-Ḥarîrî.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that even at this early age Vâsîf took an interest in surrounding events. When he recorded the history of these years as a much older man, he drew on his memories of Ali Paşa and others and hints that he sometimes took these down in writing.

In early 1767 Ahmed Vâsîf was approximately 35 years old and about to embark on a career in state service. He was already highly learned. He had traveled the Levant and eastern reaches of the empire, searching out scholars and knowledge. Vâsîf by this point must have mastered Turkish, Persian, and classical Arabic in addition to his native dialect; there is also evidence that, at least in later life, he knew some amount of Greek and Russian.<sup>29</sup> Vâsîf was furthermore well-positioned in a major statesman's entourage. Little did he know that the following years would take him farther afield – to the Danube, Crimea, Russia, and the Gate of Felicity itself.

The Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia on 4 October 1768, initiating one of the most costly wars of the eighteenth century. As the government traditionally accompanied the Ottoman army on campaign, when Kel Ahmedpaşazâde Ali Paşa was summoned to the front as part of general mobilization, to muster with the imperial army, he took his scribes and household along with military forces. Ali, now the Sivas governor, met the Grand Vezir in mid-June 1769 at Hantepesi, north of the Danube on the Pruth River. Vâsîf, too, was there.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 55. Âsım describes his duties as *hazîne kitâbeti*, 1: 255. Fâik calls them *kitâbilik*, 146. On Ḥarîrî (d. 1122) see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar, 1898), 1: 325-326. On ‘Urfî (d. 1590/91), E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (reprint, Bethesda MD, 1997) 4: 241-249.

<sup>29</sup> Aceituno, 35.

<sup>30</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 12.

Vâsîf accompanied Ali Paşa during the war's first campaign season and followed the Ottoman army to Bender. The conditions on the front were already poor. Provisions had been ineptly or corruptly organized and were scarce. Soldiers deserted, sometimes mutinied. Twice in Bender Vâsîf saw his patron openly defy orders to protest the army's condition.<sup>31</sup> However, Ali Paşa eventually accepted command in Bender, though unwillingly, and his forces, Vâsîf included, spent an uneasy winter in 1769/70 on the frontier while the imperial army barracked south of the Danube at Babadağı. He later recalled that the garrison was buffeted by several Russian attacks and a mutiny. On top of this, in mid-October Ali Paşa took ill, died, and was buried in Bender's inner citadel. Without his protector of three years, Vâsîf faced an uncertain immediate future and, so he says, succumbed for a time to anxiety and deep depression.<sup>32</sup>

Vâsîf next appears in sources the following spring in the retinue of another commander, Abaza Mehmed Paşa. Although they served together at a major battle – the defeat at Kartal in July 1770 – the author makes no mention of their connection. İlgürel ventures this is because he disapproved of Mehmed Paşa's leadership, which may well be true as the paşa was assigned to Yenikale in the Crimea that autumn but neglected his duties. When the Russians invaded the peninsula in 1771 Abaza Mehmed fled by ship to Sinope and Vâsîf, possibly along with the Crimea *serasker* İbrahim Paşa, fell into Russian hands.<sup>33</sup> Vâsîf was sent to St. Petersburg in a

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<sup>31</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 19, 25-26; Ahmed Resmî, *A Summary of Admonitions: a Chronicle of the 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman War*, ed. and trans. Ethan L. Menchinger (İstanbul, 2011), 16b both in translation and original text.

<sup>32</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 50-51, 53-55.

<sup>33</sup> Şemdânîzâde Süleyman, *Mür'î't-Tevârih*, ed. Münir Aktepe (İstanbul, 1976), 2b: 76; Âsım, 1: 255; Muharrem Saffet Çalışkan, ed., “(Vekâyi‘nüvis) Enverî Sadullah Efendi ve Tarihinin I. Cildi'nin Metin ve Tahlili (1182-1188 / 1768-1774),” (Ph.D. diss., Marmara Üniversitesi, 2000), 265-266.

captivity lasting some months. In his chronicle, he remarks tartly that the sultan, Mustafa III, attributed the situation to “fickle fate.”<sup>34</sup>

Towards the fall of 1771, Vâsîf, who had been freed by Catherine II, arrived at the imperial army in Babadağı bearing letters from the Russians. Summoned to Istanbul, he gave the sultan several depositions and was rewarded.<sup>35</sup> During this time Vâsîf also cultivated new patrons. One attempt with *reisülküttâb* Râif İsmail Efendi seems to have gone awry. However, Vâsîf did successfully curry favor with the *mektûbî* and later *reis* Abdürrezzâk Bâhir Efendi and secured a position in the latter's bureau. This attachment lasted over a decade and in the near term aligned him with a political faction that included Ahmed Resmî Efendi and Grand Vezir Muhsinzâde Mehmed Paşa, who promoted him to the *hacegân*.<sup>36</sup>

Vâsîf spent the rest of the war closely involved in peacemaking. After the collapse of initial negotiations at Foksani in the summer of 1772, Muhsinzâde appointed him as a special courier to the Russian General Piotr Rumiantsev to renew the truce, a charge he adeptly discharged. That fall, Abdürrezzâk Efendi, acting as chief delegate, included him as secretary to negotiations (*mükâleme kâtibi*) at the second peace conference in Bucharest, which lasted six months. Vâsîf also witnessed the Ottoman rout at Kozluca and was evidently with the Grand Vezir and imperial army, heavily besieged at Şumnu, when peace was signed on 21 July 1774.<sup>37</sup>

The homecoming was not a joyful one for many Ottoman statesmen, least of all for Ahmed Vâsîf. For one, in the war's chaotic end he had lost all his patrons. Abdürrezzâk Efendi,

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<sup>34</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 169. İlgürel's claim that Vâsîf's captivity lasted nine months is questionable, as he makes this judgment based on the date of the truce of 29 May 1772. In fact, Vâsîf had returned by September 1771, as he accompanied Abdürrezzâk Efendi to Istanbul on 19 September.

<sup>35</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 176-177, 279; Çalışkan, “Vekâyi‘nüvis Enverî,” 265-266.

<sup>36</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 188; Fâik, 146-147.

<sup>37</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 225-233, 241-245, 302-306.

attacked in a mutiny, was sent away for “protection” and then dismissed and exiled to Anatolia. Muhsinzâde Paşa died shortly after the peace.<sup>38</sup> Mustafa III, moreover, who had shown Vâsîf kindness, was dead. Abdülhamid I's accession to the throne in 1774 shifted power alignments in the capital and cast most who had fought and ended the war into disfavor. Vâsîf expressed bitterness at his colleagues' reception in Istanbul, where, he said, they were forced to swallow dismissal and slink home like so many criminals. While he was appointed in October 1774 to renegotiate some peace terms in Jassy with Rumianstev, Vâsîf received no reward or further posts.<sup>39</sup> The late Muhsinzâde's wife Esmâ Sultan, who was Abdülhamid's sister, also seized his landed income and accused him of acquiring it illegally. No one would intercede on his behalf.<sup>40</sup>

We have very little information on the next decade of Vâsîf's life. Like some of his peers, the best known being Ahmed Resmî Efendi, he apparently spent the time between 1774 and 1783 in obscurity. There are indications that he suffered financial hardship, and it is not improbable he returned to his old work of copying for support. However, Vâsîf maintained contact with Abdürrezzâk Efendi and, when the latter again became *reisülküttâb* on 28 April 1779, his fortunes began to revive. He wrote a chronogram for that occasion and later gained some minor appointments.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, his earliest known work – a commentary on Jârullah Zamakhsharî's *Nawâbigh al-kalim* – dates to this period and strongly suggests the *reis*'

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 2: 300-301, 309-313.

<sup>39</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 5b-6a, 6a-12a.

<sup>40</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 232-233.

<sup>41</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 97b-98a; Erhan Afyoncu, “Osmanlı Müelliflerine Dair Tevcihat Kayıtları I,” *Belgeler* 20 (1999): 125.

patronage, as it is a Turkish translation of Abdürrezzâk's presumably Arabic original, commissioned by Grand Vezir Esseyid Mehmed Paşa (1779-1781).<sup>42</sup>

The 1770s and 1780s were a time of rancorous, factional politics in the empire. The 1768-1774 war opened questions that struck at Ottoman identity and survival; in its aftermath, statesmen struggled to find answers. One of the biggest points of contention was how the government should respond to the Treaty of Kaynarca, which laid heavy impositions on the empire and was felt particularly in the loss of the Crimean peninsula. Some, taking a hard line, supported an armed response. Vâsîf and others took a pragmatic view of the matter. By 1783, he had aligned himself with the faction of Grand Vezir Halil Hamid Paşa, who favored a cautious approach: to appease the Russians while strengthening the empire through a series of military reforms. Vâsîf held a number of positions under this Grand Vezir, and was appointed court chronicler (*vekâyi'nüvîs*) for the first time on 2 November 1783. He held this post until his departure as ambassador to Spain on 1 July 1787.<sup>43</sup>

One of Ahmed Vâsîf's most significant but neglected intellectual undertakings took place during this time. In 1784 Vâsîf and the *beylikçi* Râşid Mehmed Efendi approached the Grand Vezir about purchasing İbrahim Müteferrika's printing press. The press had ceased operation decades before, and Râşid and Vâsîf argued that if reopened it would lower the prices and increase the circulation of books. After petitioning the sultan they gained control of the press.<sup>44</sup> In their partnership Râşid left everyday oversight to Vâsîf, who in turn shared the income, and together they published two court chronicles: those of Sâmî, Şâkir, and Subhî (1784) and İzzî

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<sup>42</sup> *Tercüme-i Şerh-i Nevâbigü'l-Kelim li-Vâsîfi'l-Merhûm*, Millet Kütüphanesi Pertev Paşa nr. 387, 2b-3a. The manuscript's colophon dates it to 6 April 1780. On Zamakhsharî, Brockelmann, 1: 293.

<sup>43</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 40a, 292a-292b; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 46, 372-373.

<sup>44</sup> BOA.AE.I. Abdülhamid 1064; MEHÂSİN 1, 114a-116a.



(1785). But problems soon emerged. Vâsîf alienated the typesetter, the future mathematician Gelenbevî İsmail Efendi, and split with Râşid over allegations that he had embezzled money. Râşid secured his dismissal from the press. Cevdet further claims that he engineered Vâsîf's appointment as Spanish ambassador in order to remove him from Istanbul, as a sort of "honorable" exile.<sup>45</sup> Whatever happened, the two were henceforth enemies.

Vâsîf's earliest historical writing dates to these same years, after he replaced Sadullah Enverî as *vekâyi 'nûvîs*. Submitted in yearly installments to Abdülhamid I, the work extends from 1783 to 7 June 1787, or shortly before he left for Spain, and appears uneven and unfinished. Although Vâsîf's overriding concern is with Russian encroachment on the Crimea and Ottoman reform efforts, the work is cleft in two by the 1785 fall and murder of his patron, Grand Vizir Halil Hamid Paşa. Vâsîf's eulogistic praise of Halil Paşa, whom he introduces as the empire's savior, the "renewer of the age," turns quickly to repudiation as the author, understandably if hypocritically, tries to distance himself from the disgraced minister.<sup>46</sup> It seems improbable he would have left this imbalance in a finished work. As Vâsîf also reports, he fully expected to resume his duties as historian upon returning from Spain. However, the outbreak of war with Russia in 1787 altered the situation and Enverî regained the post. Although early on Vâsîf called this work the "first" volume of his history, he later indicated an intention to revise and include it in a larger history of Abdülhamid I's reign (1774-1789).<sup>47</sup>

Vâsîf spent nearly a full year abroad in Spain. Officially his aim was to strengthen relations between the two countries, but his basic mission may well have been to secure an alliance. Vâsîf toured Barcelona, Valencia, La Granja, and Madrid, and met with Carlos III. He

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<sup>45</sup> Ahmed Cevdet, *Târih-i Cevdet* (İstanbul, 1891/92) 3: 121, 4: 7. *Târih-i Sâmî ve Şâkir ve Subhî* (İstanbul, 1783/84); *Târih-i İzzî* (İstanbul, 1784/85).

<sup>46</sup> Cf., for instance, MEHÂSİN 1, 5a-8b, 172a-172b, 181a-184b.

<sup>47</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 4a; MEHÂSİN 1, 292b; MEHÂSİN 6, 5a-5b.

also encountered a young Englishman, the foppish littérateur and eccentric William Beckford, whom he appears to have befriended. He returned via Malta on the *Santa Rosa*, a Spanish frigate under Admiral Don Federico Gravina, reaching Istanbul on 11 May 1788, and hastily submitted his report or *sefâretnâme*.<sup>48</sup> Circumstances had changed in the interim: the empire was now at war with Russia and Austria and Vâsîf was without a position.

In general, the war's first years passed quietly for Vâsîf in Istanbul. After coming to the throne in 1789, and for reasons not entirely clear, Selim III provided him a post in the financial bureaucracy (*rikâb anadolu muhâsebecisi*) and had him revise accounts of certain historical events from the imperial accession onward. However, in 1791 the historian's name appeared in a list of those to be sent to the army. Vâsîf alleged that this was a plot against him by envious “degenerates,” yet he could do naught to change Selim's mind and left for the front to serve as court historian and full *anadolu muhâsebecisi*, complaining of large debts for the journey.<sup>49</sup>

Ahmed Vâsîf remained with the army during that summer's disastrous campaign season, recording events at the imperial camp and discharging various duties. The latter included serving as a courier and composing an address for Grand Vezir Koca Yusuf Paşa before the major engagement at Maçin (9 July 1791). In spite of Vâsîf's stirring words, at Maçin the Ottoman army was outdone and effectively destroyed. Koca Yusuf then opened negotiations with the Russian commander, Nikolai Repnin.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Sefâretnâme-i Vâsîf Efendi*, TOP Emanet Hazine nr. 1438, 327b-354b. See also William Beckford, *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain, 1787-1788*, ed. Boyd Alexander (Gloucestershire, 2006); Federico Gravina, *Descripción de Constantinopla*, ed. D. José María Sánchez Molledo (Madrid, 2001). There are a number of translations and studies of this report, which may be consulted in the bibliography.

<sup>49</sup> On these appointments MEHÂSİN 2, 4b, 21a, 81a; BOA.HAT 11082, 11187, 11579, 57475.

<sup>50</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 92b-99b.

Here we must note that the historian now witnessed, and probably actively abetted, a serious insubordination in the army. In early August 1791, Vâsîf parleyed for ten days with Repnin in the city of Galatz. While he was away Selim III, who now had word of Russia's specific demands, in particular that the Dniester River form the two empires' new border, ordered the Grand Vezir to break off talks and fight for better terms. Yet Vâsîf had already yielded and signed an eight-month truce, while the other Ottoman commanders flatly refused to fight. When he returned to the army on 11 August 1791, these commanders had him draw up a memorandum justifying their refusal, in effect defying both the sultan and Grand Vezir.<sup>51</sup> Vâsîf's involvement in this "Maçin Petition," important as it was to his intellectual career, does not seem to have been widely known at the time. Actually, we know of it entirely through another work, the later *Muhassenât-ı 'Asker-i Cedîd (The Merits of the New Soldiery)*, to be discussed below.

Selim III did however blame Vâsîf for accepting the Dniester as the new border, for which he paid a price. We have it on the historian's testimony that after the Maçin boycott "certain malicious men" began to influence the sultan against him. Selim III had called Vâsîf a "blackguard (*kızılbaş*)" when he learned of the truce.<sup>52</sup> Later, courtiers convinced him that promoting Vâsîf would create the impression he was being rewarded. The sultan thus gave him a choice of temporary appointments in the provinces: to delineate the new frontier in Bosnia or to oversee the surrender of fortresses and ordnance in Belgrade. Vâsîf opted for the latter, assuming that he would retain his original position in the financial bureau. However, he learned on

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<sup>51</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 108a-110b; Ahmed Fâiz, *Selim'in Sırkâtibi Ahmed Efendi Tarafından Tutulan Rûznâme*, ed. Sema Arıkan (Ankara, 1993), 31-36; Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789-1807* (Cambridge MA, 1971), 64-66. For the petition text see Ali Osman Çınar, ed., "Mehmed Emin Edîb Efendi'nin Hayatı ve Târîhi," (Ph.D. diss., Marmara Üniversitesi, 1999), 239-247; Mehmed Edîb, *Târih-i Edîb*, UT nr. 5203, 118a-121a.

<sup>52</sup> *Rûznâme*, 36.

reaching the city of Niş that his immediate inferior, Sivasî Hasan Efendi, had taken his post “by fraud” with the help of an unnamed statesman; Enverî once again replaced him as court historian. Vâsîf says that he continued to Belgrade, in complete despair, where he finished his duties and awaited orders from the sultan. After six months Selim had him return to Istanbul, but again he had neither post nor other income.<sup>53</sup>

Vâsîf writes that he bided his time in the capital “in assiduous study” for a year. One task he undertook during the period was compiling a dictionary of obscure words from the Persian historian Vassâf, whom he greatly esteemed. The sole copy of *Müşkilât-ı Lugat-ı Vassâf* (*Perplexities in Vassâf's Vocabulary*) in the Topkapı Palace library, dated 6 March 1793, may suggest he was actively seeking patronage. To add insult to injury, at least in the historian’s mind, he shortly found that Enverî had presented Selim with a new chronicle – one that incorporated verbatim his own unfinished notes from the war front.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps as the fruit of his labors, in April of 1793 Vâsîf regained his old position of *anadolu muhâsebecisi* and one or two months later that of court historian. Selim particularly wanted him to revise and update the work of Enverî and Mehmed Edîb Efendi, who had recorded events in the capital during the war, and this commission became the “second” volume of his chronicle. Covering the period from Selim's accession in 1789 to 1794, the work is more openly moralizing than his first and incorporates precepts from the Aristotelian tradition of “practical philosophy” or *hikmet-i ‘ameliyye*. Indeed, the late war gave Vâsîf much fodder for reflection. After accusing Enverî of plagiarism, he turned his attention above all to explaining the failure of

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<sup>53</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 121a-122a.

<sup>54</sup> *Müşkilât-ı Lugat-ı Vassâf*, TOP Hazine nr. 1448, 1a; MEHÂSİN 2, 122a.

Ottoman arms – and to subsidiary discussions of historical agency, the causes of Ottoman weakness, and the need for the sultan's new reform program, the famous *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*.<sup>55</sup>

Vâsîf was soon in disfavor again, however, this time as a result of his long-standing quarrel with Râşid Mehmed Efendi. It seems that Râşid, who was now *reisülküttâb*, was feuding with the jurist and scholar Tatarcık Abdullah Mollâ, one of the historian's friends. One night in 1794 Abdullah went to Üsküdar to visit a colleague. Other callers came to pay their respects and the party, which included Vâsîf, spent several hours eating and conversing before it dispersed. Yet Râşid learned of the gathering and reported it to the sultan as subversive, and in late July or early August 1794, Selim had the men rounded up and sent into exile. As Vâsîf tells it, he was simply a victim of malicious slander.<sup>56</sup> Yet İlgürel conjectures the meeting was not so completely innocent. Other sources relate that Vâsîf had written his friend Feyzî Süleyman Paşa an incriminating letter about Râşid, which came into the *reis*' possession after Feyzî's death earlier that spring. Râşid therefore targeted Vâsîf along with Abdullah Mollâ and had them exiled to Midilli and Güzelhisar, respectively. Whatever the truth of the matter, the exiles did not last long. Selim III quickly relented and pardoned the men in early 1795.<sup>57</sup>

Vâsîf's return from exile began a rather fallow period in his intellectual career. While he resumed work in the financial bureaucracy during the second half of the 1790s, auditing accounts as *anadolu* and *baş muhâsebecisi*, he had lost his grip on the post of court historian. On his exile the position passed to Enverî and, after his death, to Halil Nûrî Bey. Vâsîf would not regain it until after Nûrî's death several years later.

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<sup>55</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 4b, 159b; also Vâsîf's marginal notes in Enverî, *Târih-i Enverî*, ÖN, H.O. nr. 105, 287b, 326b. TOP Hazine nr. 1638 is the final installment of this volume, and İÜ nr. 5980 is probably the presentation copy.

<sup>56</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 3a-4a, 10b-11a.

<sup>57</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 10b-11a; Âsım, 1: 256-257; Mehmed Cemaleddin Karlızâde, *Osmanlı Tarihi ve Müverrihleri: Âyine-i Zurefâ* (İstanbul, 2003), 64-65; BOA.C.DH. 1563; BOA.HAT 8283.

The historian's sole written work from this period is the so-called *Tesliyetnâme* (*Letter of Consolation*), probably written in the summer of 1798. The French invasion of Egypt in July of that year caught Selim III by surprise and put him in such a violent mood as to concern his ministers. Vâsîf was asked to put together a short tract to calm the sultan, which, he says, he quickly composed and submitted to the Porte.<sup>58</sup> The *Tesliyetnâme* is an example of a rare literary genre, the letter of consolation. Yet it is perhaps more important for Vâsîf's analysis of the French invasion, which he presents in a historical, comparative framework. Likening the invasion to other setbacks in Muslim history, Vâsîf offers a sweeping vindication of God's benevolence and of the Ottoman Empire's regenerative ability. It is, in a word, history as theodicy (a defense of God's power and goodness in view of the existence of evil), and a vision that Vâsîf increasingly applied to his historical output in later years.

Halil Nûrî Bey's death in 1798 left the post of *vekâyi 'nüvîs* vacant and Vâsîf's subsequent appointment, his fourth, initiated a period of intense production that would last practically until his death. The historian's immediate task was to revise and rewrite Nûrî's six-volume chronicle (1794-1798), which he then supplemented into the spring of 1800. This became Vâsîf's "third" volume.<sup>59</sup> The concerns of this work closely resemble those of the second volume. Namely, it seeks to explain the underlying weakness of the empire in relation to Europe while articulating the need for moral renewal and political reform. It also offers for the first time

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<sup>58</sup> *Tesliyetnâme*, TOP Hazine nr. 1625; Süleymaniye Serez Kısmı nr. 1890. An edited text has been published by Yüksel Çelik as "Siyaset-Nasihât Literatürümüzde Nadir bir Tür: Mısır'ın İşgali Üzerine III. Selim'e Sunulan Tesliyet-Nâme," *Türk Kültürü İncelemeler Dergisi* 22 (2010): 85-126.

<sup>59</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 2b, 227b. On Nûrî see Karşılızâde, 63; Otocar von Schlehta-Wssehrd, "Die osmanischen Geschichtschreiber der neueren Zeit," *Denkschriften der phil. hist. Klasse der Kaiserl. Ak. der Wissenschaften* 8 (1856): 9.

an interpretation of the French Revolution, which Vâsîf saw as pernicious and responsible for much of the world's turmoil.

After revising Nûrî, Vâsîf continued to record the empire's contemporary events in his "fourth" volume, a compilation left unfinished and extending from May, 1800 to January, 1805, while serving in senior chancery posts like *tevkî'î* and *büyük rûznâmçe*, gained through the intercession of Selim's privy secretary (*sırkâtibi*) Ahmed Fâiz Efendi.<sup>60</sup> He also composed several minor works. These included a short treatise translated from Arabic, entitled *Râhibnâme* (*Book of the Monk*), on the ethical virtue of patience; the introduction to a modern geography written by his colleague Mahmud Râif Efendi, *Atlas-ı Cedîd Tercümesi* (*New Atlas Translation*); and an essay on the campaign in Egypt against the French, culled from his chronicle and dedicated to Grand Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Paşa.<sup>61</sup>

From this period Vâsîf also left a large volume on the invasion of Egypt.<sup>62</sup> This work, probably incomplete, is almost entirely derivative and a pastiche of events from his third and fourth volumes prefaced with an adapted version of the *Tesliyetnâme*. Yet it carries no small importance for Vâsîf's development as a historian, for here for the first time he experimented with an interpretive framework, applying the *Tesliyetnâme*'s germ – its insistence on God's benevolence and the dynasty's divine favor – to a large sequence of Ottoman history. At the turn of the nineteenth century, then, Vâsîf was clearly seeking to reconcile the empire's situation with what he knew and believed of its exceptionalism. His effort here was another instance of history

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<sup>60</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 110b-111a, 211a; Fâik, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Respectively, *Râhibnâme*, TOP Hazine nr. 386; *Atlas-ı Cedîd Tercümesi* (İstanbul, 1803/4); *Vâsîf Efendi'nin Mısır Seferine Dâir Risâle*, ÖN, H.O. nr. 205.

<sup>62</sup> MEHÂSİN (EGYPT). Vâsîf signaled his intentions for this work in a marginal note in TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 1b.

as theodicy, in which the Ottoman victory in Egypt was, and could be nothing less than, a vindication.

Selim III planned further revisions of the dynastic chronicle in the early years of the nineteenth century. Probably in 1800, he ordered Vâsîf to revisit the *vekâyi'niivîses* who had served in the decades before his reign and overhaul their work, including Mehmed Hâkim Efendi, Çeşmizâde, and Musazâde. The historian pushed himself to exhaustion to complete this task, finishing Hâkim within four months and the whole sometime between the winters of 1801 and 1802. Vâsîf held these chroniclers in low regard, purging them heavily, and described the results as a “digest (*fihrist*).” However, Selim was evidently pleased and had him proceed to Sadullah Enverî’s chronicle of the 1768-1774 war, which he completed between 8 February 1802 and 29 January 1803. The whole was printed in November or December of 1804 and can be considered his “fifth” volume.<sup>63</sup>

The quality of this volume is especially uneven. Although Vâsîf’s revision of Hâkim is hasty and uninspired – he in fact detested Hâkim, complaining the work made him physically ill<sup>64</sup> – the second half may well be his finest overall effort. This is because the war years furnished a venue in which he could explore a number of major intellectual concerns like historical agency, peacemaking, and reform. Vâsîf framed the whole with a preface on causality, intimating that humans are responsible agents, and presents the war and its disastrous issue as a series of moral examples. Bolstered by his own eyewitness accounts, Vâsîf’s war chronicle is an admirable work of interpretive history no less than it is a powerful argument for continued political reform.

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<sup>63</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 3-4, 280-281, 2: 2-3.

<sup>64</sup> TOP Arşivi, nr. E.10323, in *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 401.



Late in life Ahmed Vâsîf most likely produced another short but influential work. This was the virulent, propagandistic defense of Selim III's reforms entitled *Muhassenât-ı 'Asker-i Cedîd*, but better known as *Hulâsatü'l-Kelâm fî Reddi'l-Avâmm* (*A Final Word to Refute the Rabble*) or more simply *Koca Sekbanbaşı Risâlesi*. This essay takes the form of a combative dialogue between an anonymous narrator, the so-called Koca Sekbanbaşı, and Janissary opponents, the former trying to expose the latter's gross ignorance and convince them of the necessity of military reform.

*Muhassenât* presents us with a number of difficulties. For one, its author is anonymous and adopts the guise, surely fictional, of a seasoned Janissary officer, and there has been no small debate over his true identity. Most scholars agree that the author must have been a member of Selim's entourage who was familiar with the workings of the bureaucracy, and that the work dates to approximately 1803/4. The second difficulty is that the narrator also identifies himself as the author of the 1791 Maçın petition to Selim, which justified the army boycott. The author of one is therefore the author of both.<sup>65</sup> These clues point to a partisan of reform in Selim's bureaucracy, who was present with the imperial army at Maçın on 10 August 1791 and still active in 1803/4.<sup>66</sup>

Vâsîf, as we have seen, fits all of these prerequisites. Furthermore, similarities in phrasing and political orientation aside, the work's only direct attribution comes from a later source, Esad Efendi's *Üss-i Zafer* on the 1826 destruction of the Janissary corps, in which Vâsîf

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<sup>65</sup> MAC, 61.

<sup>66</sup> See especially DİA, s.v. "Koca Sekbanbaşı Risâlesi"; Ali Birinci, "Koca Sekbanbaşı Risalesinin Müellifi Tokatlı Mustafa Ağa (1131-1239)," in *Prof. Dr. İsmail Aka Armağanı* (İzmir, 1999), 105-120; Kemal Beydilli, "Evreka, Evreka veya Errare Humanum Est," *İlmi Araştırmalar* 9 (2000): 45-66.

is repeatedly identified as the author of the essay as well as of the Maçın petition.<sup>67</sup> Hakan Erdem has alternately argued for the authorship of Mustafa Reşid Çelebi, based on what he believes to be a fragmentary author's copy. If the latter claim is true – if the copy is annotated by the author – it would discount Vâsıf, as it is not in his hand and two dates in marginal notes postdate his death. However, these annotations appear to be glosses on the text rather than additions, and there is no other compelling evidence that the fragment is an author's copy.<sup>68</sup> Under the circumstances, and barring new information, Esad Efendi's testimony carries great weight and we can cautiously accept Vâsıf as “Koca Sekbanbaşı.”

There is one final work as well, a “sixth” volume incomplete and surviving in one manuscript that begins in the year 1774 and ends abruptly in 1779. According to the preface, Selim III commissioned this work after Vâsıf's fifth volume was printed in late 1804, an event the historian describes as a triumph. Selim saw the work's popular demand, he says, and ordered him to revise and ready for print the next sequence of dynastic history written by Enverî and himself between 1774 and Selim's accession in 1789 – that is to say, the whole of Abdülhamid I's reign.<sup>69</sup> It is therefore likely that this chronicle was composed in 1805 and is one of the author's last written works. It also shows that Vâsıf intended to revisit his first volume and incorporate it into the larger work, but was perhaps forced to abandon the project when he became *reisülküttâb*

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<sup>67</sup> Mehmed Esad, *Üss-i Zafer (Yeniçeriliğin Kaldırılmasına Dair)* ed. Mehmet Arslan (İstanbul, 2005), 119-120, 122, 124. This was first noted by Kemal Beydilli, “Sekbanbaşı Risalesi'nin Müellifi Hakkında,” *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi* 12 (2005): 221-224. A note in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms.or.oct. 3119 also attributes the work to Vâsıf: “von anderer Hand der Vermark, daß Vâsıf Efendi, wohl der 1221/1806-7 gestorbene Reichshistoriker, Autor der Schrift sei.” Hanna Sohrweide, ed., *Türkische Handschriften, Verzeichnis der orientalische Handschriften in Deutschland* vol. 13, no. 5 (Weisbaden, 1981), 124.

<sup>68</sup> Hakan Erdem, “The Wise Old Man, Propagandist and Ideologist: Koca Sekbanbaşı on the Janissaries, 1807,” in *Individual, Ideologies and Society: Tracing the Mosaic of Mediterranean History* (Finland, 2001), 154-177. I have come to these conclusions after carefully inspecting the copy, BOA.HAT 48106, 48106a.

<sup>69</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 5a-5b.

later that year. These additions would have ensured his bold claim, made elsewhere, to have composed the empire's history for fifty years between 1753 and 1803.<sup>70</sup>

In August, 1805 poets like Surûrî celebrated Vâsîf's replacement of Mahmud Râif Efendi as *reisülküttâb*, a post that, if we believe his biographers, he had coveted for decades.<sup>71</sup> During this period the Ottoman Empire was swept up in the perilous currents of Napoleonic Europe, and Vâsîf's term yielded quite mixed results. In September he renewed with the ambassador Italinski the empire's defensive alliance with Russia against France, originally signed in 1799. According to İlgürel, however, the very next day news of Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz reached Istanbul. The empire then changed tack, conducting secret negotiations with the French and confirming Napoleon as emperor in order to break with Russia. Vâsîf inadvertently leaked details of these arrangements, causing a diplomatic row. Tension meanwhile increased with Russia as Vâsîf fell under the spell of the French ambassador Sébastiani, and oversaw the closure of the Bosphorus and dismissal of the governors of Wallachia and Moldavia, which angered both the Russian and English governments. Aside from these mixed achievements, some biographers claim that Vâsîf also indulged in peculation while *reis*, "cutting himself garments of whole cloth from the fabric of state."<sup>72</sup>

Vâsîf did not live to see the looming war with Russia, which began in December of 1806, nor the fall of his patron Selim III the following year. Now more than seventy years old, he fell ill in the autumn from an abdominal ailment and was dismissed from office. His physicians' treatments were unsuccessful and he died and was buried in Eyyüp.<sup>73</sup> Vâsîf's precise death date nonetheless forms a small point of contention, as it is not related in any biographical sources.

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<sup>70</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 315.

<sup>71</sup> Fâik, 148; *Târih-i Cevdet*, 8: 78; Karşlızâde, 65. On his appointment, BOA.HAT 12474.

<sup>72</sup> Fâik, 148; *Târih-i Cevdet*, 8: 78. Also Âsım, 1: 257-258.

<sup>73</sup> Fâik, 148-149; Âsım, 1: 255; Karşlızâde, 65.

The date on his tombstone, 20 October 1806, has hence gained general acceptance. However, a recently published source, the diary of a contemporary imam, records in two separate entries that Vâsîf died on 17 October, which may mean that the tombstone's date is incorrect.<sup>74</sup>

Vâsîf's biography, of course, does not end with his death but with his legacy. Immediately after he died, as was custom, the government sealed his estate and conducted an inventory that according to Âsîm brought to light some 800 purses and 100,000 *kuruş* in hoarded Spanish gold. Given Vâsîf's reputation for greed and the fact that he died with heavy debts, this sparked a minor scandal.<sup>75</sup> We also have a few details about the historian's family. Although his wife's name is unrecorded, he had at least three children: a son named Lebîb Efendi, later a judge and poet of some renown; an elder daughter named Züleyhâ; and a younger daughter named Hanîfe. The *Sicill-i Osmânî* notes a second son, Vassâf Efendi, also a judge, yet his name does not appear in other sources or as a beneficiary of Vâsîf's estate. Documents on the remaining children continue into the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup>

A lesser known part of Vâsîf's intellectual stature is his poetry. He was the author of at least a partial divan, which exists in a single "defective" copy at Istanbul University, though a second copy catalogued under his name may exist at the Austrian National Library in Vienna.<sup>77</sup> Besides this divan, Vâsîf adorned his prose work with verse and frequently wrote occasional poems like chronograms for court ceremonies. Yet it seems he was more poetaster than poet, and made little lasting impression. Âsîm, for example, derides his skill, claiming that he invited satirical imitation, and Babinger characterizes his verse as mediocre. When Fâtîn included him in

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<sup>74</sup> Kemal Beydilli, ed., *Osmanlı Döneminde İmamlar ve Bir İmamın Günlüğü* (İstanbul, 2001), 183, 224.

<sup>75</sup> Âsîm, 1: 259.

<sup>76</sup> SO, 5: 1652, 1654. Cf. BOA.D.BŞM.d 7370.

<sup>77</sup> *Divân-ı Vâsîf*, İÜ İbnülemin nr. 3692; ÖN, Historia Mixt. nr. 1251. I have unfortunately been unable to fully consult these manuscripts.

a mid-nineteenth century anthology of poets, he claimed that almost all of Vâsîf's verse had been lost.<sup>78</sup>

Ahmed Vâsîf in life was a surely a polarizing, forceful personality. He was ambitious, opinionated, and seen by peers as grasping, playing the pauper (*fakîr*) with incessant petitions for aid and, it seems, embezzling on occasion. It is clear that he often alienated colleagues. His long-running feud with Râşîd Efendi is a better known instance of this habit, and the historian Âsîm, whose biography of Vâsîf reveals deep-seated enmity, describes him as a pompous, jealous, arrogant, self-satisfied man.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Vâsîf must have had certain saving graces. That he was capable of loyalty is evinced by his long relationships with friends and patrons, especially Kel Ahmedpaşazâde Ali and Abdürrezzâk Efendi, and his ability to navigate court politics, sometimes merely to survive, speaks to skill in social climbing and a native, if insincere, charm. Finally, there is no doubt that he was a brilliant mind, an exceptional stylist, and a gifted historian who earned peers' grudging admiration and produced one of the most important, and possibly one of the largest, chronicles in Ottoman history. Although Cevdet griped about his prolixity and errors, Vâsîf's reputation as a historian remained high through the mid- to late nineteenth century and the publication of a partial French translation gained him some notoriety among the European public.<sup>80</sup> It is now to a better understanding of this work that we turn.

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<sup>78</sup> Âsîm, 1: 258; GOW, 336; Davud Fâtîn, *Tezkere-i Hâtîmetü'l-Eş'âr* (İstanbul, 1854), 432.

<sup>79</sup> Âsîm, 1: 258-259.

<sup>80</sup> Criticism aside, Cevdet generally joins other Ottoman commentators in admiration. For example, *Târih-i Cevdet*, 8: 78-79; Fâik, 149; Fâtîn, 432-433; Karslızâde, 65-66; and Mücteba İlgürel, "Cevdet Paşa Tarihi'nin Kaynaklarından Vâsîf Tarihi," in *Ahmed Cevdet Paşa Semineri: 27-28 Mayıs 1985* (İstanbul, 1986), 115-126. Caussin de Perceval reorders the work and is often quite liberal in his translation, *Précis historique de la guerre des Turcs contre les Russes depuis l'année 1769 jusq'ua l'année 1774, tiré des annales de l'historien turc Vassif-Efendi* (Paris, 1822).

### *Vâsîf and the Practice of History*

As indicated above, Vâsîf's chronicle is actually a number of separate works, six or seven depending on the reckoning, written during four terms as *vekâyi 'nüvîs* between 1783 and 1805. These volumes are in varying stages of completion. Moreover, because the author's vision for the history changed over this period, as did his concerns, it is well to examine more closely the characteristics of the whole.

The chronicle consists of two types of volumes. Some record contemporaneous history. These include the periods 1783-1787, 1800-1805, and parts of 1789-1794 and 1794-1800. Others are revisions that Vâsîf, commissioned by Selim III, made of previous court chronicles. These include the intervals 1753-1768, 1768-1774, 1774-1779, and most of 1789-1794 and 1794-1800. In addition to two essays on historical subjects – one the *Tesliyetnâme* and the other on the Egypt campaign – a manuscript on the French invasion of Egypt, seemingly unfinished, is a compilation from other chronicles. Vâsîf's oeuvre therefore has two major gaps: the years 1779 to 1783 and 1787 to 1789.

Like other court chronicles, Vâsîf's content generally follows the daily, monthly, and yearly patterns of court life. The eighteenth century Ottoman court adhered to a rhythmic schedule of ceremony and celebration. For instance, each year in the month of Receb the sultan customarily sent a donative to the Holy Cities; the imperial fleet left Istanbul in the spring and returned in the fall; and yearly appointments occurred in late Muharrem or early Şevval.<sup>81</sup> All of these were added to the dynastic chronicle. Vâsîf also records irregular appointments, council meetings, and military engagements, and frequently inserts addenda to analyze events and suggest moral lessons.

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<sup>81</sup> Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Müverrih Vâsîf'in Kaynaklarından Hâkim Târihi," in *Vekayi 'nüvis Makaleler*, 142.

We know a fair deal about how Ahmed Vâsîf actually wrote through his own words and material evidence like drafts, manuscript copies, marginal notes, and other clues. His working procedure is one of the easier aspects to reconstruct. As court historian, Vâsîf was expected to present regular (usually annual) installments of dynastic history in exchange for a yearly salary and, in addition, special commissions. Through his post he enjoyed privileged access to government archives, which formed one of his major sources, and when finished he presented these sections (*cüz*, pl. *eczâ*) to the sultan via the Grand Vezir for approval. It appears that Abdülhamid I and Selim III did in fact read his submissions, as they often returned the work with a critical judgment, orders for clean copy, or editorial recommendations, the latter of which survive in decrees and the margins of certain manuscripts. The sultan also very often rewarded Vâsîf's submissions with an emolument.<sup>82</sup>

Vâsîf composed his work in several stages. For example, his extant drafts indicate that he kept a notebook in which he first seems to have recorded events. Those that survive show extensive additions and emendations and also drafts of other non-historical works, poetry, and petitions.<sup>83</sup> Vâsîf next revised his notes for submission, after which he made the sultan's suggested changes and combined several preapproved sections into a continuous chronicle. The

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<sup>82</sup> On the *vekâyi'nüvis*' sources, operating procedures, and rewards see Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Vekâyi'nüvis," 107-111; idem, "Osmanlı Arşivleri ile Vak'anüvis Tarihleri Arasındaki Bağ," in *Osmanlı Arşivleri ve Osmanlı Araştırmaları Sempozyumu* (İstanbul, 1985), 123-125; Mücteba İlgürel, "Vak'anüvislerin Taltiflerine Dâir," in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (İstanbul, 1991), 183-192; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Wak'anüvis." Selim's marginalia may survive in MEHÂSİN 2, as on 152b: "Nâme-i reis efendi dermemek gerek. Tashîh oluna." On Abdülhamid I as a reader of history, see Fikret Sarıcaoğlu, *Kendi Kaleminden bir Padişahın Portresi: Sultan I. Abdülhamid (1774-1789)* (İstanbul, 2000), 65-69. For an example of a petition on the submission of a *cüz*, BOA.HAT 13135.

<sup>83</sup> The author's drafts, which came into the possession of Ahmed Cevdet and bear notations from Cevdet's son, are now dispersed in various locations: BOA.Y.EE. 90; Beyazıt Kütüphanesi, Nadir Eserler Bölümü, V3497-200; Millet Kütüphanesi, Ali Emiri layihalar nr. 74.

author's copy of Vâsîf's first volume displays this transitional stage. It is not a clean copy but shows major revisions in the margins and text and appears to consist of different sections, bound together.<sup>84</sup> The final stage, meanwhile, was the presentation copy – a clean copy, professionally executed and modestly adorned for submission to the sultan and hopefully a liberal reward. Several surviving manuscripts of Vâsîf's work, some in the Topkapı Palace library, are probable presentation copies.<sup>85</sup>

Ahmed Vâsîf drew on both written and oral sources for his history. Sometimes these are indicated in the work, but often they are not. Apart from his most prominent sources – preexisting court chronicles – Vâsîf utilized archival documents including but not limited to council minutes and legal codes or *kânûnnâme*. A cursory inventory also indicates a large sample of self-quotation and other authors like İdris Bitlisi,<sup>86</sup> Abu'l-Fidâ,<sup>87</sup> Kâtib Çelebi,<sup>88</sup> Ibn Khaldûn,<sup>89</sup> al-Wâqidî,<sup>90</sup> al-Ṭabarî,<sup>91</sup> al-Mâwardî,<sup>92</sup> and works ascribed to Apollonius and Aristotle,<sup>93</sup> all of which he used to substantiate arguments and interpretation rather than for their strictly factual content. These sources are not exhaustive, though, and Vâsîf made uncited use of many others. Thus he utilized Ahmed Resmî and İbrahim Müteferrika as unattributed sources for

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<sup>84</sup> See for example MEHÂSİN 1, 300a.

<sup>85</sup> Examples include TOP Hazine nr. 1405 and İÜ nr. 5972. These manuscripts have fine incipit pages with illuminated headpieces, gold framing, rubrication, complete *fihrist*s, and are completely clean copies.

<sup>86</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 162b-163b.

<sup>87</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 221a.

<sup>88</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 227b-230b.

<sup>89</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 4-9; MEHÂSİN 4, 315b-319a.

<sup>90</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 234a-240b.

<sup>91</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 315b-319a.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 315b-319a.

<sup>93</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 227b-230b; MEHÂSİN 2, 163b-164a; MEHÂSİN 4, 5b-11b; MEHÂSİN 6, 20b-22b.



his volume on the 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman war, and relied extensively on Kınâlızâde Ali Çelebi's seminal work of ethics, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*.<sup>94</sup>

Vâsîf made good use of eyewitnesses in his chronicle, as well, with four main sources. In chronologically early parts of the chronicle, for example, he relates a number of events on the authority of Kel Ahmedpaşazâde Ali Paşa, his late patron. During the 1768-1774 war and thereafter, he cites Grand Vezir Muhsinzâde Mehmed Paşa and more frequently Abdürrezzâk Bâhir Efendi.<sup>95</sup> Very often, though, the historian is his own most important witness, as he frequently projects his own recollections into the narrative. But this does not mean Vâsîf made no recourse to other informants. In one telling instance, he refers to checking archival information against the oral testimony of Arab merchants living in Istanbul, “following the custom of historians.”<sup>96</sup>

Like a typical Ottoman gentleman, Vâsîf mastered Turkish, Persian, and Arabic and availed himself of material in these languages. Whether he knew others is speculative. Mükrimin Halil Yınanç claims that Vâsîf knew French, but he produces no evidence and there is no indication whatsoever in the chronicle that this was the case.<sup>97</sup> Contemporary Spanish sources, dating from Vâsîf's embassy, meanwhile indicate that the historian knew Greek and Russian, and while his writing betrays no hint of Greek, at least one passage does exist in which Vâsîf

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<sup>94</sup> See Resmî, 24-29. Compare also the similarities between the tale of the “Frankish king” in Müteferrika's *İbrahim Müteferrika ve Usulü'l-Hikem ve Nizâmi'l-Ümem*, ed. Adil Şen (Ankara, 1995), 177-178 and MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 187. Vâsîf's discussion of kingly rule in MEHÂSİN 2, 2a-4a likely derives from Kınâlızâde, esp. 455-457.

<sup>95</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 55, 78-79, 314-315; 2: 178-180, 309-313; MEHÂSİN 6, 17a-18a, 99b-100a.

<sup>96</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 260a-260b.

<sup>97</sup> Mükrimin Yınanç, “Tanzimat'tan Meşrutiyet'e Kadar Bizde Tarihçilik,” in *Tanzimat: Yüziüncü Yıldönümü Münasebetile* (İstanbul, 1940), 2: 574; Şehabettin Tekindağ repeats the claim, “Osmanlı Tarih Yazıcılığı,” *Belleten* 35 (1971): 661. See also *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), xxxviii.

transliterates and explains the Russian term for a type of field gun.<sup>98</sup> This may confirm that he learned some Russian, most likely during his 1771 captivity, but we cannot know for certain.

The title of Vâsîf's chronicle is another point of interest. Scholars generally refer to the work as *Târih-i Vâsîf* (*The History of Vâsîf*) or *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakâikü'l-Ahbâr* (*The Charms and Truths of Relics and Annals*), while the second volume occasionally appears as *Dürrü'l-manzûm* (*The Strung Pearl*).<sup>99</sup> There is some ambiguity about which of these is correct. Vâsîf never personally used the first or last titles and adopted *Mehâsin* only after 1793, and that in the same work sometimes identified, mystifyingly, as *Dürrü'l-manzûm*.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, *Mehâsin* suggests a digest – more precisely, a digest of the most pleasing, truthful aspects of other sources – and creates the impression that he might have applied it specifically to his revisions of earlier court chronicles. Yet Vâsîf also called his fourth volume, a contemporary and original account of the years 1800-1805, the “third” volume of *Mehâsin*.<sup>101</sup> It therefore appears likely that *Mehâsin* was in fact his title for the work as a whole, at least as he conceived it in later years.

As might be expected, Vâsîf's conception of the chronicle and his numbering of different volumes changed over the course of his lifetime. Despite this, there is evidence that in later years he increasingly thought of the work as a coherent whole. By the early nineteenth century Vâsîf began to claim that he had written the empire's history for the entire period from 1753 to the

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<sup>98</sup> Aceituno, 35. In MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 261 he describes this as a “concealed cannon” or *esrâr topı*: пушка скрытая (پشکی سکلیتی).

<sup>99</sup> The latter is mainly found in Arabic works, Ismâ‘îl Bâshâ al-Baghdâdî, *Îdâh al-maknûn fî dhayl ‘alâ kashf al-zunûn* (Beirut, 2008), 1: 360; ‘Alî Hilmî al-Daghastânî, *Fihrist al-kutub al-turkiyya al-mawjûda fî al-kutubkhâna al-khadîwiyya* (Cairo, 1888/89), 201-202.

<sup>100</sup> He first used this title in the preface to his “second” volume, MEHÂSÎN 2, 5a.

<sup>101</sup> MEHÂSÎN 3, 278a; MEHÂSÎN 4, 1b-2a.

present day “in a single sequence.”<sup>102</sup> This assertion may have been premature given the two chronological gaps in his coverage, but Vâsîf does appear to have intended an unbroken history covering the entire second half of the eighteenth century and Selim III’s reign. The revision of his first volume, started but likely abandoned in 1805, would have closed these two gaps and realized his impressive historical vision.

### ***History Defined***

History in Ottoman times was part entertainment, part political instruction, part moral science.<sup>103</sup> An idea common to most premodern historical traditions is that the study of the past offers exempla which may be applied, by analogy, to present situations; or, following the Latin, that history is a “teacher of life (*historia magistra vitae*).” The Ottomans too subscribed to the idea of history as a moral field of knowledge. Vâsîf first expressed his own views on the subject early in the 1780s, indicating that to him, the past was instructive if nothing else. As his most explicit definition of history, this passage is worth quoting in full:

Linguistically, history [*târîh*] means the dating of time...The original meaning of history is the dating of a document, and it is the verbal noun of the root W-R-KH in the second form. It is also customary to first know the definition, subject, aim, and benefit of each science. The definition of historiography [*‘ilm al-târîh*] is a science through which the affairs of nations and their genealogies, crafts, events, and circumstances are known; its subject includes the conditions of past prophets, kings, philosophers, and others; its aim is knowledge of these events; and its benefit is admonition and good counsel. Some of the

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<sup>102</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 315.

<sup>103</sup> Hagen and Menchinger, “Ottoman Historical Thought,” 92-106. See also Menchinger, “Gems for Royal Profit,” 127-151.

ulema aver that the teaching and study of historiography verge on the obligatory. Since, therefore, it upholds the good order of the realm and immaculately preserves past rulers' customs and practice, we see through proof of reason that historiography's judgments, by use of analogy, are a guiding principle, and that the comparison of predecessors' circumstances to our time yields great advantage.<sup>104</sup>

Vâsîf's definition of history as a useful, didactic field of knowledge was by no means unique. In fact he is borrowing heavily in this passage from the seventeenth century thinker Kâtib Çelebi (d. 1657), who offered a nearly identical formulation in his Arabic bibliographical work *Kashf al-zunûn*, and who in turn lifted the definition from the sixteenth century encyclopedist Taşköprüzâde (d.1560). Kâtib Çelebi also introduces "historiography (*'ilm al-târîh*)" with a philological definition, saying that, linguistically, history (*târîh*) means the precise dating of time, especially in relation to specific events that can serve as a locus for chronology. Historiography, he continues,

...is knowledge of the affairs of nations and their countries, customs, practices, crafts, genealogies, obituaries, and so forth. Its subject is the conditions of past prophets, saints, scholars, philosophers, kings, poets, and others. Its aim is knowledge of the past. And its benefit is admonition and good counsel through those events and the acquisition of experience [*al-tajârub*] through an awareness of the vicissitudes of fortune, in order to avoid injuries akin to what is related about the evil things and gain more positive outcomes.

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<sup>104</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 3a-3b; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 2-3. Also found in MEHÂSİN 6, 3a-3b.

Kâtib Çelebi concludes, again following Taşköprüzâde, that historiography is a veritable “second life” for those who study it, with benefits akin to those that accrue to the traveler.<sup>105</sup>

Vâsîf's later definitions of history continued to emphasize these admonitory qualities, in particular its value to rulers and statesmen. In his second volume, for example, he declares that rulers cultivate historical writing as a rule, for “the admonitory accounts of histories of kings of olden times clearly give counsel to posterity and correct public morals.”<sup>106</sup> In the preface to his third volume, the historian further argues that rulers patronize historians because they present a great many “sovereign benefits and pearls of strategy.” A knowledge of the past therefore guides such men in the precepts of governance, allowing them to foresee the present from the past and also, from the present, where the future may lead.<sup>107</sup> A grand summation from the early nineteenth century, near the end of his life, affirms that Vâsîf held these opinions to the last:

Be it known that after the glorious Quran and Hadith, the pride of the two worlds, the august craft of history is the most delicious and best of sciences, and the noblest and most precious of arts. Containing the deeds and traditions of great prophets and saintly and regal tales, it not only sets forth past events but, according to the sense of the verse, “Whenever one studies history, one descries the world and perceives each generation,” it is an initiate in the vault of insight for many an episode and exploit lost to consideration; it is an eavesdropper in the corridor of hearsay on curious rumors of all corners. The aim of history is instruct and admonish, by achieving certitude over ancestors' affairs and by studying the character of the two worlds and heavens. Merely as it is a dear commodity

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<sup>105</sup> Kâtib Çelebi, *Kashf al-zunûn ‘an asâmi al-kutub wa’l-funûn* (Beirut, 2008), s.v. “‘Ilm al-târîkh.” See also Taşköprüzâde, *Mawsû‘at muştalahaât miftâh al-sa‘âda wa mişbâh al-siyâda fî mawdû‘ât al-‘ulûm* (Beirut, 1998), s.v. “‘Ilm al-tawârîkh”; Hagen and Menchinger, 93.

<sup>106</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 4a.

<sup>107</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 2a-2b.

does this craft prevail. Whereas it rights the mind, elevating the ignorant to a level of wisdom through its mastery, versing the ill-opinioned through test and trial, by means of this universal boon the elite of mankind is privy to that which was worthy of kings of Araby and Rum...From successor to predecessor, time's harvest is a memento, and from predecessor to posterity, the wayfarer's gift of admonition.<sup>108</sup>

The point is clear – to Vâsîf historiography was a field of knowledge made useful through its lessons.

### *History and Knowledge*

The link between human knowledge and the study of history has a long lineage in Islamic thought, going back to Ibn Khaldûn and earlier thinkers, as part of larger discussions of epistemology: how, that is, humans acquire knowledge. The basic idea is that the past lies outside of our actual experience but that it is still possible to have “knowledge” of these events. As a philosophically-minded historian, Vâsîf too explored the epistemological basis of history and especially how it realized a moral, instructive aim. As it happens, the three – knowledge, history, and morality – are closely entwined.

Vâsîf outlines his epistemology at length in a key passage found in two prefaces. “Knowledge of objects,” he begins, “is ordained to mankind through sense and intellect, and of the whole of sensibilia some things are gained through sight and some sound.”<sup>109</sup> But the historian admits that no one can accumulate the world’s knowledge entirely on their own. In this the study of history serves as an aid:

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<sup>108</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 1: 2-3.

<sup>109</sup> MEHÂSÎN 1, 2a; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 1; MEHÂSÎN 6, 2a.

But as it is consequently impossible to fully perceive the world, or for one man to see all of it on his own or to be aware of its good and evil through personal inspection, a faultless knowledge of creation and peoples can necessarily be achieved by recourse to histories that contain this information...In particular, laudable sovereigns unto whose judgment the great matters of the world and divers affairs of the nations are admitted require, with strongest need, this science, for they are charged with advancing or repelling the good or ill, the profit or injury, that occurs in their reigns.<sup>110</sup>

The historian, of course, indicates that history gives students proxy knowledge of the past, which they might apply, by analogy, to current problems. This is what Kâtib Çelebi and Taşköprüzâde meant when they called history a “second life.” Another seventeenth century historian, Müneccimbaşı (d. 1702), phrased it somewhat differently by saying that history is a “virtual return.”<sup>111</sup>

Yet Vâsîf goes further than these earlier historians in detailing an explicit epistemology. “Scholars say that experience in affairs is without doubt to be reckoned one of mankind's virtues and that human judgment reaches maturity through experience,” he continues. Yet how does one gain such experience?

Philosophers have proven different levels of intellect and assigned each one a name. One of these is the “experiential intellect.” Although the remainder are outside of this treatment, I adduce them here for further benefit, by way of digression. Let it be known that there are four levels of intellect. The first is the material intellect [*‘akl-ı heyûlânî*], which is a sheer capacity to perceive noumena. This is a purely potential faculty. Like the intellect of infants, the soul [*nefs*] at this stage is as primordial matter, matter that by its

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<sup>110</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 2a-2b; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 1-2; MEHÂSİN 6, 2a-2b.

<sup>111</sup> Hagen and Menchinger, 94.

essence lacks universals. The second is the habitual intellect [*'akl bi'l-meleke*] through which necessary knowledge [*zarûriyât*] is gained, and this is thought to be how soul acquires discursive knowledge [*nazariyât*]. The third, the acquired intellect [*'akl-i müstefâd*], is actualized in the discursive knowledge it perceives such that it becomes self-aware...And the fourth is the experiential intellect [*'akl-i tecârübî*], which results from studying histories new and old and investigating the vicissitudes of fortune. And philosophers say that historiography is an illustrious science and that many benefits are compassed therein. Not only does it admonish and lead latter-day men to distinguish between good and bad behavior, but through historical knowledge it verses them in affairs and makes them sage counselors in public matters.<sup>112</sup>

To understand what Vâsîf means by “levels of intellect,” it is helpful to visit earlier epistemological thought. In Islamic tradition the acquisition of knowledge relies on the intellect or *'aql*. This term refers to unaided reason, divorced from revelation, and that part of the human soul (*nafs*, Trk. *nefis*) which “knows” or “thinks.” Derived from Hellenic philosophy – the Greek *nous* and Latin *ratio* and *intellectus* – it is usually divided into a “speculative” faculty (*al-nazarî*), which apprehends universals or quiddities, and a “practical” faculty (*al-'amalî*) that contemplates future actions.<sup>113</sup> According to Rosenthal, these ideas were not restricted merely to philosophers but spread even to the foundations of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. In this way, they “penetrated right to the core of Muslim thinking.”<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> MEHÂSÎN 1, 2b-3a; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 2; MEHÂSÎN 6, 2b-3a. Vâsîf describes prophecy (*kuvve-i kudsiyye*) as the utmost level of the habitual intellect. Also ÖN, H.O. nr. 205, 2a.

<sup>113</sup> On the intellect, see EP, s.v. “Aql” and “Nazar”; DİA, s.v. “Akıl.” Also G. E. von Grunbaum, “The Concept and Function of Reason in Islamic Ethics,” *Oriens* 15 (1962): 4-5.

<sup>114</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: the Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1970), 216-217.



Following Aristotle's *De Anima* and its commentators, medieval philosophers posited that the human soul traversed different levels of intellect ranging from an absolute potentiality to full actualization. Although they differed in classifying these levels, sometimes markedly, they generally held that the soul's progress reflected interactions with a so-called Active or Agent intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'âl*), the least of the intelligences which, in Aristotelian and Neoplatonic cosmology, parallel the celestial spheres and emanate from the First Intellect or First Cause. The Active Intellect was thought to parallel the sublunary sphere, the "world of generation and corruption (*'âlam al-kawn wa'l-fasâd*)," where it somehow impressed knowledge on the human intellect.<sup>115</sup>

One of the most famous epistemologies in this tradition belongs to Ibn Sînâ (d. 1037), who created a fourfold hierarchy rising from the concrete to the abstract. Ibn Sînâ argued that the human mind begins in a potential intellect (*'aql hayûlânî* or *intellectus potentialis/materialis*). This is the intellect in its untapped, purely potential state. From there it climbs incrementally through *'aql bi'l-malaka* (*intellectus in habitu*), a midpoint between potential and actualized intellection where the mind gains knowledge of general axioms (the primary intelligibles or "necessary" knowledge) and an ability to think, and the actual intellect (*'aql bi'l-fi'l* or *intellectus in actu*), where knowledge is clarified by deriving discursive knowledge from the general axioms (the secondary intelligibles). Finally, the intellect becomes "acquired" (*'aql mustafâd* or

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<sup>115</sup> See Herbert Davidson's introduction to these theories, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellection* (Oxford, 1992). Also Deborah Black, "Psychology: Soul and Intellect," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2005), 317-318; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Aql"; DÎA, s.v. "Akıl." On the Aristotelian and Islamic cosmos, including the heavenly spheres, composed of ether and governed by celestial intelligences, and the sublunary world of generation and corruption, see Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwân al-Şafâ', al-Bîrûnî, and Ibn Sînâ*. (Boulder CO, 1978), 132-133, 139-141, 236-251.

*intellectus acquisitus*) when it contemplates these intelligibles and merges with the Active Intellect.<sup>116</sup>

With variations, this theory mostly coincides with the levels of intellect later thinkers like Vâsîf describe. Kâtib Çelebi cited a fourfold hierarchy in his *Kashf al-zunûn*, including potential, actual, habitual, and acquired intellects, adding that the latter is the ultimate aim in perfecting the soul's theoretical faculty.<sup>117</sup> In the famous *Muqaddima*, the historian Ibn Khaldûn posited a three-level hierarchy of discerning (*tamyîzî*), speculative (*naẓarî*), and experiential (*tajârubî*) intellects. Ibn Khaldûn rated this "experiential intellect" below the speculative, saying that it recognized evil through the study of events, their outcomes, and the experience derived therefrom. Such knowledge did not require direct observation but might be obtained through the examples of others.<sup>118</sup>

Although it is impossible to say here whether it was his innovation, Ibn Khaldûn's elevation of experience to the level of intellect is certainly a departure. Al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111), for example, had recognized inductive or experiential knowledge (*al-mujarrabât*), but as a form of cognition (*al-mudrik*) rather than an intellect in its own right. Al-Ghazâlî divided knowledge into the necessary (*al-ḍarûrî*) and the discursive (*al-naẓarî*). In his understanding, necessary knowledge is what imposes itself on the intellect and does not admit doubt, while discursive knowledge relies on logical proof and takes necessary knowledge as its source. In the work *Mi'yâr al-'ilm*, he organized these into four total types of cognition, the first two "necessary" and the latter two "discursive": a priori (*al-awwaliyyât al-'aqliyya al-maḥḍa*); sensory (*al-maḥsûsât*);

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<sup>116</sup> EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Aḳl"; DĪA, s.v. "Akıl."

<sup>117</sup> *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. "İlm al-ḥikma."

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldûn, prolégomènes d'Ebn-Khaldoun, texte arabe*, ed. M. Quatremère (Paris, 1858), 2: 412-413, 417-419. Translation from idem, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967) 2: 418-419.

inductive or experiential (*al-mujarrabât*); and deductive (*al-kaḍâyâ allâtî 'urifat lâ-bi-nafsihâ bal bi-waṣat*).<sup>119</sup>

Ahmed Vâsîf's epistemology combines these elements into a slightly different configuration. He adopts experience in Ibn Khaldûn's sense, adding it to the intellects, but places it higher in a more customary hierarchy and, indeed, above speculative knowledge. To Vâsîf the experiential intellect, which allows knowledge of the past, sits atop ever more complex forms of human knowledge. The potential and habitual intellects furnish the mind with "necessary" knowledge, primary intelligibles which are the basis of all higher discursive knowledge – what allows us to form reasoned judgments and make decisions. But while the acquired and experiential intellects are both discursive, in that they work through logic and argument, experience for him seems to form a sort of shortcut that bypasses direct observation.<sup>120</sup>

By putting the experiential intellect at the top of his hierarchy, Vâsîf does two things. Firstly, he raises history's stature, implying that knowledge gained through experience (and hence history) crowns all human knowledge – as good a reason as any why he and Ibn Khaldûn, historians both, included it among the intellects. Second, and perhaps more importantly, his theory of knowledge signifies that history-writing is at its deepest, epistemological level an instructive act. History, to Vâsîf and undoubtedly others, consisted entirely and literally of exempla.

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<sup>119</sup> *Mi'yâr al-'ilm* (Egypt, 1961), 186-193. See also Bernard Weiss, "Knowledge of the Past: the Theory of 'Tawâtur' According to Ghazâlî," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 81-105; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 216-217; von Grunebaum, 4-5.

<sup>120</sup> Hagen and Menchinger, 103-104.

## *History and Morality*

It is important at this point to place Vâsîf's epistemology within a still larger complex of ideas, namely that of philosophy (*hikmet*), moral education (*edeb*), and the perfection of the human soul (*nefs*). For in Islamic thought the intellect is not morally neutral; there is a direct connection between it and right conduct. As von Grunebaum writes, Islamic thinkers considered the intellect not just a source of knowledge but a natural way of knowing what is right or wrong without the authority of revelation, a sort of "lumen naturale." What distinguishes man from animals, what gives his actions meaning, what makes him a responsible agent, is intellect. In this understanding of knowledge, the "rational sciences (*al-'ulûm al-'aqliyya*, Trk. *'ulûm-ı 'akliyye*)" in Islam encompassed everything that unaided reason might acquire, including ethics and the "natural value of law and morals."<sup>121</sup>

The term *hikmet* must begin any attempt to appreciate the relationship between knowledge, history, and morality in Vâsîf's work. Usually translated as "philosophy" or "science," *hikmet* was in fact a more expansive, "lofty spiritual conception of the world, penetrating all knowledge within the grasp of man, and even attaining to faith in God in revelation."<sup>122</sup> Ottoman thinkers like Kâtib Çelebi and Kınâlızâde Ali defined philosophy or *hikmet* as a field of knowledge examining things in their essence, both in substance and in the mind, insofar as man is able.<sup>123</sup> Generally, and like the intellect itself, philosophy was divided into "speculative" (*nazarî*) and "practical" (*'amelî*) spheres. Speculative philosophy (*hikmet-i*

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<sup>121</sup> Von Grunebaum, 4-5; DĪA, s.v. "Akıl."

<sup>122</sup> EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Ḥikma." While philosophy became synonymous with *hikmet*, some thinkers specified that it was not *hikmet* itself but the love and acquisition thereof. Still others claimed *hikmet* was only metaphysics and excluded the "particular" sciences, or that it encompassed all the natural sciences. See DĪA, s.v. "Hikmet."

<sup>123</sup> "Huwa 'ilm yubahathu fîhi 'an haqâ'iq al-ashyâ 'alâ mâ hiya 'alayhi fî nafs al-amr bi-qadr al-ṭâqat al-bashriyya wa mawḍû'ahu al-ashyâ al-mawjûdat fî al-a'yân wa al-aḍhân." *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. "'Ilm al-ḥikma." Also Kınâlızâde, 41-42.

*nazariyye*) concerned what might be called truth or “pure” knowledge, fields that exist independently of human volition like metaphysics, physics, mathematics, astronomy, and others. Practical philosophy (*hikmet-i ‘ameliyye*) meanwhile aimed at outcomes arising from voluntary action, and so fused under the heading “ethics” or *ahlâk* personal morality, household economy, and politics. The ultimate end of philosophy was the Good, which in an Islamic context meant the soul's perfection and felicity in the here and hereafter.<sup>124</sup>

To philosophers the way to the Good was twofold, through knowledge and action. One aspired to perfection in both spheres of philosophy and the person who realized them would attain felicity. Yet they also held that knowledge was a necessary antecedent to action. The soul must first progress to the highest level of intellect and become perfect in thought, after which perfection in deed could follow. Kınâlızâde opened his seminal work of ethics, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, by stating that voluntary actions depend on two things: knowing what the truth of a thing is, either in essence or form, and understanding its benefit. Although philosophy as a whole was the soul's acquisition of “knowledge and action and reaching perfection in both,” he made it clear that speculative must precede practical philosophy. Only when the soul properly knows objects and their essences can it perceive God's attributes and sound belief. And only when it acquires a proper belief in God through speculative philosophy, and rids itself of error, can it come to distinguish good behavior from bad, and virtues vices, through practical philosophy.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> On *hikmet* and its definitions, divisions, and aims, see EP<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Hikma” and “Nazar”; DİA, s.v. “Hikmet”; *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-ḥikma”; Kınâlızâde, esp. 41-53; Marlene Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fazlızâde ‘Alî’s Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin, 2011), 200-248 passim; Naşîr al-dîn Tûsî, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. Wickins (London, 1964), 25-29; J. Stephenson, “The Classification of the Sciences according to Nasiruddin Tusi,” *Isis* 5 (1923): 329-338.

<sup>125</sup> Kınâlızâde, 39, 41, 47-48. See also DİA, s.v. “Ahlâk”; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 240-252.

Practical philosophy came to the Ottomans through Persianate works of ethics and moral education (*edeb*), themselves ultimately derived from the Aristotelian tradition. The touchstone of Ottoman ethics, the Persian philosopher Naşîr al-dîn Ẓûsî (d. 1274), characterized practical philosophy as the study of voluntary, disciplined actions “in a way that conduces to the ordering of the states of man's life in the here and hereafter, necessitating arrival at that perfection to which he is directed.”<sup>126</sup> This definition was adopted by later popularizers like Davvânî, Ḥusayn Vâ‘iz, and Kınâlizâde Ali, the latter of whom wrote the standard Ottoman ethics in the sixteenth century. These works normally divided ethics into three parts. Personal ethics (*ahlâk*) taught the individual to cultivate virtue and abjure vice; household economics (*tedbîr-i menzil*) the proper relationships in and management over a shared household; and politics (*siyâset-i müdîn*; lit. “the governance of cities”) the rule of larger social structures and polities.<sup>127</sup>

The key to this tradition was moral education. “The formation of character and acquisition of good manners and ways of behavior” was the basic premise of Persian and Ottoman ethical works, and they sought to give information about the soul and hence train it to produce virtuous acts toward the goal of felicity.<sup>128</sup> But as Baki Tezcan notes, it would not be incorrect to see practical philosophy more widely as a sort of “art of human governance.” Personal ethics, for instance, teaches self-governance, economics the governance of the household, and politics the governance of a polity. Practical philosophy's three parts, ascending from the individual human soul to larger associations, also suggest that personal ethics is the

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<sup>126</sup> Ẓûsî, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 26-29.

<sup>127</sup> Kınâlizâde, 44-46. See further *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “Akhlâq” and “‘Ilm al-ḥikma”; *Miftâḥ al-sa‘âda*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-akhlâq”; DÎA, s.v. “Ahlâk”; Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden, 1991), esp. 131-147; Baki Tezcan, “Ethics as a Domain to Discuss the Political: Kınâlizâde Ali Efendi's *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*,” in *Learning and Education in the Ottoman World* (Istanbul, 2001), 109-120.

<sup>128</sup> Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 284-289; Fakhry, 131-147; DÎA, s.v. “Ahlâk”; *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “Akhlâq”; *Miftâḥ al-sa‘âda*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-akhlâq.”

base upon which all else is built. This means that politics functions as a domain of or adjunct to personal ethics, and that politics must reflect moral principles.<sup>129</sup> In this way, then, moral education, ethics, and politics all work toward a single end – the perfection of souls, and individual and communal salvation.

Of course, philosophy was not the only or even the most popular approach to ethics, and made suppositions that many Ottomans, for religious reasons, could not admit. The major objections were over ontology and knowledge: what are moral values and how can humans know them? The view endorsed by the empire’s legal and theological schools, the consensus view in Islam since the medieval period, was a legal, ethical voluntarism. This meant that divine will preceded reason – that right and wrong were not based on abstract categories (and certainly not on human reason) but on God’s command in revelation and holy law. While it might be animated by a “dialectical spirit” or the literal interpretation of scripture, voluntarism relegated reason to a dependent role; where philosophers insisted that human reason could discern moral values, voluntarists effectively merged ethical action with legal justice.<sup>130</sup>

The choice made in favor of philosophy and a larger role for reason is therefore significant. Ahmed Vâsîf quite naturally assumed that the experiential intellect, and so history, served practical philosophy and hence individual and political morality. His words on education and knowledge demonstrate as much. As said above, humans progress through different levels of intellect that allow them to discern noumena and gain necessary and discursive knowledge. This knowledge should serve the end of knowing God and living well. For if we fail to give these gifts

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<sup>129</sup> Tezcan, “Ethics,” 111, 117.

<sup>130</sup> For example, the jurist al-Shâfi‘î argued that justice was nothing other than obedience to the law. On ethical voluntarism and related topics, Fakhry, 46-58, 151; George Hourani, “Ethics in Classical Islam: a Conspectus,” in *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge, 1985), 15-22; idem, “Combinations of Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics,” in *Ibid*, 270-276.

proper use, asks Vâsîf, how can we possibly escape divine punishment in this world and the next?<sup>131</sup> Vâsîf likewise used practical philosophy within his work to draw explicit morals. These range from discourses on individual virtues and vices to counsel on proper administration and kingly justice.<sup>132</sup>

An example from his second volume clearly establishes this link between the experiential intellect and morality. In an entry for the year 1774, Vâsîf records the execution of a vezir named Osman Paşa. Vâsîf and Osman had met in Silistre during the 1768-1774 war, where the latter was serving as garrison commander. Yet while he was intelligent, cultured, and energetic, says the historian, Osman Paşa harbored an overweening conceit and became unjust and rebellious. “Alas!” he laments,

His Excellency was not destined to mend his morals through the guide of experiential intellect [*delâlet-i ‘akl-ı tecârübî*], nor, rescued from his carnal vices, was he able to find the safe path of justice. He ultimately gave his life in youth's first bloom and shed his body and head as so many leaves in the cold wind of crushing fate.<sup>133</sup>

By contrast, in another entry Vâsîf praises the Grand Vezir Yusuf Ziyâ Paşa for his justice, compassion, and sound governance based on the precepts of practical philosophy.<sup>134</sup>

Moral reform through experiential knowledge was not an idea isolated to Vâsîf. Kınâlızâde spoke briefly about epistemology in relation to ethics, and on at least one occasion linked experience (*tecârib*) to the kingly virtue of sound judgment (*isâbet-i rey*), adding that it

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<sup>131</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 215b.

<sup>132</sup> For instance, MEHÂSİN 2, 2a-4a, 27b-29b, 78a-79b; MEHÂSİN 3, 188a-189b; MEHÂSİN 6, 29a-29b.

<sup>133</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 22a-22b.

<sup>134</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 188a-189b.



might be gained personally or through the study of history.<sup>135</sup> Earlier Ottoman chroniclers like Naîmâ and Kınâlizâde's one-time student Mustafa Âli also incorporated tenets of practical philosophy to their work,<sup>136</sup> making history and its instructive qualities in some sense handmaidens to ethics. On the other hand, Vâsîf arrogated such importance to the experiential intellect in his epistemology, and placed such weight on practical philosophy in his work, that he may well have been claiming more. It is not a stretch to wonder if, for Vâsîf, history was less a handmaiden than an umbrella science for ethics.

To conclude, Vâsîf's epistemology reveals his assumptions about knowledge, history, and morality. Most narrowly, it indicates that he believed history had a didactic aim and consisted of exempla meant to edify readers. Still more broadly, Vâsîf saw experience and historical knowledge in close association with moral education and practical philosophy – ethics, household economics, and politics – and hence with philosophy's ultimate aims: fostering proper belief in God, knowledge of right and wrong, the perfection of the human soul, and individual and communal salvation. Along with his definitions, these assumptions should dispel any doubt that to Vâsîf history was an inherently, inescapably moral science.

### ***Criticism and Self-Praise***

Criticism provides further insight into how Vâsîf understood the practice of history. A forceful personality, he was not averse to expressing opinions, almost always negative, about the taste, literary style, and value of earlier chroniclers' work, nor was he abashed at self-praise. His comments on this subject and critique of specific historians therefore say much about his views.

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<sup>135</sup> Kınâlizâde, 144-148, 462.

<sup>136</sup> Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: the Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, 1986), 42-43, 302; Mustafa Naîmâ, *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara, 2007) 1: 25, 4: 1891.

Mehmed Hâkim Efendi was the target of some of Vâsîf's most vicious hatchet-work. As a court historian under Mustafa III and a poet of name, Hâkim left an enormous chronicle covering the period 1753-1768. However, as Kütükoğlu and others observe, his historical output is now largely neglected. This probably owes as much to Vâsîf's revision of the work around the year 1800 as it does to his vocal denigration.<sup>137</sup>

Vâsîf's disdain for Hâkim surfaces early on in the fifth volume's preface. "Although Hâkim Esseyid Mehmed Efendi is renowned for being well-versed and learned in the sciences," we read,

...in the art of rhetoric he was pedestrian, more faltering, perhaps, than a simple-simon.

But notwithstanding, the events he recorded were merely of the divan's appointments and dismissals; he was allusive out of the exigencies of time and place, forsaking and omitting causation. His work was bereft of the sound narration and moral lessons that are precepts of the historical craft, and his wretched style incurred scholars' disgust and weariness.<sup>138</sup>

Vâsîf also impugns his sources, "inveterate liars (*kezzâb*)" like Evliya Çelebi. Because of Hâkim's incompetence, he claims, he had labored to rewrite the work to make it usable. Only after reducing it to a "digest (*fihrist*)," stripping it of superfluities, and supplying its defects could he produce a demonstrably superior version.<sup>139</sup>

Further criticism of Hâkim can be found elsewhere. A letter Vâsîf wrote during these revisions, most likely to the Grand Vezir, repeats that he is turning the work into a digest, removing Hâkim's "fatuous" tales, and adding certain morals. Here his disgust is visceral. How

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<sup>137</sup> Kütükoğlu, "Müverrih Vâsîf," 139-194; Madeline Zilfi, "Hâkim's Chronicle Revisited," *Oriente Moderno* 18 (1999): 193-201. On Hâkim himself, see DÎA, s.v. "Hâkim"; GOW, 300-301; Karslızâde, 60.

<sup>138</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 4.

<sup>139</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 4, 280-281; TOP Hazine nr. 1405, 3a.

could such a meager talent ever have become court historian, especially in the cultured era of Grand Vezir Koca Ragıb Paşa, he wonders? Indeed, Vâsıf writes that the revisions have discouraged him and made him physically ill: “the man’s painful expressions make a healthy man sick, let alone wish to write!”<sup>140</sup> Marginalia in Hâkim’s chronicle in the Topkapı Palace library seem to corroborate Vâsıf’s frustrations. A portion of these appear to be his, perhaps as one, on a distich of poetry, reading, “My God, man! Half the history is filled with this very same verse!”<sup>141</sup>

Two scholars have asked whether these criticisms are entirely just. In a famous article, Bekir Kütükoğlu attempted to test Vâsıf’s strictures against Hâkim through a textual comparison, concluding that his revisions were unclear, slapdash, lacked underlying logic, and made omissions “at random.”<sup>142</sup> Kütükoğlu’s example is instructive. An erudite, meticulous researcher, he was unable to assess Vâsıf without applying his own values as a twentieth century historian, or at least to concede that these might have differed from those of an eighteenth century Ottoman. Kütükoğlu never looked beyond his own historiographical priorities. In finding Vâsıf’s criticism to be utterly unfounded, he more successfully highlighted his own limitations.

Madeline Zilfi has recently put forward a different view. She argues instead that Vâsıf’s criticism of Hâkim reflects their differences in worldview, social position, and vocation. While Hâkim focused on the minutiae of Istanbul life and lesser social figures, a “mahalle” cum court historian, Ahmed Vâsıf wrote from a rarefied position, and his edition “is symptomatic of an historiographical approach that brought its own distortions to the world about which he wrote.”

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<sup>140</sup> “Bayağı beni hasta eyledi, gayretimden geziyorum, yazmak öyle dursun herifin tabîrât-ı bâridesi müstakillen sahîh âdemi hasta eder!” TOP Arşivi, nr. E.10323.

<sup>141</sup> TOP Bağdat Köşkü nr. 231, 208b. Kütükoğlu first associated this copy with Vâsıf, “Müverrih Vâsıf,” 140, n. 3, 143 n. 19.

<sup>142</sup> Kütükoğlu, “Müverrih Vâsıf,” esp. 194.

She also suggests that his words be taken with a certain grain of salt, as a way of privileging his own version of events.<sup>143</sup>

It remains that Vâsîf's major concerns with Hâkim were stylistic, causal, and moral. There may be truth in his complaint that the work forsook causality, for Hâkim noted in one manuscript that he had been ordered to disregard cause and effect.<sup>144</sup> Vâsîf's aversion to Hâkim's prose is harder to pinpoint; clearly he felt it lacked taste and inventiveness, yet he also ventured that Hâkim's "painful expressions" were simply the style of the time and were to all appearances popular.<sup>145</sup> Above all, though, one sees Vâsîf's concern for history's didactic qualities. Justifiably or not, he claims to have made the work "useful to both high and low" by expurgation and augmenting it with morals.<sup>146</sup>

Sadullah Enverî Efendi was another of Vâsîf's favorite targets. This is not altogether surprising, as Enverî rivaled Vâsîf as court historian for some two decades and wrote much of the material he later revised under Selim III.<sup>147</sup> Interestingly, the historian's regard for Enverî seems to have undergone a change. While his first volume praises Enverî's skill and knowledge, though it also occasionally draws attention to his omissions,<sup>148</sup> Vâsîf turned against his rival after the 1787-1792 war, during which both men served as court historian. As said above, Enverî came into possession of Vâsîf's notes and added them, word-for-word, to his chronicle, for which

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<sup>143</sup> Zilfî, "Hâkim's Chronicle Revisted," 193-198, 200-201.

<sup>144</sup> Kütükoğlu, "Müverrih Vâsîf," 146, n. 35.

<sup>145</sup> TOP Arşivi, nr. E.10323.

<sup>146</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 280-281, 326-327.

<sup>147</sup> For biographies see DİA, s.v. "Enverî"; von Schlecta-Wsshrd, 3-5; Karslızâde, 62-63.

<sup>148</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 4-5; Filiz Çalışkan, "Vâsîf'in Kaynaklarından Enverî Tarihi," in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (İstanbul, 1991), 144-145; BOA.AE I. Abdülhamid 532.

Vâsîf accused him of plagiarism. Thereafter he had little good to say about Enverî as a historian. In marking the latter's death in 1794, Vâsîf barely even mentioned his work.<sup>149</sup>

The most explicit critique of Enverî is found in the preface to Vâsîf's volume on the 1768-1774 war, the events of which he, Enverî, originally compiled on the war front. Here Vâsîf wastes little time and directs a killing-blow at his rival's competence. He writes:

The events Enverî Efendi recorded...are filled with copies of letters and other curiosities, and his history is an assemblage of mistakes and defects arising through ignorance of every occasion. What is more, as it was clear to the sultan who receives God's blessing that he had wasted much ink recording certain circumstances unsuitable to history, he suggested to this humble servant his illustrious will that the said history be rewritten like Hâkim's and the others' works, and that I correct his contents and emend his errors.

Vâsîf then claims that his own wartime position in the bureaucracy, coupled with negotiation service, gave him more authority than Enverî.<sup>150</sup> Nor is this the extent of his criticism. The historian conducts regular side commentary on Enverî's work, faulting him for appending unnecessary documents, omitting important details, giving unsatisfactory descriptions of winter quarters, and, in another possible case, of confusing the death date of Abdülhamid I.<sup>151</sup>

Following Kütükoğlu, Filiz Çalışkan has tried to test these claims through a textual comparison and reaches similar conclusions: that Vâsîf's critique is unfounded, his revisions unclear, haphazard, and prone to error. Notably, at least one Ottoman contemporary agreed. Ahmed Âsım Efendi ridiculed Vâsîf's chronicle of the war years, saying that it was entirely

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<sup>149</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 9a-9b.

<sup>150</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 3-4.

<sup>151</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 77-78, 102, 210-211; MEHÂSİN 6, 11b-12a; marginal note in ÖN, H.O. nr. 105, 99a.

derivative and no different from Enverî's "except for the preface."<sup>152</sup> However, Âsım harbored a deep resentment against Vâsıf and may have had ulterior reasons for disparaging the work.

As in the case of Hâkim, Vâsıf's criticism of Enverî was probably some combination of ambition, rivalry, and a different historiographical approach. There is no question that Enverî was the less talented stylist. Aksan sheds light on this fact in characterizing his work as akin to reportage, an undigested, uncensored account.<sup>153</sup> His approach grated with Vâsıf's sense of selectivity, his literary scruples, and his belief that historians must pay close attention to the value of reports, both for factual content and usefulness. Vâsıf's concluding remarks in the volume put this into perspective, vaunting his own "unpracticed idiom" and likening its eloquence to that of the Persian historians Vassâf and Juvaynî. Unlike his less skilled peers, moreover, he notes that he included precepts of morality (*ahlâk*) and practical philosophy (*hikmet-i 'ameliyye*) for the reader's benefit, through they could derive "pearls of wisdom" and, applying these by analogy, distinguish themselves among their peers.<sup>154</sup>

Twice late in his career Vâsıf made statements about the general quality of Ottoman historians, which are also telling of his views on the craft. The first ends his treatment of the 1768-1774 war. Here, with no small amount of bombast, Vâsıf says that some of his predecessors had muddied their work with "obscure or tenebrous prose," while still others, lacking in proper discernment, wasted ink with poor phrasing or bizarre, strange expressions. All, he contends, were "crumbs in the mouths of men of dignity and talent" who gave heed

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<sup>152</sup> Âsım, 1: 258-259; Çalışkan, esp. 162-163.

<sup>153</sup> Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 111. Babinger calls Enverî's style "easily intelligible, if often clumsy and vulgar." GOW, 320-322.

<sup>154</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 314-315.

neither to benefits of state, the fine points of philosophy, nor “the truths of cosmic revolutions that are tenets of the historical science.”<sup>155</sup>

Another more expansive statement appears in the preface to his final, unfinished volume. On this occasion Vâsîf progresses through an almost a canonical list of Ottoman historians, against whom he presumably hoped his own work would be judged, and picks each one apart. He proceeds:

The history Hoca Sadeddîn wrote has a sort of eloquent charm but his prose disagrees with this era’s scholars, and, in truth, his repetitions to balance rhymes are excessive, and his history is filled with Turkish and simple verse. As for [Mustafa] Âli Efendi, he had to use unusual expressions and the events he recorded lack literary taste and graceful substance. The works of Solâkzâde, Neşrî, Uruc Bey, Hadâdî, and Malkoçzâde are vulgar, wretched, and their successors of the same sort. The late Naîmâ prepared the events that Şârih-i Menârzâde skillfully collected in the Imperial harem, and arranged them with important addenda. His history is pleasing to temperaments high and low. His successors Râşid Efendi and Çelebizâde Efendi each wrote a choice history, moreover – their eloquent works pleased all. The quality of later chroniclers is quite clear from their histories; their bungled writings are unmistakable to practiced stylists.<sup>156</sup>

By way of contrast, Vâsîf says that when it came his turn as *vekâyi ‘nüvîs*, he “chose a novel style neither simple nor obscure, and, as the occasion presented itself, carried out [his] design by adding advice, morals, and certain precepts of practical philosophy that the others had neglected through ignorance.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 2: 314.

<sup>156</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 4a-4b.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 4b.

It is true that Vâsîf was not wholly negative in appraisal of others. He admired the court historian Süleyman İzzî, for instance, calling his prose “prolix” but “still sweet of expression,” and had warm words for two other court historians: Küçükçelebizâde Âsım Efendi, whom he deemed a “paragon of the age” and master of prose, and Mehmed Subhî Efendi.<sup>158</sup> As for non-Ottoman historians, Vâsîf obviously venerated the Persian master (and his near-namesake) Vassâf. Apart from explicit self-comparison, he may have named a son Vassâf and certainly compiled a specialized dictionary on him.

### ***Conclusions: Vâsîf and the Post of Court Historian***

On the whole these critiques raise Vâsîf at the expense of his earlier rivals. Yet they also make a strong statement about how he saw the post of *vekâyi'nivîs*. Vâsîf often wrote about the admonitory role of court history in Ottoman and Islamic dynasties,<sup>159</sup> and it is significant, then, that he mostly discounted Râşid's and Çelebizâde's successors from the mid-eighteenth century onward, for he had an editorial hand in printing or rewriting every single one – Subhî, İzzî, Hâkim, Enverî, and others. In fact, Vâsîf argued, prior to him the post of *vekâyi'nivîs* had become broken, “disordered” such that decades of history were in danger of being lost.<sup>160</sup> This is a somewhat odd view, since many of the chronicles he rewrote, like Hâkim's, were complete, polished works. Implicit also is the claim that Vâsîf was somehow restoring the post to its proper dignity. What accounts for this?

There is indeed some evidence that the prestige of the *vekâyi'nivîs* had declined in the second half of the eighteenth century. Lower-level scribes, not always skilled stylists, were

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<sup>158</sup> Respectively, MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 51-52, 179-180, 2: 7-9.

<sup>159</sup> For example, MEHÂSİN 2, 4a.

<sup>160</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 5a.



increasingly appointed. Another problem appears to be that these historians were not afforded sensitive information, or “state secrets (*esrâr-ı devlet*).”<sup>161</sup> Hâkim complained that he had been ordered to ignore causes, for example,<sup>162</sup> with the result that Vâsîf characterized his work as a litany of appointments and dismissals. Edîb Efendi likewise wrote in the 1790s that he was unable to access sensitive documents, so that his chronicle “was but limited to a history of the appointments and dismissals of men of rank, along with daily events.” In 1795/96 furthermore, Halil Nûrî Bey petitioned Selim III to restore “ancient practice” to the office of *vekâyi ‘nüvis*. The resulting administrative reforms were to supply the historian with an unrestricted stream of information, and Selim on another occasion ordered that they be sent regular intelligence on Europe. Vâsîf noted that the goal of these actions was to realize the benefits of studying history.<sup>163</sup>

Another point of interest is the overall trajectory of the dynastic chronicle under Selim III. Selim appears to have been interested in creating a vision of the past consistent with his own views and those prevailing at court. This involved overhauling the most recent works; between his accession and death in 1807, Selim had revised the histories of Hâkim, Çeşmizâde, Mûsazâde, Enverî, Edîb, and Nûrî Bey. These revisions bear the semblance of a developing, systematic program, an impression strengthened by his reform of the *vekâyi ‘nüvislik* and move to print dynastic records in the early nineteenth century. Whether Selim acted of his own accord or at Vâsîf’s instance is impossible to say. Interestingly, though, he relied entirely on the historian to execute these tasks. Combined with his involvement in the imperial printing press and role in

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<sup>161</sup> Kütükoğlu, “Vekayi‘nüvis,” 108; EP, s.v. “Waqa‘nuwîs.”

<sup>162</sup> Kütükoğlu, “Vekayi‘nüvis,” 108, n. 27; idem, “Müverrih Vâsîf,” 146-147.

<sup>163</sup> Kütükoğlu, “Vekayi‘nüvis,” 107-108. On Edîb see Çınar, “Mehmed Emin Edîb,” 117-118. For Nûrî’s petition, *Târîh-i Nûrî*, Beyazıt Kütüphanesi nr. 3369, 91a-93a. See furthermore BOA.HAT 5094, 11187. Vâsîf comments on these reforms in MEHÂSİN 3, 41a-41b.

publishing editions of *Subhî* and *İzzî*, we may at least concede that the idea that Ottoman court chronicles provided a continuous, printed record of the dynasty<sup>164</sup> owes much to Vâsîf's labors for Selim III.

Ahmed Vâsîf's pursuit of moralizing historiography was not a cliché or empty bombast. His gradual move toward interpretive frameworks, realized most fully in his volume on the 1768-1774 war; his epistemology linking history to practical philosophy and hence the perfection of the soul; his critiques of peers and predecessors and unabashed self-praise; his very definition of history – all of these indicate that he took his vocation seriously and that to him history was not merely a record of the past; it was a guide in man's hazardous portage from this world to the next.

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<sup>164</sup> EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Waka'nuwîs."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ahmed Vâsîf on Agency and Causality: a “Reformist” Philosophy of History

Even when not intentionally didactic, we expect a work of historiography to mirror, to greater or lesser extent, the anxieties and preoccupations of its author and their milieu. Ahmed Vâsîf’s work is no different. Like so many of his peers, Vâsîf was gravely troubled by events of his lifetime which for an educated Ottoman posed profound moral and historical dilemmas. Military collapse, eroding power, bankruptcy, and the rise of hostile powers like Russia seemed to undermine any pretense of “Ottoman exceptionalism,” the widespread belief that the empire was, somehow, divinely favored, while at the same time they demanded cogent answers: *Why did this happen? How could this happen? What must be done?* It is no surprise, then, that Vâsîf tried throughout his life to grapple with these problems. In his work, particularly his chronicle and historical essays, he not only made Ottoman defeat and reform a key concern but more generally outlined a framework for understanding the universe, causation, and historical change. His was a complex, cerebral response – we might even say a philosophy of history.<sup>165</sup>

This chapter traces Ahmed Vâsîf’s understanding of agency, causality, and the universe, moving from his earliest words in the 1780s through his later chronicles and final written work.

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<sup>165</sup> Ottoman historians never developed a coherent theory of history. By “philosophy” I instead mean a more ad hoc grasp of historical patterns, how history unfolds, how events occur, and a possible teleology; in a different sense, Vâsîf on these topics is also highly philosophical in that he is grounded in pertinent discourses in Islamic thought. My findings in this chapter shall shortly appear as “A Reformist Philosophy of History: the Case of Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* (forthcoming, 2014). See Hagen and Menchinger on Ottoman historical thought in general.

Though couched in theological terms, Vâsîf's philosophy of history urges concrete action within a regular, predictable universe. He censures those who would trust to fate, arguing that initiative is in fact a moral and religious obligation. This creates a powerful intellectual justification for reform that buttressed the efforts of his patrons. Over time, moreover, Vâsîf refined his views, or at least expressed them more directly, applying them in later work as a coherent interpretive framework.

### *Ottoman Exceptionalism and the Problem of Causality*

The late eighteenth century was to all appearances a time of deep moral and intellectual crisis.<sup>166</sup> A certain militancy and sense of divine favor, what might be called "Ottoman exceptionalism," had long been central to the self-perception of the empire's elite. Gottfried Hagen defines this as the teleological belief that history culminates in the Ottoman dynasty. Ottomans like Vâsîf and his peers believed that their rulers had a greater devotion to the faith, sustained believers like none before, and that the dynasty itself, divinely supported, combined ultimate justice and zeal in jihad and would last till the end of time; that God had sent them to renew the faith and that their success, witnessed in the fall of Constantinople and far-flung conquests, was proof positive of His aid.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> For the idea of a moral crisis in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire, Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, (Montreal, 1964), 26-30; George W. Gawrych, "Şeyh Galib and Selim III: Mevlevism and the Nizam-ı Cedid," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 4 (1987): 93-96.

<sup>167</sup> Gottfried Hagen, "Afterword: Ottoman Understandings of the World in the Seventeenth Century," in *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden, 2004), 233-241; Hagen and Menchinger, 100-101. See further Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth," *Revue d'études turques* 19 (1987): 7-27. For examples of Ottoman exceptionalism, Müteferrika in *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1896-1899; Mehmed Dürri, *Nuhbetü'l-Emel fî Tenkîhi'l-Fesâdi ve'l-Halel*, TOP nr. 1438, 283a-285a. Vâsîf often voices such beliefs. See MEHÂSİN

Ottoman exceptionalism was also enmeshed in the realm's frontier origins – it seemed to both grow out of and explain the early empire's gazi traditions and dizzying expansion. In any event it gave pride of place to warfare. Because of their devotion to gaza and jihad, Ottomans saw themselves as superior to Europeans and even to other Islamic dynasties. The “zeal of Islam” and duty of jihad supposedly made Ottoman soldiers more innately brave than non-Muslims, and hence, all other things being equal, they could and would always prevail.<sup>168</sup>

Although Rhoads Murphey argues that this ideology was largely spent by the seventeenth century, it survived, at least in rhetoric, well into the eighteenth, surfacing again and again after 1768.<sup>169</sup> It is therefore preferable to follow Aksan, who believes that militant exceptionalism as an ideology was not seriously questioned until the very survival of the Ottoman way of life was in danger and war “no longer profitable – financially or psychologically.”<sup>170</sup>

While many scholars focus on the martial overtones of Ottoman exceptionalism, it must be said that this belief was a more complex, pervasive worldview – one that avowed complete faith in the empire's superiority and its ability through God's aid to overcome all challenges, domestic as well as foreign. The troubles of the eighteenth century were not simply a blow to Ottoman military pride. They also opened a wide rupture between ideology and reality, and between self-perception, aspiration, and the empire's real frailty. When disaster struck, perhaps the biggest concern of eighteenth century intellectuals was therefore to salvage exceptionalism or somehow harmonize it with events. Discussions of agency were an important part of this effort.

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1, 5a-5b, 9b, 102b-103a; MEHÂSİN 2, 2a-4a; MEHÂSİN 3, 1b-3a; MEHÂSİN 4, 308b-310a; MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 4-10, 2: 182-183.

<sup>168</sup> *Usulü'l-Hikem*, 170-171, 191; MEHÂSİN 1, 41b-42a, 131a-131b; MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 260-263.

<sup>169</sup> Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (NJ, 1999), 145-146.

<sup>170</sup> Virginia Aksan, “War and Peace,” 3: 116. See further Ahmed Resmî's remarks on the rhetoric of war in the 1760s, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 2a-5b.

Causality and human agency are subjects with an old pedigree in Islamic thought. The crux of the issue is the extent to which humans, as created beings, are responsible agents. In other words, how much influence, if any, do humans have over their actions and the surrounding world – are we masters of our fate or puppets moved from on high?

For medieval Islamic theologians this question impinged on two particular aspects of the divinity – power and justice – and called for an attempt to reconcile God’s omnipotence and righteousness. Already by the eighth century two basic views had emerged. On one hand, a party known as Fatalists or Predestinarians (*jabriyya* or *mujbira*) championed God’s omnipotence, arguing that humans have neither will, choice, nor power to make decisions and that their behavior must be the result of God’s will alone, for He can have no rivals in power. Opposed to the Predestinarians were supporters of free will (*qadariyya*), who objected that, being all-just, God must have granted mankind some measure of agency. Otherwise, religious obligation and indeed moral right and wrong would be meaningless. Their opinion was that after creating the necessary substructure, God gave humans will as a test and left them to their own devices, good or ill. To preserve divine power, they maintained that God wills and creates all human actions, but only those that are volitional. Such was the belief of a famous party of rationalists known as the Mu‘tazila.<sup>171</sup>

A synthesis of these views came about via two later, highly influential theologians, Abû al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arî (d. 935/36) and al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111). Al-Ash‘arî pointedly emphasized God’s omnipotence by adopting an occasionalist or atomistic cosmology, in which God

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<sup>171</sup> I can give only the barest summary of these often convoluted arguments. For a readable account of the formative period, Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London, 1948). Also Oliver Leaman, ed., *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, (New York, 2006), s.v. “Jabr”; DĪA, s.v. “Ahlāk,” “Īlliyet”; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Djabriyya,” “Qadariyya”; Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Mâturîdî und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden, 1997).

continually “rearranges all the atoms of this world and creates their accidents anew – thus creating a new world every moment.”<sup>172</sup> This Ash‘arî atomism holds that the universe consists of bodies made from atoms and the accidents which inhere therein. On earth, the lowest, sublunary sphere, God at every moment recreates these atoms according to His will, continually joining and separating them in a process of generation and corruption (*kawn wa fasâd*, Trk. *kevn ü fesâd*).<sup>173</sup> Rejecting the idea of any kind of “natural law” or causality outside of God, as such would limit divine power and will, al-Ash‘arî nonetheless acknowledged a rather complex scheme in which humans “acquire (*kasb*)” actions created by God, and thus accept responsibility for them. This theory of acquisition was not wholly satisfying, called by some a “moderate fatalism.”<sup>174</sup>

Al-Ghazâlî, who is generally considered a follower of al-Ash‘arî, effectively merged Ash‘arî occasionalism with Aristotelian causality and added finishing touches to what eventually became Sunni Islam’s predominant theological orthodoxy.<sup>175</sup> He achieved this through the notion of “God’s custom (‘*âdatullah*, Trk. ‘*âdetullah*.)” Al-Ghazâlî argued that God wills and creates every event – that is, He is the only true agent in the cosmos – but chooses to create through the mediation of secondary causes, or, at least, through the semblance of causes. God is the only efficient cause, the Primary Cause or more specifically “the one who makes causes function as causes (*musabbib al-asbâb*).” But this distinction is somewhat immaterial on a mundane level.

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<sup>172</sup> Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, 2009), 126.

<sup>173</sup> More generally on the concept and origins of Islamic atomism, Michael Marmura in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge, 2005), 142-143; Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalâm: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazilî Cosmology* (Leiden, 1994); *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, s.v. “Atomism,” “Al-Ghazali,” and “Maturidi”; Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, trans. Michael Schwartz (Jerusalem, 1997). On generation and corruption, *DIA*, s.v. “Âlem”; Nasr, 240-241.

<sup>174</sup> On al-Ash‘arî generally, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, s.v. “Ashariyya”; Griffel, 124-133; Watt, 147-152.

<sup>175</sup> Al-Ghazâlî’s Ash‘arîsm is still a point of debate. Cf. Griffel with Marmura, 142-143; “Al-Ghazali” in *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, 1: 158-168.

For while God remains unconstrained, able to abrogate causality at any time, His custom links cause and effect and creates a visible “natural law” upon which humans must rely in day to day affairs.<sup>176</sup> Incidentally, then, Ghazâlî pointed to an important distinction between fate as a matter of theological doctrine and fatalism as an approach to life.

We can have no doubt that when Ottoman intellectuals spoke of causality, they did so with this theological superstructure in mind. Worldly causes (*esbâb*) were understood as “secondary” in that they were actualized by God, the Primary Cause.<sup>177</sup> In the eighteenth century such problems held an especial urgency, as they were closely tied to political reform, the outcome of matters like warfare, and to the imperial mystique. For theologians and Sufis, the concern surfaced in tracts on free will, which flourished from the late seventeenth into the nineteenth century, and in the rise and popularization of “particular will (*irâde-i cüziyye*),” a concept discussed below. For statesmen and intellectuals who dealt with the immediate ends of human agency, the question was more practically limited to whether or not to act through worldly causes.

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<sup>176</sup> Griffel, 216-222, 276-278; DĪA, s.v. “İlliyet.” As Mardin observes, the distinction is between a natural law depending on God’s will and one existing independently of the deity; or, following Aquinas, *natura naturata* as opposed to *natura naturans*, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, 2000), 86-94. Natural laws are therefore “due to habit and have no more than a juridical status,” Nasr, 8-10. For more on *âdetullah* and miracles as its abrogation (*khârq al-âda*), Jonathan Brown, “Faithful Dissenters: Sunni Skepticism about the Miracles of Saints,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 123-168; DĪA, s.v. “İlliyet.”

<sup>177</sup> Gottfried Hagen, “Osman II and the Cultural History of Ottoman Historiography,” *H-Net Reviews* (2006): 8, n. 16; Hagen and Menchinger, 101-102. Sources also call these causes “visible (*esbâb-ı zâhire*),” “virtual (*m’anevî sebebleri*),” and “customary (*umûr-ı zâhiredesbâb-ı mu’tâde*).” For example, *Târih-i Na’îmâ*, 2: 493.



Ottoman elites were divided, however. While many held that mankind had free will in moral, civil, and political life, and indeed that to deny its existence was sinful,<sup>178</sup> there are strong indications of a sentiment – how widespread is not known – of fatalism, or at least of resigned despair, at even the very highest levels. Mouradgea D'Ohsson, for example, Vâsîf's contemporary, states that a notion of total predestination held increasing sway over much of the population and that any complaint against inertia was seen as a gross impiety.<sup>179</sup> This vein of thought may have been an outgrowth of popular Sufistic beliefs in the annihilation of the will.<sup>180</sup> Meanwhile, in another facet of what Berkes calls “an incipient crisis in moral life,” it appears other Ottomans, at least in private, denied that God interfered in human affairs at all and owned what sources describe as deism, materialism, or atheism.<sup>181</sup>

The rhetoric of fatality cut across all groups but is most linked in sources to two: military men and the religious authorities, or ulema. For the former, blaming defeat on God's will was an understandable reaction in light of Ottoman exceptionalism, for it implied a divine trial and not

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<sup>178</sup> Mouradgea D'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'empire ottoman* (Paris, 1788-1824), 1: 166-168; Şerif Mardin, “The Mind of the Turkish Reformer, 1700-1900,” in *Arab Socialism: a Documentary Survey* (Salt Lake City, 1969), 29-30. A large number of Ottoman-era tracts on free will survive. Altun examines many of them in “Kazâ ve Kader Risâleleri.” Also Şamil Öçal, “Osmanlı Kelamcıları Eşarî miydi? Muhammad Akkirmânî'nin İnsan Hürriyeti Anlayışı,” *Dinî Araştırmalar* 5 (1999): 225-254; and Arif Yıldırım, “Karşılı Davud (Davud-i Karsî) Efendi'nin İrade-i Cüz'iyeye Anlayışı,” *Ankara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 15 (2000): 189-199.

<sup>179</sup> D'Ohsson, 1: 166-168.

<sup>180</sup> For an excellent discussion of the human will versus God's power, see Kurz, 159-171. Gibb and Bowen ascribe eighteenth century fatalism to a vulgarization of mysticism, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East* (London, 1957), 2: 205-206.

<sup>181</sup> Elias Habesci, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1784), 135-137; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (London, 2006), 62, 110-111; and Sir James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks* (Dublin, 1768), 31-32. Some of these are quoted by Berkes, 28-29. Of course, these observers were outsiders to Ottoman society and their accounts may reflect misunderstandings.

necessarily any moral or material advantage on the part of the enemy.<sup>182</sup> It was practical, too.

Vâsîf himself advised commanders to invoke God's will following a loss, for example, to preserve discipline and as a sop to morale.<sup>183</sup> For the latter, meanwhile, denying human agency was an assertion, albeit an extreme one, of the general belief in Sunni theology that God creates all worldly events and human deeds, and of believers' obligation to trust in Him absolutely.<sup>184</sup> Fatalism, like other causal positions, was therefore simply one way of answering the problem of theodicy – simply one way of reconciling calamities with a just and almighty God.

Given the empire's traumas, it is not surprising that some Ottomans took refuge in fatalism. But whether this attitude was sincere is largely moot. For example, it is noteworthy that fatalism – essentially a theological viewpoint – could be used to shut down arguments and assert the status quo, particularly for two groups like the military and ulema threatened by reform.<sup>185</sup> It also offered a convenient way to evade responsibility: this is why, wrote the memorialist Canikli Ali Paşa, people blamed Providence whenever there was a flaw in human strategy.<sup>186</sup> Causal discourse was in any event common currency to all parties. Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals

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<sup>182</sup> For example, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 34b; MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 46, 169, 271; MAC, 77. Human agency in warfare seems to have been hotly debated: Mardin, "Mind of the Turkish Reformer," 30.

<sup>183</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 269.

<sup>184</sup> In Islamic theology the relationship between the creation of acts and human will is quite vexed. See Daniel Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie Musulmane* (Paris, 1980), esp. ix-xiii, 61-64, 232-234; Altun, 2-19. Defective trust in God is an act of infidelity, D'Ohsson, 1: 329; Watt, 155.

<sup>185</sup> Not incidentally, they formed the biggest opposition groups. Berkes, 61-63; Beydilli, "Islâhât Düşünceleri," 25-26; Gibb, 2: 107-108.

<sup>186</sup> "Tedbîrde noksan oldu takdîre bühtân etdiler." Canikli Ali Paşa, *Tedbîr-i Cedîd-i Nâdir*, ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 1b. Also Yücel Özkaya, ed., "Canikli Ali Paşa'nın Risalesi 'Tedâbîru'l-Gazavât,'" *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil-Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7/13-14 (1969): 137. D'Ohsson and Gibb allude to this use of fatality.

used these theological arguments, cynically or in earnest, to political ends.<sup>187</sup> Reform, reaction, war, peace, and other topics were all debated in causal terms. In this regard, Ahmed Vâsîf's treatment of human agency is unique only in its more extensive degree of detail.

### *The 1784 Risâle*

Some of Vâsîf's earliest words on reform, causation, and historical change occur in a short essay (*risâle*) he wrote at the behest of Abdülhamid I and inserted in a chronicle entry for 1784.<sup>188</sup> The timing was no coincidence. For some ten years the Ottoman court had been mired in indecision and bickering, loath to accept the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca and in particular the loss of the Crimean peninsula. The task of reform fell eventually to Vâsîf's patron Grand Vezir Halil Hamid Paşa (1782-1785), whose efforts elicited the historian's hope and lavish praise.<sup>189</sup>

That year, Vâsîf tells us, the Duke of Montmorency-Luxembourg<sup>190</sup> sent the sultan a letter by leave of the French king. Within the Duke suggested that Ottoman territorial losses were due to inadequate training and that their forces were ill-prepared in military science. He hence

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<sup>187</sup> To give a cynical example, in a 1784 meeting with the French ambassador de Choiseul-Gouffier Grand Vezir Halil Hamid Paşa, certainly no fatalist, refused to discuss commercial privileges on the Black Sea, saying only: "Everything depends on providence; it will happen when the ordained time comes." When the ambassador intimated that "providence" was his caprice, the Grand Vezir retorted that everything depends on providence, to deny which is illicit. *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 196-198.

<sup>188</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 149-152; MEHÂSİN 1, 129a-132b. Cevdet adds a condensed version to *Târih-i Cevdet*, 3: 85-88. Mardin also discusses the essay in "Mind of the Turkish Reformer."

<sup>189</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 5-9; MEHÂSİN 1, 5a-8b. Vâsîf goes so far as to call the Grand Vezir the "sâhib-i mia," or the one whom "the Lord God sends to this community at the beginning of every 100 years...who restores its religion." On Halil Hamid Paşa, *Sefînet*, 118-120; DİA, s.v. "Halil Hamîd Paşa"; and İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Sadrazam Halil Hamid Paşa* (İstanbul, 1936). On the era's politics, Christoph Neumann, "Decision Making Without Decision Makers: Ottoman Foreign Policy Circa 1780," in *Decision Making and Change in the Ottoman Empire* (Missouri, 1993), 29-38.

<sup>190</sup> Probably Anne Charles Sigismond de Montmorency-Luxembourg (d. 1803), a French commander and the Duke of Piney-Luxembourg.

proposed a mission to instruct the Ottoman army in fortification, mortars, and cannonry.<sup>191</sup>

Abdülhamid was inclined to accept the French offer and gave a guarded assent. However, he asked his court historian Vâsîf to first prepare a tract on the soldiers used by Christian kings and related topics.<sup>192</sup>

The 1784 essay stridently rejects French assistance. Muslim and Christian armies are inherently different, Vâsîf proceeds. While European rulers use orphans as soldiers or conscript peasants, employing them under duress, Ottoman levies are virtuous, devoted to their leaders, and cannot be compelled. Their unity and commitment to holy war guarantee victory, even if, from time to time, the infidel prevails. Nor does Vâsîf think such men will ever stoop to learn enemy arts.<sup>193</sup>

Vâsîf thus begins from the vantage-point of Ottoman exceptionalism, a belief he shared with many, if not all, of his peers. But affairs raised a disturbing question: if the Ottomans were favored by God, if they were guaranteed victory, why did they now fare so poorly in war? Vâsîf presents this dilemma first and foremost as a divine trial. “If things have now altered so that our soldiers are denied victory,” he says, “and if the enemy sometimes prevails by land or sea, this is an effect of their faculty of *istidrâc*, produced by satanic efforts.”<sup>194</sup> To Vâsîf *istidrâc* – a theological concept and miracle (*khârq al-‘âda*, Trk. *hârikülâde*) whereby God gives infidels success, making them prideful, in order to lure them to damnation and test believers' fidelity – has led to recent Ottoman defeats. However, he assures us that *istidrâc* is rare and cannot last

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<sup>191</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 149; MEHÂSİN 1, 129a-129b.

<sup>192</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 150; MEHÂSİN 1, 130a.

<sup>193</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 150-151; MEHÂSİN 1, 130a-131a. Vâsîf's rejection of conscription is related to the traditional Islamic view (discussed in Chapter Three) that discipline and compulsion are not needed, as war is an obligation and essentially a sacrifice on the part of the believer. See also *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, 139.

<sup>194</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131a.

long.<sup>195</sup> The enemy's arms and organization are no different than in the past and in the end the Ottomans shall continue to prevail. This fine point is tied to God's will.<sup>196</sup>

By invoking God's will, the 1784 essay raises precisely those problems of historical causation and agency that were at the heart of eighteenth century intellectual debate. Vâsîf's rejection of the French offer leads him to speak openly on this subject, in a passage that merits quotation:

Indeed do victory and defeat depend on the will of God. As for Christian nations, their beliefs dispute this. Hence they say, following a group of philosophers, that the circumstances of war are among particular events [*umûr-ı cüziyye*] and that God – Heaven forbid! – has no effect on particular events. They not only ridiculously contend that whichever side can muster superior means [*esbâb*] of warfare will prevail, but they produce proofs weaker than a spider's web, crediting victory to the perfection of means

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<sup>195</sup> “İstidrâcın hükmü ise kalîl ve her zamân emeli câri olmak müstahîl.” *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131a. According to Lane this meaning was already established in early exegetical works and in the most important medieval Arabic lexicons. For example: “He brought him near to punishment by degrees, by means of respite, and the continuance of health, and the increase of favour”; “He (God) took him (a man) so that he did not reckon upon it; [as though by degrees;] bestowing upon him enjoyments in which he delighted, and on which he placed his reliance, and with which he became familiar so as not to be mindful of death, and then taking him in his most heedless state.” *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. “D-R-J.” Ibn al-‘Arabî also discusses this “divine guile” in some detail in *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, summarized by William Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi’s Metaphysical Imagination* (Albany, NY, 1989), 267-269. Brown says that by the 15<sup>th</sup> century *istidrâc* was reckoned a specific type of miracle (*khârq al-‘âda*), 133-134. The 19th century scholar Abdülhakîm b. Mustafa Arvâsî gives this definition: “Fâsıkların (günahkârların), bilinmeyen bâzı şeyleri haber vermeleri, âdet üstü hârikulâde hâdiseler göstermeleridir. Allahü teâlâ, her şeyi bir sebep altında yaratmaktadır. Allahü teâlâ, sevdiği insanlara, iyilik ve ikrâm olmak için ve azılı düşmanlarını aldatmak için, bunlara âdetini bozarak sebepsiz şeyler yaratıyor. Bunlar kâfirlerden, fâsiklardan, günâhı çok olanlardan zuhûr ederse, istidrâc denir ki, derece derece kıymetini indirmek demektir.” Quoted in *Evlîyalar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul, 1992-1993), 1: 21. Cf. Şemseddin Sâmî, *Kâmûs-ı Türkî* (İstanbul, 1899/1900), 98.

<sup>196</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131a.

[*esbâb*] and necessities and heedless of the sacred import of “Not the least atom is hidden from Him” and “There is no aid but from God the Almighty.”<sup>197</sup>

Vâsîf, to refute this view, then cites past campaigns when Ottoman troops won in spite of ill-preparedness and disorder. With such counterexamples, “how,” he asks, “can anyone impute victory to refinement of the means of war [*tekmîl-i esbâb-ı ceng*] and defeat to inadequate arms?”<sup>198</sup>

This passage needs some explanation, for it partakes in a long-standing philosophical and theological discourse. “Particular events (*umûr-ı cüziyye*)” and their counterpart “universal events (*umûr-ı külliyye*)” are key terms in the Ottoman causal lexicon on relations between the earthly and divine. Both are traceable to earlier thinkers and were current in some schools of Islamic theology along with the concept of “particular will (*irâde-i cüziyye*).” Particular will, sometimes translated less strictly as “free will,” denotes human will as the end product of the divine will (*irâde-i külliyye*). Put simply, “particular events” are worldly events that humans can affect and that admit agency, while “universal events” encompass larger historical processes linked to divine preordination.<sup>199</sup>

As said before, Ottoman intellectuals were quite familiar with this discourse. In the seventeenth century work *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr*, the polymath Kâtib Çelebi explains at some length how worldly causation operates.<sup>200</sup> God, he says, is the Almighty and Primary Cause (*müsebbibü'l-esbâb*) who decrees all things in His earthly dominion. However, God also created

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<sup>197</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131a-131b. Quotations are from the Quran, 34:3 and 3:126, 8:10 respectively. Mardin too quotes this passage, “Mind of the Turkish Reformer,” 28.

<sup>198</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131b. Vâsîf cites the Eğri campaign of 1596 and the battle of Hisarcık.

<sup>199</sup> Şerif Mardin, “Mind of the Turkish Reformer,” 28-29.

<sup>200</sup> Kâtib Çelebi, *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr fî Esfâri'l-Bihâr* (İstanbul, 1911), 163-164. Discussed by Hagen in “Osman II,” 6; Hagen and Menchinger, 101-102.

the world as a world of causes (*'âlem-i esbâb*) so that each event is revealed by way of a cause.<sup>201</sup> He furthermore, through benevolence, endowed humans with particular will (*ihdiyâr-i cüzî*) and made a custom (*'âdet*) of creating as an outcome thereof. Kâtib Çelebi consequently argues that it is man's duty to exert free will through these “secondary causes (*esbâb*).” While humans are not, strictly speaking, the cause of events, they are enjoined and empowered by God to take initiative: “Man must therefore concern himself with causes in order to conform to the divine command that is needful to him,” he writes. “With initiative, man has performed his duty and thereafter the matter's resolution abides with the will of God the Primary Cause.” Though God might sometimes test believers with adversity, it rests on them to struggle through causes.<sup>202</sup>

Kâtib Çelebi's is an atomistic universe in which God is the sole true agent, a view closely aligned with al-Ghazâlî and the Ash'arî school of theology. While worldly events seem to follow cause and effect, then, they are in truth only concomitant and “caused” in a strict sense by God's divine power and given the semblance of regularity through His custom (*'âdetüllah*). But lest humans be freed from moral responsibility, as agency gives meaning to sin, piety, and religious duty, theological schools like the Ash'arîs and others sought by means like “particular will” to preserve human agency without running roughshod on God's omnipotence.<sup>203</sup> As Kâtib Çelebi

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<sup>201</sup> Ottoman authors often refer to *'âlem-i esbâb*, though more often than not the idea is assumed. For example, *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 11, 2: 476, 493; Robert Anhegger, “Hezarfenn Hüseyin Efendi'nin Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtına Dair Mülâhazaları,” *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 10 (1953): 382; Mehmed Atâullah Şânîzâde, *Şânîzâde Târîhi* (İstanbul, 2008), 1: 33-34.

<sup>202</sup> “[Allah] bu ‘âlem-i dünyâyı...‘âlem-i esbâb kılub kevn ü fesâdda cümle mukadderât ve tasarrufâtı sebab yüzünden gösterüb...mahz lutf ve kereminden kulların ihtiyâr-ı cüzî sâhibi kılub herkese ihtiyâr-ı cüzîsini bir tarafa sarf etmeğe temkîn ü ikdâr edüb ‘akabinde halk etmek üzere ‘âdetini icrâ eyledi.” *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr*, 163-164.

<sup>203</sup> Rudolph, 336-343. Mehmed Akkirmanî in the eighteenth century reiterates that human agency gives sin and piety meaning: “Zîrâ teklîf, ihtiyâr-ı fî'le ve sarf-ı kudrete sebab olur. Allah teâlâ dahî eğer mâni‘ yok ise evvel fî'li halk eder. Abd'dan bu ihtiyâr sebebiyle sâdır olan fî'li şari‘in taleb etdüğüne muvafık olursa taat olub sevâba alâmet olur; muhâlif olursa ma‘siyet olub ‘ikâba alâmet olur.” Öçal, 236.

indicates, God commands humans to act; to ignore worldly causes is therefore sinful and initiative itself a moral imperative.

The lineage of these ideas in the Ottoman Empire is not entirely clear. Şerif Mardin credits them to Ibn Sînâ's Aristotelian cosmology by way of the popular ethical treatise *Ahlâk-ı 'Alâî*,<sup>204</sup> but the latter contains none of the key words or even a detailed discussion of causality. The matter is further confused by whether they are Ash'arî or Mâturîdî, probably too clumsy a distinction. While on one hand Ottoman theology is usually considered to have been Mâturîdî in orientation, there is some doubt over its formal affiliation<sup>205</sup> and concepts like *'âdetü'llah* and *müsebbibü'l-esbâb* are almost certainly linked to al-Ghazâlî's atomistic causality. Furthermore, Philipp Bruckmayr demonstrates that the concept of *irâde-i cüziyye* stems from the Ottoman pietist Birgivî Mehmed (d. 1573), and was spread and popularized only in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in treatises on free will. These tracts derived from a mixed milieu, one characterized by "harmonization" of Ash'arî and Mâturîdî ideas and purveyed, above all, by Sufî Nakşbendî authors.<sup>206</sup> It is hence probably wrong to look for their origins in any one school of theology. For just as "God's custom" or *'âdetü'llah* effectively aligned Ash'arî atomism with Aristotelian cosmology, at least in terms of its practical implications, so any Ash'arî – Mâturîdî distinction is likely minor in everyday application.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Mardin, "Mind of the Turkish Reformer," 28-29.

<sup>205</sup> Öçal, 225-226.

<sup>206</sup> Bruckmayr, esp. 10-11. Altun also notes a trend toward harmonization and a strong link between the authors and Sufism, 84-87. See also Kurz, 12.

<sup>207</sup> Öçal, for example, argues that this system of ideas displays Ottoman Mâturîdism. Mardin, too, associates it with the Mâturîdis, *Young Ottoman Thought*, esp. 407. The point is academic. Gimaret outlines three basic positions in Sunni Islam: that man controls neither his will, power, nor actions, which are entirely created by God; that man is an actual agent but his power and will are created by God; that God creates acts in all elements save one, the decision of the human. Gimaret says that historically the first option is most closely aligned with the Ash'aris and the third with the Mâturîdis, who affirmed the reality of the human act, 232-234;



If we return to the 1784 *risâle* in this light, we can see that Vâsîf sketches, if vaguely, a stance that can be called “activist.”<sup>208</sup> At no time does he deny that humans have particular will or that warfare is a “particular event.” His mere use of the phrase suggests otherwise. What he instead rejects is the idea that God has no part in such outcomes – that victory rests only on human initiative through causes, an impious notion to say the least.<sup>209</sup> That Vâsîf connects this idea to a group of “Christian philosophers,” moreover, suggests he is to some degree aware of intellectual trends in Europe. His words are a recognition and firm rejection of Enlightenment-era materialism, and maybe of any homegrown materialist tendencies.<sup>210</sup>

Nor does Vâsîf question the utility of action. This becomes clearer when he turns to his patron Halil Hamid Paşa's reform efforts. “Ultimately,” he writes, “there is still reason to struggle for the causes/means [*esbâb*] at the heart of our discussion; and these, praise to God, are now being readied and gradually brought to completion.”<sup>211</sup> In his conclusion, Vâsîf extols Halil Paşa and his circle for their cooperation and reform initiatives. The French offer was not to be trusted and is in any case unnecessary. For should the Grand Vezir and his colleagues continue,

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also Altun, 2-19. Once terminological niceties are put aside, I tend to agree with Fakhry: that “their positions are almost identical,” 47. See also Griffel, 124-146, 276-287; Hagen and Menchinger, 101-102.

<sup>208</sup> The term is Mardin's. “Mind of the Turkish Reformer,” 33; idem, *Young Ottoman Thought*, particularly 171-173.

<sup>209</sup> According to Rudolf, absolute human free will was seen as a form of unbelief in that it ascribes divine attributes (creative power) to mankind, while fatalists commit unbelief by anthropomorphizing God, associating Him with human wickedness, 336-339.

<sup>210</sup> On materialism, Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, 2004), 18-44.

<sup>211</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151; MEHÂSİN 1, 131b-132a.

by God's grace, to attend to state affairs, "the means/causes will undoubtedly come to full fruition."<sup>212</sup>

If Vâsîf's essay seems unsystematic and lacking in detail, this may suggest that his audience was already familiar with its main ideas. In any event, the rest of his first volume gives the less adept modern reader hints about what "particular events" more or less encompassed. Certainly they included warfare in its many aspects. Grand Admiral Gazi Hasan Paşa, one of the major statesmen of the 1780s, put it succinctly when quoted by Vâsîf, stating that war must be conducted through causes, among which are the treasury, the army, and quality of commanders.<sup>213</sup> To these the author adds provisions and unity among statesmen. Waging successful warfare without any of these factors is impossible, he writes, and in his opinion the empire's defeats have occurred through bankruptcy, insufficient ordnance, cowardice, and a willful neglect of the military.<sup>214</sup>

What is more, the chronicle obliquely outlines what Vâsîf felt would produce victory. Foremost, of course, were Halil Paşa's reform efforts: his ordering of the military, reorganization of lapsed land grants, and introduction of new weapons and tactics, for, as Vâsîf says, "it is among the secondary causes [*esbâb-ı zâhiriyye*] of victory for every state to acquire weapons to match those of its enemy."<sup>215</sup> Another telling passage reports an Ottoman rout in the East, a "particular event" caused by the army's tribal levies, and namely their disobedience on the field

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<sup>212</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 151-152; MEHÂSİN 1, 132a-132b. Vâsîf accuses the French of base motives, such as designs on the island of Crete where they proposed to offer training. Cf. Berkes, 65-66.

<sup>213</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 91; MEHÂSİN 1, 78b.

<sup>214</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 99; MEHÂSİN 1, 85b.

<sup>215</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 8; MEHÂSİN 1, 7b.

and greater interest in plunder and prisoner-taking than in fighting. Elsewhere Vâsîf mentions, again, supplies and well-defended frontiers as causes of victory in war.<sup>216</sup>

As the 1784 *risâle* specifies, though, victory could not rest on material factors alone.

“Spiritual provisions” were significant, too. “From ever of old,” Vâsîf avers,

The customary needs and secondary causes of gaza and jihad have been secured, according to the favor of the time, entirely through God's aid and the succor of royal prayers. Yet while, praise be to God, be He lauded and extolled, the Sublime State has always swiftly gained advantage, the statesmen decided to trust not in causes alone but in God's aid, according to the holy verse, “There is no aid but from God the Almighty,” and to begin spiritual provisions [*rûhânî tedârükât*] and binding rituals.<sup>217</sup>

One of these rituals was the recitation of the *Kitâb al-shifâ* and Bukhârî's *Şahîh* by ascetics as far afield as Egypt, Damascus, the Holy Cities, and Baghdad. In the past the empire, supported by God, had recovered quickly from disasters through the piety of its rulers. Such spiritual measures, it was hoped, would now offset Russian *istidrâc* and, along with military reforms, help to secure victory.<sup>218</sup> The spiritual side of Vâsîf's causality must not be overlooked. In his work action and absolute trust in God's aid always go together, and are indeed a duty of statesmen.

At least one scholar, Şerif Mardin, characterizes Vâsîf's 1784 *risâle* as a “fatalist,” arch-conservative position.<sup>219</sup> On the contrary, in the larger debate of the time it is neither fatalist nor conservative but toes a fastidious line between fatality and a godless materialism, a stance usually seen as “orthodox” in Sunni Islam. Vâsîf considers military defeat a divine trial, or

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<sup>216</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 204, 261-262, 305-306; MEHÂSİN 1, 149b, 199a-200a, 236a-237a.

<sup>217</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 52; MEHÂSİN 1, 42b.

<sup>218</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 52-54; MEHÂSİN 1, 42b-44a.

<sup>219</sup> Mardin, “Mind of the Turkish Reformer,” 28-30, 32; idem, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 172-173. Cf. Berkes, 66.

*istidrâc*. At the same time, however, he advises action and his understanding of causation affirms that humans have a role to play, albeit a limited one. Like Kâtib Çelebi, Vâsîf sees the world as a world of causes. He hence ties the military success of the empire to moral considerations but allows room for reform and activism. These same ideas, moreover, would play a large and growing role in Vâsîf's philosophy in following years.

### ***Vâsîf on the Natural and Supernatural***

Ahmed Vâsîf's view of causality can be better understood through his conception of the natural and supernatural. Here it is again worth saying a few words about the concept '*âdetüillah*. While Ash'arî atomism holds that God is the only true agent in the universe, '*âdetüillah* in fact reconciles it with worldly causality. Because God chooses to persist in His custom, events will always, or nearly always, act as if by joined in a series of cause and effect. There is therefore no outward contradiction between worldly causes and the idea that God is an absolute agent (*fâ'il-i muhtâr*) who creates and governs the universe.<sup>220</sup> Vâsîf was of course well aware of this fact. His epistemology, for example, discussed above, depends on the point: to deny regularity and causality makes all discursive knowledge (and history) impossible.<sup>221</sup>

Vâsîf's work depicts an atomistic universe made intelligible by God's custom. Further, since the universe operates according to visible and customary secondary causes, humans are able to predict and in some cases manipulate outcomes. This picture emerges more clearly when the historian speaks of the natural world, as, for instance, in several entries on eclipses. Vâsîf, whose interests ranged widely, seems to have been disquieted by a popular belief that these events were actually portents. In recording a partial solar eclipse on 14 June 1760, he likens the

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<sup>220</sup> Griffel, 276-278; DĪA, s.v. "İllyet."

<sup>221</sup> DĪA, s.v. "İllyet."

event to the famed eclipse that immediately followed the death of İbrahim, a son of the Prophet. According to Vâsîf, when the Prophet discovered that some people were calling the eclipse a miracle caused by İbrahim's death, he corrected them, saying, "Verily are the sun and moon two of the divine signs; they are not eclipsed for the death of one man." Vâsîf then enumerates the physical conditions under which sun, earth, and moon create eclipses.<sup>222</sup> For a lunar eclipse on 4 February 1795, meanwhile, Vâsîf goes so far as to accuse the ulema of denying God's custom. After explaining that the moon is eclipsed because the earth blocks out the sun's light, he adds that the prophetic hadith does not contradict astronomical writings, since

The divine actions of God occur sometimes regularly [*'alâ hasbe'l-âdet*] and sometimes irregularly [*lâ 'alâ hasbe'l-âdet*] and His omnipotence rules over both causes [*sebeb*] and effects [*müsebbeb*]. The learned ulema however, believe, as a point of faith, in a divine omnipotence that does not follow general laws [*'alâ harki'l-âdet-i 'umûm*] and whenever something strange occurs they take fright due to this conviction.

Vâsîf concludes that with eclipses they cannot deny certain causes related to divine habit.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 184-185. While it is impossible to tell whether this account depicts a geo- or heliocentric universe, and though eighteenth century Ottoman intellectuals knew of the heliocentric model, Vâsîf's usual acceptance of an Aristotelian/Ptolemaic cosmology makes the latter a remote possibility. This passage parallels İbrahim Hakkı Efendi (d. 1780), quoting al-Ghazâlî's *Tahâfut al-falâsifa*, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, "The Introduction of Western Science to the Ottoman World," in *Science, Technology, and Learning in the Ottoman Empire: Western Influence, Local institutions, and the Transfer of Knowledge* (Burlington, 2004), 2: 24-25. See also Robert Morrison, "The Response of Ottoman Religious Scholars to European Science," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 21 (2003): 187-195.

<sup>223</sup> "Hakk sübhanehü ve te'alâ'nın ef'âl-ı ilahîyyesi ba'zen 'alâ hasbe'l-âdet ve ba'zen lâ 'alâ hasbe'l-âdet vukû' bulub kudreti sebeb ü müsebbeb üzerine hâkimdir. 'Ulema-yı mütebassırîn 'alâ harki'l-âdet-i 'umûm kudret-i samadâniyyeye mu'takid olub bir şey-i garîb vukû' buldukda zalike'l-i'tikâd sebebi ile havf ederler. Bu sûretde bu 'âdetin cereyânı için ba'zı esbab zuhûrını men' ü inkâr etmezler." MEHÂSİN 2, 196a. Cf. the eclipse in MEHÂSİN 4, 274b-275a. Although he was not a religious scholar, Fazlîzâde Ali took a similar stance, rejecting the notion of divine custom and all manner of causal connections, real or apparent. Kurz, 183-196.

These comments are paralleled by the author's more or less firm mistrust of astrology (*ahkâm-ı nüccâmiyye*). Many Ottomans had no scruples in consulting the stars, over the protests of certain religious authorities. Naîmâ, for example, had recommended to aspiring historians that they incorporate the effects of conjunctions and astrological influences in their work.<sup>224</sup> Vâsîf granted that God used the heavens to convey signs, but he could not accept that astral bodies had any independent causal influence. In one decisive passage from his first volume, he urges his audience to obey the will of God by taking initiative, trusting in Him, ignoring astrology, and rejecting philosophers who endorse it, quoting a distich – “He who plans by the stars knoweth not / For the Lord of the Star doeth what He will” – and verse by the poet and alchemist al-Ṭughrâ'î (d. 1121): “God governs alone, neither stars / Nor sun nor moon share in His rule.”<sup>225</sup>

Vâsîf's treatment of earthquakes elicits many of the same details. Recording a massive quake in 1784, which killed a certain brutal vezir in Erzincan, he is quick to disavow that earthquakes are divine interventions. While the ulema attribute earthquakes to sin and injustice, he says, and corroborate their claims through scripture, philosophers explain that quakes occur from the accumulation of vapors under the earth. The surface of the earth in this state becomes unyielding, hence the vapors are unable to escape, become heated, and rise. An earthquake occurs if they cannot find an outlet. Yet Vâsîf, the son of a religious scholar but unimpressed by the current profession, pointedly adds that the ulema hold this opinion in contempt.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 5; Thomas, 114; el-Rouayheb, 201-202; B. Harun Küçük, “Natural Philosophy and Politics in the Eighteenth Century: Esad of Ioannina and Greek Aristotelianism at the Ottoman Court,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 41 (2013): 140.

<sup>225</sup> See on the Silistre governor Hasan Paşa, who was ruined by an interest in occult sciences. *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 49-50; MEHÂSİN 1, 142a-142b. On al-Ṭughrâ'î, author of the *Lâmiyyat al-'ajam*, Brockelmann, 1: 247; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “al-Ṭughrâ'î.”

<sup>226</sup> ““Ulemâ-yı şer'î şerîf bu akvâlî ibtâl ve tezyîf eyledikleri mahallinde mestûrdır,” *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 184-185. Vâsîf called the ulema of his day unqualified, corrupt, ignorant, and

This regular, predictable view of the universe also allows humans to act on the world around them. When Abdülhamid shuttered two profitable bullion mines in 1785/86, ostensibly out of concern for public order, Vâsif informed his superiors that the loss could be recouped through artificial means: alchemy. To begin, he writes, most philosophers agree that the essence of the seven precious metals is the same – gold – but that they differ in accidental properties (*min ciheti'l-a'râz*). These accidental properties develop over long periods of time, according to the degree to which the climate deviates from the mean in hot, cold, damp, or dry. Gold, for instance, needs intense heat to keep its purity; silver is produced in moderate cold; lead in cold and excess dry; copper arises where heat overpowers moisture. All metals, he argues, are produced by variations against the mean.<sup>227</sup> Following this logic, it should therefore be possible to produce them artificially (*sinâ'at-ı hikemiyye ile*), for God's consummate wisdom created most perfectly, among metals, both the pure matter capable of becoming gold and silver and the active matter to transmute it (*anı tedbîr ü tekâmîl edici madde-i fâ'ile*). He also revealed to philosophers how to refine it by fire. When the debased metal (*ma'den-i nâkıs*) is treated by alchemy (*esrâr-ı hikmet*), then, and by imitating the actions of nature (*muhâkât-i fi'l-i tabî'at*), the cause of its defect is removed and it can be turned into gold and silver. Just as it is possible to

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illiterate sponges, MEHÂSİN 4, 42a-42b. Cf. Anhegger, 392. His account of earthquakes is based on Aristotle's theory of vapor and exhalation, Nasr, 240-247; İhsanoğlu, 2: 25.

<sup>227</sup> This account is informed by Galenic humoralism, whereby the four elements earth, air, fire, and water have distinct characteristics and condition the human body as well as other natural objects. A competing theory argued that all metals consist of sulphur and mercury in different degrees and denied that alchemy can change a metal's basic principles. Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500-1700* (Albany, 2009), esp. 23-24, 66-68; Nasr, 244-247; István Ormos, "The Theory of Humours in Islam (Avicenna)," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (1987/1988): 601-607.

produce wonders through artifice, he closes, or to cure illness with medicine and alter plants, so too is it possible to rid metals of accidental properties and imperfections.<sup>228</sup>

For all Vâsîf's causal reasoning, for all his physical explanations, for all his emphasis on the world's regularity – for all that, he nonetheless did not disclaim miracles. This is because *'âdetüllah*, though regular and predictable, is not a necessary course of events. God chooses to act through custom but may abrogate it according to His will.<sup>229</sup> During a drought in the spring of 1794, Vâsîf on these grounds heatedly denied that a famine was imminent:

While the Creator of elements, compounds, and all creation has sometimes bound His divine omnipotence and will to secondary causes, let there be absolutely no doubt that He must ever needs use an intermediary. His consummate power in creating and producing without cause [*bilâ 'illetin min'l- 'ilel halk u ihtirâ'*] is a self-evident fact. And in order to save from turmoil and various sufferings those materialists who are heedless of the secret wisdom, “His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it ‘Be,’ and it is,” He now made abundant clouds...<sup>230</sup>

And the rains came. Not only does the author in this passage thereby affirm God's power to ignore regular order, but once again he toes an “activist” middle ground, chiding those who see only external causes just as those who see only the miraculous.

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<sup>228</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 293-298; MEHÂSİN 1, 226a-230b. Reading *fâ'ile* for İlgürel's *gâile*.

<sup>229</sup> Marmura, 142.

<sup>230</sup> “Âferînende-i besâit ve mürekkebât ve rûzîdihende-i kâffe-i mahlûkât zuhûr-ı kudret ü meşiyetini ba'zen esbâb-ı zâhireye rabt etmiş ise dahi kati'en li-maddeti'ş-şübheti müzâvele-i 'amel ve isti'mâl-ı alete iftikârı olmayub bilâ 'illetin min'l- 'ilel halk u ihtirâ' ve icâd u ibdâ'da ta'ayyün-i kemâl kudreti dahi iclâ-yı bedîhiyyâtındandır. Innamâ amruhu idhâ arâda shayan an yakûla lahu kun fa-yakûnu idrâk-ı hükm-i hafîyyesinden rû-pûş-ı gaflet olan erbâb-ı zevâhir inkılâb-ı derûn ve iztirâb-ı gûnâgûndan tahlîs için bu esnâda gamâm-ı latîfü'l-insicâm dahi feyzân edüb.” TOP nr. 1638, 10a-10b. On miracles and their typology, Brown, “Faithful Dissenters.”



### *The 1787-1792 War: the Morality of Victory and Defeat*

The Russian-Ottoman and Austrian-Ottoman Wars of 1787-1792 led Ahmed Vâsîf to a more coherent, philosophical statement of agency. Sparked by Grand Vezir Koca Yusuf Paşa (1786-1789, 1791-1792), who forced an ill-advised declaration of war against Russia on 14 August 1787, the conflict pressed the Ottomans into a campaign along the Danube against Russia and Austria, raising anew the spectre of Ottoman collapse. Vâsîf himself served at the front from 1791 to 1792, witnessing the signal Ottoman rout at Maçin, which effectively ended the war, and negotiating a truce with General Nikolai Repnin in August of 1791. He later reflected on these events, when bidden by Sultan Selim III in 1793 to produce a history of the war from the work of earlier chroniclers Sadullah Enverî and Mehmed Edîb.<sup>231</sup> Most notably, the historian used this occasion to explain the failure of the empire's arms, elaborating on human action and the causes of victory and defeat.

Vâsîf's most explicit words on this subject come in his account of the Ottoman defeat at Foksani. In July of 1789, Koca Yusuf's successor Hasan Paşa (1789-1790) stationed the bulk of his forces at Foksani in Moldavia to prevent a joint Russian and Austrian assault on Bucharest. By means of a forced march, however, the Russians under General Suvorov arrived earlier than expected. The Ottoman force was taken completely by surprise and disintegrated when the Russians and Austrians attacked together on 30 July.<sup>232</sup>

Contrasting the Ottoman and enemy armies, Vâsîf argues that a disobedient mass of soldiers who disregard secondary causes (*esbâb-ı zâhire*) cannot match the obedient, disciplined,

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<sup>231</sup> Vâsîf was sent to the army to serve, among other things, as court historian. This appointment's date is uncertain but seems to have taken place in April of 1791. Vâsîf was certainly at the front by June of that year. Kütükoğlu, "Vekayi'nüvis," 118-119. Also MEHÂSİN 2, 81a, 87b-89a; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), xxix; and related documents, BOA.HAT 10467, 11579, 57475.

<sup>232</sup> Shaw, 36; MEHÂSİN 2, 25a-26a.

new-style soldier fielded by Russia and Austria; indeed it is outwardly difficult, if not impossible, to defeat an enemy without equal or superior organization. The pressing concern, then, lies in “secondary causes,” which, he says, “encompass warfare and the arts of combat [*kanûn-ı muhârebe ve fînûn-ı müzârebe*] – in other words, the new [military] organization which is part of the mathematical sciences [*fînûn-ı riyâziye*].”<sup>233</sup> Vâsîf then presses the argument at length, stating:

According to the philosophers, everything is contingent; what is contingent admits influence; and what admits influence cannot be without cause. The Sunnis say that although everything issues un-contingent from God and man's deeds have absolutely no effect nor influence on causes or ability to influence the course of events, it is God's custom to create everything as an outcome of secondary causes [*‘âdetüllah bunun üzere cârîdir ki her şeyi esbâb-ı zâhire ‘akabinde halk ede*] Therefore, is it is ever incumbent on all sects that when they must undertake a matter they should secure the secondary causes forthwith and complete necessities pertaining to the circumstance, then await God's victory and seek the fruits which derive from the sense of “Hobble your camel and trust in God.”<sup>234</sup>

Vâsîf therefore links acting through secondary causes both to obedience to God and success in battle. The Prophet himself offered this wisdom: “War is a trickery (*al-ḥarbu khud‘a*).”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 26a-26b. Vâsîf's association of mathematics and warfare here and elsewhere seems to corroborate Adnan-Adivar's claim that modern math entered the Ottoman Empire “through the military channel.” See Berkes, 49.

<sup>234</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 26b-27a. The proverb is from a hadith, G.W.F. Freytag, *Arabum proverbialibus instruxit, latine vertit, commentario illustravit et sumtibus suis editit* (Bonn, 1838-43), 2: 112.

<sup>235</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 26b.

A similar grasp of causality can be found elsewhere in Vâsîf's day in the work of scholars and statesmen. Indeed, this was a matter of fierce debate. While theologians like Mehmed Akkirmanî (d. 1760) and Davûd-ı Karsî argued that human agency was both real and obligatory,<sup>236</sup> would-be reformers called especially for warfare based on worldly causes. For example, İbrahim Müteferrika (d. 1745) acknowledged that victory and defeat depend on God's will but that “God has consigned the outward realization of every matter to initiative through causes. Man must operate thus.” The victorious army is hence pious and just as well as well-trained, well-led, disciplined, and informed of tactics and weaponry.<sup>237</sup> The 1768-1774 war, provoked and prolonged by men who argued precisely the opposite – that God grants victory on zeal alone – intensified this debate and produced a spate of treatises in the 1770s and 1780s. Among them, Ahmed Resmî's (d. 1783) trenchant *Hulâsatü'l-İtibâr* (*A Summary of Admonitions*) rejected the war and its authors' insouciance, and exposed the empire's decrepit military system. Resmî agreed that Russian power was divine punishment (*istidrâc*) for Ottoman moral failings, but called for reform and a pacific foreign policy.<sup>238</sup> Even Canikli Ali Paşa's (d. 1785)

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<sup>236</sup> Such men argued, according to D'Ohsson, that “dans toutes les circonstances de la vie et dans toutes les entreprises publiques ou particulières, on doit d'abord implorer les lumières célestes, par l'intercession du Prophète et de tous les saints du Musulmanisme; ensuite réfléchir, délibérer, consulter ses propres lumières, en usant de tous les secours que peuvent suggérer la prudence, l'expérience et la raison. Ce n'est qu'après avoir employé ces moyens, que l'on peut attribuer aux décrets éternels les événemens humains, auxquels on doit alors se soumettre avec une résignation absolue.” 1: 168.

<sup>237</sup> “It is secret wisdom that victory, success, and triumph over the enemy depend always and utterly on the Lord God's infinite aid to believers; that rule rests on His exalted will; and that victory and defeat lie within His preordination. However, God has consigned the outward realization of every matter to initiative through causes. Man must operate thus.” *Usulü'l-Hikem*, esp. 148. See also Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 74.

<sup>238</sup> Resmî attacked his peers' bellicosity and blind faith in the “zeal of Islam,” *A Summary of Admonitions*, 1b-2b, 4b-5b, 24b-25a, 33a-36a, 44b-45a, 48a-48b. Berkes, following Resmî, blames the war on “conservatives” who hoped to show that pious zeal was enough to bring victory, 55-59. Also D'Ohsson, 1: 264-266, 5: 49-75. For a discussion of this work and others

conservative *Tedbîr-i Cedîd-i Nâdir* (*The Rare New Stratagem*) admitted, if in a vague way, that divine preordination and worldly causes work in tandem, and that the Ottomans must attend to strategy if they are to reverse their fortunes.<sup>239</sup> Ottoman reformers seem to have internalized this discourse by the reign of Selim III. While Vâsîf derided Canikli Ali's essay as outmoded, he found no fault in its notions of causality.<sup>240</sup>

What, then, did “secondary causes” mean to Ahmed Vâsîf? The historian gives some inkling of this when he clarifies the link between these causes and victory and defeat. Victory over the enemy, he asserts, occurs through sound judgment and good strategy, together with great effort and preparation, proper order, and bearing hardships on campaign. After this comes wholehearted trust in God's aid. Above all, a successful army is well-trained and can fight on any ground and at a moment's notice.<sup>241</sup> Defeat, on the other hand, is essentially a moral failure. Sin incurs God's wrath, he says – a sinner betrays the faith and the traitor is fearful by nature, hence Ottoman armies fare poorly because, as sinners, they lack strength of heart.<sup>242</sup>

Vâsîf also rejects the idea that zeal and bravery suffice for victory. Rather, he says that armies must assign each matter to experts and have men of strategy, effort, and vision as leaders “to illumine the darkness of affairs with the light of the proper path of reason, to stand against

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after the 1768-1774 war, Virginia Aksan, “Ottoman Political Writing, 1768-1808,” in *Ottomans and Europeans*, 25-44.

<sup>239</sup> For example: “Gerçi takdîr-i ilahî böyle imiş lâkin tedbîrde ‘azîm hatâ etdiler.” ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 60a-60b; Özkaya, 136-137, 144-145, 167. On Canikli Ali, Rıza Karagöz, *Canikli Ali Paşa* (Ankara, 2003).

<sup>240</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 278; MEHÂSİN 1, 214a. Kahraman Şakul argues that by Selim's time reform had become the only legitimate discourse. Debate therefore centered around the nature of the reforms themselves, 129, 145-148; Beydilli, “Islâhât Düşünceleri,” 37-42. For instances of such causal language in decrees see, for instance, BOA.HAT 9284, 56252.

<sup>241</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 27b-29b. Cf. Müteferrika, who lists attention to holy law and justice, awareness of tactics and weaponry, discipline, good intelligence, trust in God, and the Prophet's intercession. *Usûlü'l-hikem*, 170-172.

<sup>242</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 33a, 83a. It is incumbent on the ruler to restrain such behavior as drinking, and encourage the vicious to reform.

enemy arms, and to adapt their forces according to the rules of war when is proper.”<sup>243</sup>

Secondary causes, then, embrace military preparations, strategy, and the active removal of vice through measures like shuttering taverns. It is significant as well that in this volume Vâsîf, unlike in his 1784 essay, admits the old ways are obsolete and that Europe's military arts must be met like for like, a notion we will encounter frequently.

We therefore see that victory relies partly on the individual's moral constitution. Piety, firmness in battle, trust in God, and leadership are all personal qualities whose neglect incurs divine wrath. As the historian notes, the defeat at Foksani was due mostly to the rank and file's sinfulness, disobedience, and greed. While Ottoman forces were large enough to repel an attack, they showed less interest in fighting or order than in drawing pay and the commanders, for their part, were utterly unaware of Suvorov's position. If they had traced his movements, as the Russians did theirs, the rout might have been avoided.<sup>244</sup> Vâsîf's address at Maçin, discussed above, likewise paints the outcome of war in personal, moralistic terms: defeat as punishment for Ottoman cowardice, disunity, and sin, and victory as God's promise to believers if the men but abjure their disobedience and hold firm in battle. Victory depends on this individual effort, for “however keen our swords and swift our steeds, the sword does not cut or the horse charge on its own.”<sup>245</sup>

At the same time, however, the chronicle puts victory into a larger causal picture. Vâsîf chiefly connects secondary causes with Selim III's reforms and declares that these efforts – drilling soldiers in the new exercise, organizing provisions, improving armaments, and correcting

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 33a.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 26a-27b.

<sup>245</sup> “Sâniha,” in *ibid*, 96b-99b.

men's natures – are all means to victory.<sup>246</sup> The reforms that initiated the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* in 1792 were by no means limited to the military sphere. Yet by Vâsîf's lights all of them serve to strengthen the empire and to confirm Ottoman exceptionalism.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, whether individual or collective, and though they admit of human agency, all secondary causes depend ultimately and utterly on God. After the rout at Maçın, the historian expresses this reliance in prayer:

May God the Primary Cause grant good foreordination to the Sublime State's attempt to reorganize; and may He ordain its completion while the opportunity is in hand, grant us the ability to take revenge on the enemy, and fill the hearts of all believers with the joy of illimitable victory, Amen.<sup>248</sup>

Vâsîf's 1789-1794 volume uses striking and deliberate causal rhetoric to convey a point: if God ordains everything and is the only true agent in a theological sense, humans must still live as though their actions were their own, as God has commanded.<sup>249</sup> This stance resembles those taken by İbrahim Müteferrika and Ahmed Resmî, with whom Vâsîf was familiar and whose work he had thoroughly digested.<sup>250</sup> However, Vâsîf is more explicit than either in outlining a

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<sup>246</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 5a-6b; on the reform of timars and zeamets, 51b-52a.

<sup>247</sup> Berkes, 71-74; Beydilli, "İslâhât Düşünceleri," 25-26. Şakul presents the reforms as part of a larger ideological "movement." Vâsîf himself calls them the means to order the army, obtain victory, strengthen the faith, and right injustice. MEHÂSİN 3, 2a-4a, 12b-14a.

<sup>248</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 27b. In another volume he writes: "May the Lord God create the causes that lead to their increase and may He make the enemy's new methods of warfare successful against various military dispositions, Amen." MEHÂSİN 3, 6b.

<sup>249</sup> This recalls the axiom attributed to Muslim ibn Yasar (d. 718 or 720): "Act therefore like someone who knows that only his own acts can still save him; and trust in God like someone who knows that only that will strike him which was meant for him." Eric L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: the Dispute over Ghazâlî's "Best of All Possible Worlds"* (Princeton, 1984), 71.

<sup>250</sup> Vâsîf knew Resmî personally and used his *Hulâsat* as a source. *A Summary of Admonitions*, 24-29. Vâsîf's intellectual debt to Müteferrika meanwhile began in printing, but he seems to have read at least *Usûlü'l-Hikem* and used some of its material.

sort of calculus for war, a morality of victory and defeat. In this calculus human initiative is a moral duty and weighed with piety, zeal, and other factors. To Vâsîf “observing Islamic practice and perfecting causes” will result in victory; impiety and sin, defeat.<sup>251</sup>

### ***The 1798 Tesliyetnâme: a Theodicy***

The next representative text dates four years later, to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.

According to Yüksel Çelik, the French landing at Alexandria on 1 July 1798 took Selim III and his ministers unawares. The sultan was sorely affected and dismissed Grand Vezir İzzet Mehmed Paşa and *şeyhülislâm* Dürrîzâde Ârif Efendi, sending them into exile.<sup>252</sup> The other ministers feared Selim's volatile moods. In an attempt to calm him, they summoned Ahmed Vâsîf to the Porte and asked him to compose a tract that would sooth and admonish the sultan. Vâsîf hastily put together a few folios of material to submit. The result was an essay in the epistolary form of a *tesliyetnâme*, or letter of consolation.<sup>253</sup>

Yet the 1798 *Tesliyetnâme* is much more. It is a historical essay, as Vâsîf uses fourteen historical examples to draw parallels to the French invasion and demonstrate to the sultan that their disturbance is temporary. It is also, more importantly, a fully developed theodicy. Although

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<sup>251</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 33a.

<sup>252</sup> Çelik, “Tesliyet-Nâme,” 88-95.

<sup>253</sup> This story is related in Süleymaniye Serez nr. 1890, a copy commissioned by one of Vâsîf's sons, probably Vâsîfzâde Lebîb Efendi, 1b-2a. Also Çelik, “Tesliyet-Nâme,” 94-98, 116-117; *Târih-i Cevdet*, 7: 7. In the presentation manuscript, Vâsîf writes in a marginal note that he tried to submit the work to the Porte but was thwarted by administrative turn-over. The work went unread and he resubmitted it, hoping it might preface another, separate work on the Egypt campaign, 117; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 1b. The latter appears to be the unfinished MEHÂSİN (EGYPT). See also Bekir Kütükoğlu, “Münşeat Mecmuaların Osmanlı Diplomatiği Bakımından Ehemmiyeti,” in *Vekayi'nüvis Makaleler*, 219-221. A *tesliyetnâme* was presumably very similar to a *tâziyetnâme*.

Vâsîf's earlier work contains seeds of theodicy,<sup>254</sup> the *Tesliyetnâme* marks his first defense of Ottoman exceptionalism in these terms as well as his first experiment with a coherent interpretive framework.<sup>255</sup> The work consequently presents the invasion as a historical problem, lending more insight into the author's view of causation, historical change, and the universe at large.

Vâsîf opens the essay by asserting that the invasion, while serious, is no cause for despair. The French have taken Alexandria but are in an untenable, doomed position. They betrayed in the empire a friendly and generous power and have become haughty in their faculty of *istidrâc*; their pride is extreme and scripture confirms they will soon suffer God's wrath.<sup>256</sup> The *Tesliyetnâme* therefore invokes in the idea of *istidrâc* the same divine providence as the 1784 essay. As further consolation, however, Vâsîf reassures the sultan that such mishaps occur because the universe is naturally variable. "This world," he declares, "is the world of generation and corruption (*'âlem-i kevn ü fesâd*)."

Its edict is changeable, ephemeral, and always prone in base bodies to give rise to sundry accidents. It defies the natural course of the world for nations' circumstances to remain in a single disposition [*nüsûk-ı vâhid üzere ber-karâr bulmak*] or for states' affairs to be free of accidents affecting the realm [*umûr-ı düvel 'âvarızât-ı mülkiyyeden vâreste olmak*].

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<sup>254</sup> For instance: "[Selâtîn-i 'osmâniyye] a'zam-ı hasâis-i düvel-i islâmiyyeden olan ba'zı ıztırâb-ı mülkiyyeye dûçâr olsalar dahi der-'akab nizâm-ı esbâb-ı hâle muvaffak belki sâbıkından evfer ü akvâ kudret ü miknete mâlik olageldikleri mütetebbi'-i tevârîh olanlara muhakkaktır." MEHÂSİN 1, 5b.

<sup>255</sup> Çelik, who published the text, analyzes it as a literary piece with little "real" historical value, "Tesliyet-Nâme," 96-99.

<sup>256</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 118; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 1b-2a.



And though the various aspects inscribed by God in the cosmos at times take loathsome form, holy scripture demonstrates that they lead to great good and benefit.<sup>257</sup>

Historical examples then follow to prove Vâsîf's thesis: that calamities have occurred "from the beginning of the world and Sublime State till our own day" but lead, ultimately, to the good.<sup>258</sup>

The *Tesliyetnâme's* historical examples number fourteen and are taken from Ayyubid, Mamluk, European, and Ottoman history. Generally these examples show the hand of providence or a fortuitous Muslim victory. For example, during the Fifth Crusade crusaders landed in Egypt and took Alexandria and Damietta. They then marched on al-Mansura. In the course of the siege, however, the Nile flooded and cut off the crusaders' path of retreat. Desperate, they were forced to negotiate with the Ayyubids and surrender Damietta in exchange for safe conduct.<sup>259</sup> In another example, the Andalusian emir Ebü'l-Velîd İsmail met a huge Christian army outside Grenada with only 5,000 men and slaughtered over 50,000.<sup>260</sup>

Vâsîf even adds an anecdote of his own. During the 1768-1774 campaign, he relates, the Russians besieged Silistre with 70,000 soldiers, routing two Ottoman commanders in turn. Silistre was hopelessly surrounded. Yet, at the time of the final assault 6,000 Ottomans made a sally, "like a speck of white on a black cow," and with God's aid crushed the Russians and broke the siege. Vâsîf himself passed through Silistre after the battle as a courier. He claims the defeat was such that cannons and munitions lay scattered everywhere, abandoned, and that the road was nearly impassable from heaped Russian corpses.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 118-119; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 2a.

<sup>258</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 119; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 2b.

<sup>259</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 119; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 2b-3a.

<sup>260</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 121; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 4b.

<sup>261</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 121-122; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 4b-5a. Vâsîf was there to announce the accession of Abdülhamid I. MEHÂSİN 6, 22a-23a.

Vâsîf's examples on one hand show that the fates of rulers in all ages are subject to flux. "Were I to detail these affairs, the quarrels between states, and the property thereby wasted," he insists, "they would form a weighty, instructive tome. Sovereignty and dominion are never without cares nor rulers without enemies."<sup>262</sup> On the other hand, these selfsame events confirm God's solicitude for believers. According to the *Tesliyetnâme*, God will support the Ottoman Empire until Judgment Day and despite reverses, as history and scripture attest. Vâsîf therefore encourages Selim III to bestir himself against the French. The remedy, he says, "is to immediately put trust and forgiveness with God and, asking aid from the Prophet, to purify intent, strive with all effort, and spend might and main to perfect secondary causes [*esbâb-ı zâhire*] before any time is lost."<sup>263</sup> Vâsîf then suggests certain administrative and military reforms should the sultan succeed in regaining Egypt, including dividing Egypt into three provinces, transferring Mamluk posts to loyal men for three-year terms, and stationing a flotilla at Alexandria.<sup>264</sup>

The *Tesliyetnâme* responds to many of the same problems as the 1784 *risâle* and 1789-1794 chronicle. Perhaps most pressing to Vâsîf and his peers was to reconcile Ottoman exceptionalism with the reality of defeat, which he does here, most outstandingly, by theodicy. As in earlier work, Vâsîf interprets defeat as a miraculous divine trial. However, at the same time he adds that accidents are universal. The world is one of constant change, of atomistic "generation and corruption," through which God realizes His perfect cosmic plan and where apparent evils are in fact good.<sup>265</sup> These two premises are not entirely congruent but do not

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<sup>262</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 121; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 4a.

<sup>263</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 122-123; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 5a-5b.

<sup>264</sup> "Tesliyet-Nâme," 123; TOP Hazine nr. 1625, 5b-6a.

<sup>265</sup> Ormsby calls this explanation of suffering "apparent evil, real good." This type of theodicy holds that divine wisdom is hidden within suffering. Evils are really disguised goods, and all

contradict each other. Vâsîf's argument, furthermore, rationalizes French power while still upholding the semblance of exceptionalism. His parallels suggest that the Ottomans, and believers more generally, experience peaks and valleys, times of good fortune and ill, but that history and their role within it progresses onward to God's ordained end. Everything changes, as it were, while nothing really changes at all. The French invasion is no different.

In terms of causality, Vâsîf must also, again, address man's power to affect outcomes. His universe is one in which change is a fixed principle and through which God, the Primary Cause, reveals His will. Humans are powerless in this universe's larger revolutions. Victory follows defeat by God's grace, as Vâsîf illustrates, and believers to an extent must simply remain faithful and trusting. Yüksel Çelik deems this view “irrational” and “fatalistic,” but such is not the case.<sup>266</sup> To Ottoman intellectuals the link between worldly and divine causation was complex but reasoned. Humans could not compass larger historical processes or “universal events,” as said above, yet they could exert will in “particular events” by taking initiative and preparing secondary causes that God, if He desired, would realize. This is why Vâsîf ends the *Tesliyetnâme* with a plea for action. An arch-fatalist would neither urge the sultan to “perfect secondary causes before any time is lost” nor suggest reforms. Since God allows humans to act, at least in some cases, Vâsîf holds that initiative through secondary causes – here administrative as well as military – complements faith and trust in God as a solution.

Vâsîf's 1798 *Tesliyetnâme* is by no means “fatalistic.” Like his earlier writing it enjoins moral considerations alongside action and is in fact sympathetic to reform. It depicts a universe

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evil contains some hidden benefit such that the good would come to naught were the evil removed. The reverse can also be true, with apparent blessings working evil, 255-257. Also Griffel, 225-231.

<sup>266</sup> See “Tesliyet-Nâme,” 111 for a clear example. Here Çelik ascribes Vâsîf's “fatalism” to “a submissive understanding that takes refuge not in analysis but in categorical perceptions of religion and the world...”

where men are partly bound to flux and destiny, partly able to foresee and condition outcomes. This is a universe of “generation and corruption” as well as one of “causes.” Finally, and as said above, Vâsîf’s later adaptation of the letter shows that by the early nineteenth century he was actively forging these ideas into an interpretive framework. As the preface to an unfinished chronicle of the French expulsion from Egypt, the *Tesliyetnâme* offered, through its theodicy, a guide to readers, a vindication of Selim’s reforms, and compelling proof of the empire’s exceptionalism.

### ***Refuting the Rabble: Polemic and Reform***

A further illustration of Vâsîf’s philosophy of history comes from a tract written around 1803, or several years before his death, entitled *Muhassenât-ı ‘Asker-i Cedîd (The Merits of the New Soldiery)*.<sup>267</sup> A polemical treatise, this work acidly defends Selim III’s reforms by placing them in historical perspective. Although Vâsîf’s express purpose is to silence critics, he also draws on his earlier conceptions of historical agency and change in order to argue the need for reform.

It must first be recalled that *Muhassenât*’s authorship is subject to debate. The anonymous work has long been attributed to one “Koca Sekbanbaşı,” about whom no information exists outside of the text. Our one clear identification comes from Esad Efendi’s *Üss-i Zafer (The Roots of Victory)*, an account of the Janissaries’ 1826 destruction, where he positively and repeatedly names Vâsîf as *Muhassenât*’s author and quotes the work

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<sup>267</sup> Unfortunately, no manuscript survey has ever been conducted or a reliable text established. For an Ottoman version of this work, see appendix, *Târîh-i ‘Osmânî Mecmuası Encümeni* 37/42 (1910). For a Latin transcription and modern Turkish translation, MT. An English translation is contained in William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (London, 1820), 216-294. Analyses of the work can be found in Aksan, “Ottoman Political Thought,”; Beydilli, “İslâhât Düşünceleri”; Şakul, “Nizâm-ı Cedid Düşüncesi”; and DİA, s.v. “Koca Sekbanbaşı Risalesi.”

extensively.<sup>268</sup> And, as said above, although Hakan Erdem's putative author's copy would discount Vâsîf on the basis of date and hand, on closer inspection there is little reason accept this incomplete, annotated draft as an original.<sup>269</sup> Barring further evidence, we can cautiously accept Esad Efendi's testimony.

*Muhassenât* takes the form of a dialogue between the author and Janissary opponents of reform. Vâsîf rebuts claims made by these men – “a set of contentious and ignorant men, incapable of learning reason” – that the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* is the “cause of all disorder in the world.”<sup>270</sup> He argues this is decidedly untrue. Did the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* cause earlier rebellions, or Ottoman defeat in 1774 or 1792, before it even existed? No, but there is at present disorder in all regions of the world, from Europe and the New World to Arabia, Persia, China, and India.<sup>271</sup>

“These despicable wretches,” he says,

Have never issued from the castle-gate, nor travelled a single stage from home, neither do they know what war and peace mean, nor from what cause the troubles of the world have sprung, and whence they are likely to arise in the future; some of them are so ignorant of what belongs to pure religion, that in repeating a short prayer they commit mistakes from

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<sup>268</sup> *Üss-i Zafer*, 119-120, 122, 125-127; Beydilli, “Sekbanbaşı Risalesinin Müellifi Hakkında,” 221-224. Prof. Beydilli also communicated this to me orally in October 2011. For the earlier debate see Ali Birinci, “Koca Sekbanbaşı,” 105-120. Beydilli is highly critical of Birinci's methodology and working assumptions, “Evreka, Evreka,” 45-66. Cf. Hakan Erdem, “The Wise Old Man,” 154-177.

<sup>269</sup> Erdem, 164-165. The copy, which I have carefully compared to Vâsîf's drafts, does not resemble his hand. The annotations also hold two dates, one 1222 and the other Muharrem, 1222, or several months after Vâsîf's death. However, these do not seem to be additions to the text, as Erdem states, but comments from a sympathetic reader. BOA.HAT 48106-a, 48261. My thanks to Aysel Yıldız for providing me with this copy.

<sup>270</sup> MAC, 32; Wilkinson, 221-222. Wilkinson's translation.

<sup>271</sup> MAC, 32-35; Wilkinson, 222-225. This section bears a resemblance to parts of Vâsîf's chronicle. For example: “Bu hilâlde tekevvün eden ihtilâl memâlik-i islâmiyyeye münhasır olmayub Fransızlar fitnesi akâsî ü edânî rüb'-i meskûne sirâyet edüb mülk ü mâl cihetleriyle cemî' düvel mütekeddir ve memleketlerinde mütemekkin efrâd-ı insâniyyenin cümlesi bir sebebiyle mutazzarır olmuştur.” MEHÂSİN 3, 213a-217b.

beginning to end; men in appearance only, vulgar of the lowest description, children of falsehood, who suppose that the Nizam-y-Gedid is the cause of confusion in the universe, and that if this ordinance were removed, and the old system restored, the world would be tranquil in five days.<sup>272</sup>

The reality *Muhassenât* presents is instead one of constant instability, in which all rulers must exert reason and prudence to preserve their realms from outside aggression.<sup>273</sup> The Prophet himself used guile in war, we read, following the hadith, “War is a trickery,” while the Janissaries who so strongly object to the new forces began as a unit after defeats in the reign of Süleyman I. Vâsîf’s facts on the Janissaries’ foundation are wrong but used to elegant effect: the opponents of reform are products of reform, one that led the Europeans to devise the very military innovations now troubling the empire.<sup>274</sup> Success therefore depends on worldly causes – namely, adapting to one’s enemies. Moreover, all other things being equal, history shows that armies with better training and strategy will always prevail.<sup>275</sup>

Vâsîf’s basic point, then, is that threats to the empire must be actively countered, a religious duty incumbent on all statesmen which he reiterates with the sayings, “Even if your enemy is an ant, you should use every effort against him,” and “Danger must be averted before it

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<sup>272</sup> MAC, 75-76; Wilkinson, 276-277. Wilkinson’s translation.

<sup>273</sup> MAC, 29-30, 80; Wilkinson, 216-217. It is also the *‘âlem-i esbâb*, as he says God created rulers as the “mundane cause (*sebeb-i ‘âdî*)” of earthly order, MAC, 29.

<sup>274</sup> MAC, 45-49, 69; Wilkinson, 240-245, 270.

<sup>275</sup> MAC, 69; Wilkinson, 270. Cf. *Usulü’l-Hikem*, 148-149; MEHÂSİN 2, 26a-26b; MEHÂSİN 3, 216a, where Vâsîf says the Ottomans ought to have matched the new tactics if they could not surpass them, but were misled by sophistry and went into the field with a battle array long since obsolete.

strikes.”<sup>276</sup> Selim’s *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* forces are in this way a wise measure and source of victory, as demonstrated against the French in Egypt.<sup>277</sup>

It is worth noting that Vâsîf’s opponents raise other religious and anti-causal arguments. In their bombast they invoke the time-honored “zeal of Islam” and deny that there is any reason to adopt new methods of war:

Is there any occasion for these new troops of the Nyzam-y-Gedid? At the time that the Ottoman race conquered the world with the sabre, there were no such forces. Let the enemy present himself, and we will lay our hands on our sabres, and at a single charge make piece-meal of him. Only let us see the intentions of our enemy, we will storm their camp, sword in hand, upset their Cral from his throne, trample his crown under our feet, and penetrate even to the most distant of their countries [*Kızıl Elma*].<sup>278</sup>

Others, it seems, went so far as to say that victory did not depend on modern arms at all.<sup>279</sup> A rigid, uncompromising, exceptionalist rhetoric underlines these arguments. In its logic, the reforms were merely so much infidel trickery and artifice, neither of which become Muslims.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> MAC, 30, 41; Wilkinson, 218, 233-334. In the latter case he calls action an individual duty of all statesmen: “Bunun dahi bir çaresi bulunmak cümle ümerâ-yı saltanat üzerlerine farz-ı ‘ayn addolunmakla...”

<sup>277</sup> MAC, 43-44; Wilkinson, 237-238.

<sup>278</sup> MAC, 44; Wilkinson, 238. Wilkinson’s translation.

<sup>279</sup> “Ve kimi dahi cevabında cenk alâtıyla oynamak gâvûr işidir, müslümâna göre gâvûr işi küfürdür. Ya tüfenk ü...ya top u humbarayı müslümânlar isti‘mâl edeyorlar dendikde cevabında ah işte nusret olmadığına sebep bunlardır, yedi krala yalnızca kılıc yetişür dedi. Ya donanmâ gemilerine top lâzım değildir dendikde cevabında sübhanallah Cezâîr gemilerinde top yoğiymiş keferem gemilerine çatan ‘asker dövür kırarız ve gemileri aluruz, tersâneye getiririz dediler. İşte gazânın tarîkini güzelce hayır aldık.” Marginalia in BOA.HAT 48106-a.

<sup>280</sup> MAC, 70; Wilkinson, 271-272. “Bu t‘âlîm maddesi keferem mahsûsdur, müslümâna yakışmaz güft ü gû eyleyüb.” Cf. “Askerimizin bunda cevabı budur ki keferem tâîfesi işini hîle ile görür ki üste çıkar lâkin biz müslümânız, müslümâna hîle yakışmaz derler.” Marginalia BOA.HAT 48106-a.

As might be expected, Vâsîf mocks these scruples and goes to great lengths to undermine them. For one, he alleges that many of the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*'s detractors would accept the program were they not afraid of losing their livelihood. Such men may appeal to the "zeal of Islam" but in truth are more beholden to the "zeal for coin."<sup>281</sup> Those who claim that drilled soldiers injure the faith, meanwhile, are so many "blockheads" who have never before given any thought to faith, the empire, or religious probity; but now they show a mighty anxiety for religion.<sup>282</sup> The historian writes that the rabble are ignorant of the art of war and causes of victory and defeat, and only trouble themselves over the loss of a few *akçe*.<sup>283</sup> God forbid the government should listen to them! For at that time the enemy will be emboldened and

We shall not derive the least service from those knaves who disapprove of the Nizam-y-Gedid; they will merely say that it was thus ordained; that there is no contending with destiny; and if a great calamity befalls (which Heaven avert!) they will, without making more words about the matter, become the authors of trouble and distress.<sup>284</sup>

*Muhassehat*'s polemic is meant for a broader readership. It is therefore less interested than other works in detailing the universe's inner workings. However, Vâsîf's causal framework is still present and there is certainly nothing to contradict the activism he argues elsewhere. To the contrary, *Muhassehat*'s defense of initiative is Vâsîf at his boldest and most belligerent.

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<sup>281</sup> MAC, 52, 62; Wilkinson, 249, 262. Cf. "Bu bâbda cevâbları gayret-i dîniyye güzel lâkin gayret-i akçeviyye olmadıkça gayret-i dîniyye kavî olmaz..." Marginalia in BOA.HAT 48106-a.

<sup>282</sup> MAC, 62-63; Wilkinson, 263.

<sup>283</sup> MAC, 70; Wilkinson, 272.

<sup>284</sup> MAC, 76-77; Wilkinson, 278. Wilkinson's translation.



## *Final Chronicles*

Ahmed Vâsîf expanded and applied his ideas on an even larger scale in his final chronicles.

Under Selim III, Vâsîf rewrote earlier court histories like those of Sadullah Enverî, Mehmed Edîb Efendi, and Halil Nûri Bey. These works covered Selim's reign from 1789 onward.<sup>285</sup> But during his last term as court historian the sultan gave a further commission: to edit and rewrite a twenty-three year period of history back to the 1750s, including the work of Hâkim Mehmed Efendi and Enverî's account of the 1768-1774 war and Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. Vâsîf completed this work around 1803 and it was subsequently printed.<sup>286</sup> It is the latter, the war chronicle, that is of interest to us.

Vâsîf's volume on the 1768-1774 war shows clearly his active interpretation and belief in edifying history. Here, as elsewhere, he not only reckons history's practical uses but adds analysis and morals to the text, usually as addenda or asides.<sup>287</sup> Vâsîf also disparages Enverî's method and insists his version is superior because it makes use of moral and practical philosophy, understands "the cosmic revolutions that are tenets of historical science," and seeks to profit the state. In this way, he claims, it will better instruct statesmen.<sup>288</sup>

But there is more. In the 1768-1774 chronicle, Vâsîf forcefully reiterates his views on the universe, change, and causation. The history covers a dire military defeat that was still fresh in

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<sup>285</sup> Kütükoğlu, "Vekayi'nüvis," 118-122; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), xxxix-xliv.

<sup>286</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 3-4, 315. Vâsîf calls himself the "former chancellor (*tevki'î*)" in the first part of this volume but had regained the post by the second. Ibid 5, 1: 3, 2: 3-4. He therefore finished the first portion between his dismissal and re-appointment as *tevki'î* (18 February 1801 – 7 February 1802), the second during his second appointment (8 February 1802 – 29 January 1803). The work was printed in November/December of 1804. Also on these appointments, MEHÂSİN 3, 271a; MEHÂSİN 4, 49b-50a, 110b-111a, 171b; BOA.A.RSK.d 1628/37; BOA.HAT 15168.

<sup>287</sup> Vâsîf reiterates the value of history, MEHÂSİN, 1: 2-3. A wider discussion is found in his first volume, *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 1-4; MEHÂSİN 1, 2a-4a.

<sup>288</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 3-4, 314-315.

Ottoman minds and which raised the problems of the 1784 *risâle*, the 1789-1794 chronicle, and 1798 *Tesliyetnâme* on a massive scale. For the first and only time in a finished volume, Vâsîf applies his philosophy as an interpretive framework and is thereby able to broach issues like agency, morality, historical change, and reconciling defeat with exceptionalism.

To begin, the chronicle preface puts the 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman war directly within a framework of the “universal” and the “particular.” Vâsîf writes:

Because the universe is formed of constituent elements, and because it is changeable, the periodic appearance of misfortune on the face of the earth – now peace and harmony, now misery and war – is, according to men of great acuity, a precept of philosophy. The occurrence of these two opposing states, moreover, depends on certain causes that by the will of God and hidden verdict of fortune cause quarrel between peoples. Such it is that if one cares to scrutinize the universal and particular events that have occurred in the world from the creation of man till this age, all of them will be founded upon a cause. All things issue from God, who doeth what He will. But if man's deeds have, in fact, absolutely no effect on causes or ability to influence the course of events, then it is clear the Lord God (His Majesty be exalted) has a divine practice of creating something as the outcome of secondary causes [...*bir şeyi esbâb-ı zâhiresi 'akabinde halk etmek 'âdet-i ilâhiyyesi olduğu muhtâc-ı beyân olmayub*]. Indeed, this approximates what the philosophers say: everything is contingent; what is contingent admits influence; and what admits influence cannot be without cause.<sup>289</sup>

The war, the preface continues, began because Russia's reform efforts had made them powerful. They grew bold through *istidrâc* and asserted themselves abroad, even in neighboring Poland,

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 2: 4. Vâsîf follows Kâtib Çelebi nearly verbatim.

while the Ottomans sought to make territorial gains, “commenced a serious matter of unknown outcome,” and declared war.<sup>290</sup> Vâsîf lastly promises to retail the armies' movements and “whenever...through poor command, lack of provisions, or disloyalty among the troops, occasions arose which had consequences for the campaign.”<sup>291</sup>

The preface places human agency at the very heart of events. Vâsîf again evokes a universe of “generation and corruption” and “causes” wherein God alone is responsible for events leading to the war, His causes inscrutable, determined, and necessary. However, the historian leaves room for action alongside God's will, with the caveat, as in his earlier work, that secondary causes are meaningful. The Ottomans could not prevent Russia's rise through *istidrâc*, which led to the conflict. But Ottoman statesmen were perhaps rash and misjudged the situation. War was avoidable. Vâsîf, furthermore, indicates he will narrate so as to highlight secondary causes – movements, mistakes, and critical junctures all caused by decision-making – and to show how actions like poor strategy and preparation (“particular events”) contributed to a larger outcome: a disastrous Ottoman defeat (a “universal event”). Vâsîf consequently raises agency as a basic problem through which the campaign can be understood; his preface offers readers a legend to interpret the history as a whole.

An example will illustrate how Vâsîf draws these connections – the Ottoman defeat at Kartal in 1770. During that year's campaign season a large Ottoman army under Abaza Mehmed Paşa and Abdi Paşa joined a Tatar force north of the Danube at the ford of Falça. Vâsîf, himself an eyewitness, was serving in the entourage of Abaza Mehmed.<sup>292</sup> After skirmishes with the main Russian force under Field Marshal Rumiantsev, Grand Vezir İvazpaşazâde Halil Paşa,

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 2: 4-5.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 2: 6.

<sup>292</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 84-85. See also *A Summary of Admonitions*, 19a-19b; Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 148-151.

south of the Danube at the imperial camp, sent reinforcements with Jannisary Ağa Kapıkıran Mehmed Paşa. The Russians moved before Kapıkıran could arrive. The night of July 18, they caught the sentries asleep and attacked at dawn, causing the Ottomans to beat a hasty retreat and abandon their camp and ordnance.<sup>293</sup>

After Falça, Abaza Mehmed and Abdi Paşa regrouped at Kartal on the Danube, where they were joined by the Grand Vezir on 27 July. Six days later, on 6 August, Rumiantsev again advanced on the Ottoman entrenchments, and though the Ottoman center held firm, the wings dissolved, a general rout ensued, and Abdi Paşa and Abaza Mehmed Paşa both set out for İsmail while the rest awaited aid on the Danube shore. Vâsıf, who probably stayed with Abaza Mehmed, describes how the camp at İsmail quickly degenerated into mutiny and soldiers stole supply boats to flee south, most sinking in the Danube. The arrival of a new Russian force under Nikolai Repnin meanwhile led to another rout, as Abaza Mehmed retreated by barge with several thousand men and Kapıkıran Paşa led a contingent north.<sup>294</sup>

The chronicle's account of this event stresses agency. Vâsıf notes that some blamed the rout at Falça on the soldiers' negligence and others on the commanders, but he dismisses the latter claim. God, he argues, enjoins believers to jihad and other religious duties. The Russian victory was divine punishment because the soldiers had abused Ottoman subjects during the campaign, disobeyed orders, and behaved immorally. And as exegetes know, the inner truth of the matter (*emrin hakîkati*) is that scripture reveals what sort of behavior brings victory.<sup>295</sup> To

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<sup>293</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 85-88; *A Summary of Admonitions*, 20a-21a.

<sup>294</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 92-97, 97-99. Cf. Resmî, who gives a different perspective, as he was in the Grand Vezir's camp, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 21a-23a; Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 151-153.

<sup>295</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 88. Aksan notes his analysis in *An Ottoman Statesman*, 151.

further defend his commanders, Vâsîf then turns from “inner truths” to “externals” connected with secondary causes:

On the other hand, men who observe outward appearances [*erbâb-ı zevâhir*] claim that the Russian soldiers were trained in the newly developed principles of war and combat; that they were obedient to their officers; that they were assiduously drilled in all the means of artillery, prevented from luxury, and kept from rest; that there was no place in their forces for the untrained and, in most situations, victory will go to the trained, hardened soldier over the untrained, soft, disorderly soldier.<sup>296</sup>

In this respect, he believes one cannot fault Abdi Paşa and the others, especially as the Tatars fled the field and induced panic.<sup>297</sup> The defeat at Kartal, meanwhile, Vâsîf calls a guilty one. There had been nothing lacking in preparations, provisions, or expenditures. The soldiers had simply failed to obey God’s commands and committed all manner of sins. They fled when faced with the enemy; the defeat was a result of their cowardice.<sup>298</sup>

Vâsîf’s analysis of Kartal balances concrete action and morality, the earthly and the divine, in what is, once more, a calculus of victory and defeat. “External” factors like order, provisioning, obedience, and up-to-date strategy are juxtaposed with “internal” moral factors. Neither is preferred over the other. Yet Vâsîf’s preface suggests divine and human agency are closely entwined and do not merely coexist.<sup>299</sup> As Kâtib Çelebi writes in *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr*, God determines outcomes but it remains for humans to obey and discharge their duties, both in living

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<sup>296</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 88.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 2: 88.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 2: 97-99.

<sup>299</sup> See Hagen, “Osman II,” 6, where he is critical of Piterberg’s statement that divine and earthly causes “simply coexist” and are un-problematical. Cf. Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, 2003), 89.

morally and exerting particular will; “inner” and “outer” causes are thus complementary.<sup>300</sup> The soldiers at Kartal forsook their duties, especially waging war, and failed to behave obediently. However, Vâsîf’s explicit contrast of the two forces indicts the Ottomans’ preparation, training, and seriousness, all secondary causes which ought to have been prepared beforehand. Here as elsewhere, his remedy lies in a mixture of moral renewal and activism. The lesson of the passage, furthermore, is not simply historical. Its reformist implications would have been clear to readers in 1804.

Ahmed Vâsîf also applies his philosophical framework to war and peace. For Ottomans the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which ended the war, was a humiliating blow.<sup>301</sup> One of the volume’s chief aims is to explain why this treaty was necessary and perhaps, with different decisions, how it might have been avoided. Vâsîf’s own position is clear. He believed that internal bickering and failure to agree to initial settlements ultimately meant the more onerous terms of Kaynarca.

As in all things, war and peace to Vâsîf result on a universal scale from change and instability. This is why the 1768-1774 campaign inclined toward peace:

The Lord God, who doeth what He will, settled this world of generation and corruption with mankind, and since human nature consists of contrary elements, enmity and opposition being natural to this creature, the wars that occasionally occur between states can be considered a precept of philosophy. The universe, however, is not fixed in a single disposition [*nesak-ı vâhid üzere ber-karâr olmayub*]. However long warfare lasts, the ephemeral conditions of the universe demonstrate that accidents – here peace and repose,

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<sup>300</sup> *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr*, 163-164.

<sup>301</sup> On Kaynarca see DİA, s.v. “Küçük Kaynarca Antlaşması”; İA, “Küçük Kaynarca”; and Osman Köse, *1774 Küçük Kaynarca Antlaşması* (Ankara, 2006), esp. 107-232.

there war and suffering – will befall people settled on the face of the earth. The will of God inevitably deigned that the quarrel between the Sublime State and the Russians give way to peace; and there being now truce and now negotiation, the foundations for a reconciliation of both parties began to be laid.<sup>302</sup>

On a lesser scale, nevertheless, humans have influence over war and peace. For example, after the Battle of Kartal in 1770 Marshal Rumiantsev wrote İvazpaşazâde Halil Paşa to propose peace negotiations. The Grand Vezir deferred to Istanbul, where the sultan's circle dismissed the overtures.<sup>303</sup> Vâsîf laments this failure by saying that war is uncertain. Since ancient times men, and especially Europeans, have therefore made it a habit to be peaceable in wartime, warlike in peacetime, and to secure victory whenever possible. Hence the Ottomans refused peace for nothing but more lost blood and treasure.<sup>304</sup>

Vâsîf pursues this point further in an addendum to the text. As the scholar al-Munâwî writes in his commentary on al-Suyûtî's *al-Jâmi' al-şaghîr*, he says, it should be considered a sort of victory if believers cannot win outright and make peace to preserve Muslim life, territory, and property. Al-Munâwî and Ibn al-‘Arabî both illustrated this precept with the tale of Maslama b. Abdülmalik, who was censured by caliph Umar II after besieging Constantinople in the years 717/18.<sup>305</sup> The caliph's harsh reprimand, the historian emphasizes, served to warn against wasting men on a distant campaign or putting soldiers in unnecessary peril. Yet he concludes these lessons were lost on the Ottomans, for “had the state acquiesced when the Russians showed

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<sup>302</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 196-197.

<sup>303</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 111-114. For more on these peace overtures, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 24a-24b; Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 153-154; Köse, 52-57.

<sup>304</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 114.

<sup>305</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 114. On ‘Abd al-Ra‘uf Muḥammad al-Munâwî (d. 1621), see EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Al-Munâwî.”

a desire for peace, the empire would surely have received a settlement several times better than Kaynarca.”<sup>306</sup>

War and peace too are therefore fitted on a framework of flux and causality. Vâsîf grants that God ordains the larger patterns of amity and enmity so that, for instance, an enemy might grow menacing or docile. Yet he also stresses that Ottoman decision-making forestalled peace and did the realm great harm. He repeatedly states that reluctance to make peace led to death, destruction, and in the end the bitterer terms of Kaynarca.<sup>307</sup>

These are pointed words if one considers prevailing attitudes. The consensus in the army was for peace, yet we are told the court refused to act, with opposition such that Grand Vezir Muhsinzâde Mehmed Paşa, Vâsîf's patron, and other statesmen considered wintering in Istanbul in 1772/73 to counter its influence.<sup>308</sup> Proponents of war meanwhile marshalled causal (or, rather, anti-causal) arguments in pursuit of a “victorious peace.” The ulema for their part dismissed the overtures out of hand, vowing the “zeal of Islam” would inevitably arise; that “we shall have a good fight with the Muscovites and then have peace as we desire.” The sultan and court agreed.<sup>309</sup> A contemporary, Ahmed Resmî, complains bitterly that such types demanded a resolution through arms alone, with disastrous results.<sup>310</sup> Citing the fourth caliph Ali's arbitration with Mu'âwiya, he moreover links them by implication to the Kharijites, who protested Ali's settlement with the words, “Judgment belongs to God alone” – namely, to an austere, warlike,

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<sup>306</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 115

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 2: 115, 203-204, 225-226, 244-246, 305-306.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 2: 238-239, 280.

<sup>309</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 32b-33b. Also 24b: “The sword to Moscow, the sword to Moscow!...Still our words were unheeded, nor was a good sword drawn on the infidel, else, would the matter stand thus? We have the zeal of Islam!” Vâsîf adds the rescript published soon after, which said if they could crush the Russians but once, they would doubtless make peace as they desired. MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 249-250.

<sup>310</sup> “Şöyle böyle olsun. Pek metîn ve müsaffâ ve gıl u gışdan müberrâ olsun.” *A Summary of Admonitions*, 35b-36a.



literalist group that believed the community must “fight the insolent until they return to God’s command.”<sup>311</sup>

The opposition to peace was further emboldened by Mustafa III’s ineffectual leadership. The sultan, in deep despair, yielded to fatalism and in doing so left little accountability.<sup>312</sup> He swore that peacemaking was destined to fail, saying, “There shall be no peace in our time,” words which others like Yenişehirli Osman Efendi used to subvert the first round of negotiations in 1772. Even the Grand Vezir refused from fear to assent to peace and thus, the historian says, showed grave moral weakness.<sup>313</sup> If the “true” cause of peace’s failure was God’s will and *istidrâc*, then, Vâsîf still includes war and peace as secondary causes over which humans can and should exercise control.<sup>314</sup> In this vision God, in essence, sets the basic conditions while man is left the choice – a moral one – to act or not.

In sum, Vâsîf’s chronicle of the 1768-1774 war sets out what can be called a “reformist” philosophy. The work’s main problem is agency and, in applying this question to Ottoman

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<sup>311</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 36a. On the Kharijites see Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practices* (Princeton, 2006), 125-126; Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004), 54-64; G.R. Hawting, “The Significance of the Slogan *La hukma illa li’llah*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978): 453-463.

<sup>312</sup> “Merhûm Sultan Mustafa Han hazretleri dahî tedbîrde noksân etmedik lâkin mukadder-i ilâhî böyle imiş diyerek bu husûsa cümlesini hisse-yâb etdi ve bana kimsenin tedbîrinde noksân etdin deyü bahâne bulmağa mecâli kalmadı diyerek gice vü gündüz hâb ve rahatı terk edüb gâh paşa kapusına ve gâh ricâl konaklarına vararak işi bir dereceye iletirdi ki büyük ü küçük fark olunmadan kaldı.” ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 40a; Özkaya, 157. Resmî hints of this as well, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 66/121. Vâsîf has Mustafa invoking God’s will on several occasions, the capture of the Crimea, for instance. MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 169.

<sup>313</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 247, 280-281; Cf. Osman Efendi on peace in Çalışkan, “Vekâyi’nüvis Enverî,” 347-348.

<sup>314</sup> Vâsîf sets human and divine causes side by side in this passage: “Bu mevânî’ esbâb-ı zâhireye nisbetle serd olunub hakikatda Cenâb-ı Hakk’ın irâdesi başka yüzden olub şu kadar nüfûs zâyî’ ve ber-muktezâ-yı istidrâc katı çok emâkin ve mevâzi’ istîlâ ile düşmân dilsîr-i menâfi’ olacak imiş bu bâbda ‘ukelâ-yı devletin rey ü tedbîrini takdîr-i ilahî tagyîr ve ‘âkıbet Kaynarca musâlahası gibi kerîh bir musâlaha vukû’ bulub.” MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 245-247.

history, it stresses the ability of humans to exert their will. To act, moreover, is not an idle decision. It is a moral one. Finally, the chronicle labors like Vâsîf's other writing under an even bigger problem: how can defeat be reconciled with Ottoman exceptionalism? The answer to this question is that the entire account forms a sort of theodicy. Like his other works, the chronicle depicts a universe in constant change but one bound ultimately to God's immutable will. In this universe, Vâsîf hopefully asserts, trust, piety, and abiding by the morality of victory and defeat will deliver the empire and community of believers now and till the end of time.

### *Conclusions*

Hugh Trevor-Roper once wrote that “a great work of ‘philosophic history’ does not set out its philosophy in crude schematic form.”<sup>315</sup> Vâsîf's philosophy is difficult to articulate precisely because it is diffuse, developed over the course of decades and revealed throughout the massive chronicle in fleeting snatches and epiphanies of reflective insight. Nevertheless, we are still able to offer some observations by way of conclusion.

For one, Vâsîf's history presents a coherent and rationalized view of the universe. He tackles moral and intellectual problems raised in contemporary Ottoman society, and attempts to reason through and understand them. Causality, theodicy, human agency, and reconciling defeat with Ottoman exceptionalism were not academic diversions; these were among the most urgent questions of the day and reflect a courtly milieu that was increasingly concerned with political reform, agency, and moral responsibility. As a whole, his history indicates these and similar ideas formed topics of passionate debate in the late eighteenth century.

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<sup>315</sup> Regarding another eighteenth century historian, Edward Gibbon. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1993), 1: lxxxvii.

More specifically, Vâsîf's philosophy of history can be described as "activist" or "reformist." It refutes a fatalism that would rely on God's will alone or rob humans of the ability to influence outcomes. While Vâsîf recognizes God as the ultimate Primary Cause, he holds that initiative is not only desirable but itself a moral obligation, enjoined by God alongside other divine commands. We ought to reiterate that these ideas are not overly novel but draw on much older lines of reasoning. They stem from native currents of thought going back to at least Kâtib Çelebi and derived from even earlier thinkers. Still, it is hardly a coincidence that Vâsîf's work buttressed the type of efforts undertaken by reformers and especially his patrons Halil Hamid Paşa and Selim III. His position creates a powerful intellectual justification for reform, and even, if we are bolder, the basis for a secularized concept of history.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Sheathing the Sword of Enmity: Vâsîf on Peace and Peacemaking

The vagaries of war and peace dominated the late eighteenth century Ottoman Empire, as they did the life and career of Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi. Like many of his peers Vâsîf had direct, bitter experience with warfare and with battle, bloodshed, and captivity. He served on the front in two wars, was captured by the Russians at Yenikale in 1771, and his experiences at Kartal, Kozluca, and Maçın exposed him to some of the worst Ottoman routs of the century. On the other hand, in the years between 1768 and 1806, the year of his death, Vâsîf tirelessly defended peace and thrice negotiated truces and treaties in the field. It is therefore little surprise that peace and peacemaking form a prominent, recurrent concern in his oeuvre.

This chapter situates Vâsîf's views within a larger Ottoman intellectual discussion of peace – its terms, legality, and advisability. Moving again in chronological order, it suggests, contrary to some recent scholarship, that these debates were ongoing and unresolved by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It further shows that Vâsîf himself shifted from prescriptive and legalistic defenses of peace early in his career to a more philosophical position late in life. This change points to a widened realm of human agency in the conduct of war. Short of condemning militant ideology outright, Vâsîf came to argue that war and peace were open to rational scrutiny, and hence that peace need not be a mere respite from war but should be pursued at all times.

### *Ottoman Views of War and Peace*

As noted in Chapter Two, Ottoman ideology placed great weight on military success and the empire's pursuit of religiously sanctioned war, or *gazâ*. These ideas drew on the formulation of jihad in Islamic jurisprudence as well as on Turco-Mongol notions of world domination, bolstered by a conviction that the dynasty was just, divinely supported, and would endure, victorious, until the end of time.

The classical, juristic view of jihad is well-known.<sup>316</sup> As a universalizing legal tradition Islam divides the world into two basic spheres, a “realm of war (*dâr al-ḥarb*)” and a “realm of Islam (*dâr al-Īslâm*),” which exist in a state of continuous, open or latent war. This division, which is “morally necessary, legally and religiously obligatory,” will continue until the former is absorbed by the latter. While cessations of hostility can occur and are at times even the rule, these pauses are strictly temporary and legal only when in the community's best interest. A permanent peace is therefore impossible.<sup>317</sup>

For the Ottomans this worldview was pervasive, and Hanafi law, to which they adhered, particularly stressed the division of the world into *dâr al-ḥarb* and *dâr al-Īslâm*. This found common expression in the axiom, “Unbelief is a nation unto itself (*Al-kufr milla wâḥida*)” as

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<sup>316</sup> I list only a few titles for the sake of economy: Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*; Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, 1955); Crone, 358-364; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Dâr al-Ḥarb,” “Djihad,” “Ḥarb,” “Hudna,” and “Ṣulḥ”; and DĪA, s.v. “Cihâd,” “Dârülharp,” “Savaş,” “Sulh.”

<sup>317</sup> Quotation from Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, 1988), 73. See also Khadduri, esp. 51-64; Bonner, 92-93; and Hans Kruse, “Die Begründung der islamischen Völkerrechtslehre: Muhammad aš-Šaibani – ‘Hugo Grotius’ der Moslimen,” *Saeculum* 5 (1954): 223-224. Articles in DĪA dispute this view, often in apologetic terms. They generally argue jihad was a response to Christian aggression.

well as a legal doctrine of war based on *force majeure* in which peace was only possible in two situations: submission to rule or truce.<sup>318</sup>

The Ottomans also inherited a stock of prophecies and legends, some Islamic, some Central Asian, auguring a destiny of world conquest. These were epitomized by the myth of the “Golden” or “Red Apple (*kızıl elma*).” Originally an apocalyptic legend about the fall of Constantinople, the “red apple” took its name from an orb held by an equestrian statue of the emperor Justinian and became a byword for world domination and continuous, successful expansion. While they avoided defining its location, Ottomans in the fifteenth century and after used this term in several distinct senses: for any distant goal of conquest, for the mythical place where their conquests would end, and for ensuing world domination.<sup>319</sup> The result, by the sixteenth century, was an imperial mythos in which war was perpetual, peace the exception, and the Ottomans “always justified – and always at war.”<sup>320</sup>

The depth and duration of this worldview is nevertheless debatable. Traditionally, scholars have argued that the Ottomans, hidebound to Islamic tradition, slowly divorced themselves from the ideal of perpetual expansion and adopted European models of war, peace, and diplomacy in the face of military defeat, in a transition that began in the late seventeenth

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<sup>318</sup> Colin Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud: the Islamic Legal Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1997), 67-70; Viorel Panaite, *The Ottoman Law of War and Peace: the Ottoman Empire and Tribute Payers* (Boulder, 2000), 80, 128-132; D'Ohsson, 1: 35-41. For this axiom in Vâsîf, *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 45, 86, 169; MEHÂSİN 1, 39a, 74b.

<sup>319</sup> Osman Turan, “The Ideal of World Domination among the Medieval Turks,” *Studia Islamica* 4 (1955): 77-90; idem, *Türk Cihân Hâkimiyet Mefkûresi Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1969). On the legend of *kızıl elma*, Pál Fodor, “The View of the Turk in Hungary: the Apocalyptic Tradition and the Legend of the Golden Apple in Ottoman-Hungarian Context,” in *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tourant de la chute de Constantinople: acts de la Table Ronde d'Istanbul, avril 13-14 1996*, ed. Lellouch and Yerasimos (Paris, 1999), 99-131; Stéphane Yerasimos, “De l'arbre à la pomme: la genealogie d'un theme apocalyptique,” in *ibid*, 153-192.

<sup>320</sup> John F. Guilmartin, “Ideology and Conflict: the Wars of the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1606,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18 (1988): 726. Imber refers to “the pervasive ideology of the holy war,” *Ebu's-su'ud*, 77.

century and ended with fully reciprocal diplomacy under Selim III.<sup>321</sup> Yet this interpretation has recently come under question. Panaite, for one, depicts the Ottomans' ideology of war as less a comprehensive worldview than a tool to justify "purely military and political ambitions."<sup>322</sup> Yurdusev, meanwhile, holds that the older interpretation is so much "latter-day prejudice" and that the empire was not even strictly speaking an "Islamic polity." He rejects the idea that Ottomans saw the world through a prism of continuous warfare, stating that "by the seventeenth century, war was largely understood in terms of what we nowadays call reason of state."<sup>323</sup> Both authors emphasize the pragmatism and flexibility of Ottoman policy.

A related question is when militant ideology ceased to move Ottoman hearts and minds. Rhoads Murphey, for example, holds that as a motivating force it was dead letter by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>324</sup> Yurdusev and Mustafa Palabıyık argue that it yielded to pragmatic "raison d'état" already in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; by the early eighteenth century Ottoman society viewed war in a distinctly negative light, though *gazâ* received continued lip

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<sup>321</sup> The classic work is J. C. Hurewitz, "The Europeanization of Ottoman Diplomacy: the Conversion from Unilateralism to Reciprocity in the Nineteenth Century," *Bellesten* 25 (1961): 455-466. Also idem, "Ottoman Diplomacy and the European State System," *Middle East Journal* 15 (1961): 141-152; Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "The Adoption and Use of Permanent Diplomacy," in *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* ed. A. Nuri Yurdusev (New York, 2004), 131-150; Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Diplomatic Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Carbondale, Ill., 1977), 88-107; idem, "Reform and Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III, 1789-1807," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 295-315.

<sup>322</sup> Panaite, 78.

<sup>323</sup> A. Nuri Yurdusev, "Ottoman Conceptions of War and Peace in the Classical Period," in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges* (Oxford, 2012), 190-206; idem, "Ottoman Attitudes Toward Diplomacy," in *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 5-35. Cf. Mustafa Palabıyık, "Türkiye'de Savaş Düşüncesi," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 4 (2007): 185-215.

<sup>324</sup> Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, 145-146.

service.<sup>325</sup> Panaite for his part sees a shift from an “offensive” to “defensive” mentality in the late seventeenth century, but admits the eighteenth century was filled with “nostalgia” for aggressive warfare.<sup>326</sup> Aksan, opposed to all, holds that militant ideology went largely unchallenged until the late eighteenth century.<sup>327</sup>

Such views confront us with the perennial problem in intellectual history of the relation of the idea to the act, something Lindner calls “stimulus” versus “justification.” In other words, were Ottoman notions of war and peace “motive forces” – did they stimulate and direct action – or were they presented as sops, as ex post facto justifications?<sup>328</sup> If we agree that the empire was not a perfect military society, organized for the sole purpose of war,<sup>329</sup> it becomes easier to accept the idea that a warlike ethos functioned on a variety of levels. For one, there is no reason why Ottoman militancy could not have served as a source of inspiration and cohesion as well as a pragmatic tool, nor why Ottoman motives for war or peace must be either “religious” or “secular.”<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, while it would be foolish to ignore Ottoman flexibility, or their extensive relations with Europe, or their increasing reliance on diplomacy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, textual evidence signals that many Ottomans did in fact espouse traditionally “Islamic” views of war and peace and that these views were not seriously shaken

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<sup>325</sup> Yurdusev, “Ottoman Conceptions of War and Peace,” 190-191, 197-199; Palabıyık, 188-196. See also Ali Fuat Bilkan, “İki Sulhiyye Işığında Osmanlı Toplumunda Barış Özlemi,” in *Türkler*, ed. Hasan Celal Güzel et al (Ankara, 2002), 12: 598-605.

<sup>326</sup> Panaite, 78-79.

<sup>327</sup> Aksan, “War and Peace,” 116-117.

<sup>328</sup> Rudi P. Lindner, “Stimulus and Justification in Early Ottoman History,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982): 207-224. Boğaç Ergene, “On Ottoman Justice: Interpretations in Conflict (1600-1800),” *Islamic Law and Society* 8 (2001): 73.

<sup>329</sup> Murphey’s *Ottoman Warfare* attempts to debunk this myth. See also Kadir Üstün, “The New Order and its Enemies: Opposition to Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1789-1807” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2013), 20-28.

<sup>330</sup> Yurdusev and Palabıyık divide sixteenth and seventeenth century wars into three: religious, political, and humanitarian. Yurdusev, “Ottoman Conceptions of War and Peace,” 197-199; Palabıyık, 190-192.



until quite late – perhaps the end of the eighteenth century. It is hard to mistake the tone of scholars like Yurdusev, who seems troubled that ideas now considered obsolete (if not offensive) held currency in the empire. Yet pained debate within the Ottoman hierarchy, discussed below, and labored, constrained defenses of peace all indicate that their concern with war was immediate and more than mere “nostalgia” or “lip service.”

Most important, revisionist treatments undervalue the force of an idea – a militant ethos – that was central to Ottoman self-identity and exceptionalism. They accordingly undervalue the effect success and defeat had on the Ottoman psyche and the dynasty’s legitimacy. As Abou-El-Haj has noted, military success did nothing less than vindicate Ottoman beliefs about history and their role within it, while defeat bred ideological dissonance. To abandon this ethos required a shattering alteration in the way the Ottoman elite saw themselves, their dynasty, and the surrounding world.<sup>331</sup> As will be seen, they clung fast to the idea in spite of reverses in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### ***Defenses of Peace: Karlowitz***

Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals long argued the merits of peace. The author and moralist Ḥasan Kâfî al-Aqhişârî (d. 1616), an early example, ended his treatise *Uşûl al-ḥikam fî nizâm al-‘âlam* (*Precepts of Wisdom for the Order of the World*) with a brief section on the topic. Aqhişârî first composed this work in Arabic during the Eğri Campaign of 1596 and later that year translated it into Ottoman Turkish.<sup>332</sup> His is less a reasoned defense of peace than, as the title

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<sup>331</sup> Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, “Ottoman Attitudes Toward Peacemaking: the Karlowitz Case,” *Der Islam* 51 (1974): 134-136. Aksan thinks this perspective may apply to the late eighteenth century, “Ottoman Political Writing,” 32 n. 1.

<sup>332</sup> For the Arabic text, Ḥasan Kâfî al-Aqhişârî, *Uşûl al-ḥikam fî nizâm al-‘âlam: risâla fî al-fikr al-siyâsî al-islâmî*, ed. İhsân Şidkî al-‘Amad (Kuwait, 1987). Mehmet İpşirli has published the

indicates, a series of axioms, prophetic wisdom, and scriptural quotations. For example, Aqhişârî begins the section with words from the Quran, “Settlement is best,” and cites proverbs from figures like the Persian kings Key Khusraw and Ardashir: “The greatest mistake is to fight him who wishes peace,” and “Except for the rebel I do not use the sword when the rod suffices; and I do not meet the enemy with violence if a word will soften him.” Aqhişârî also insists generally on honoring treaties, or *pacta sunt servanda*.<sup>333</sup>

Perhaps the first coherent defense of peace belongs to Mustafa Naîmâ (d. 1716), also the empire’s first court chronicler. Naîmâ wrote in the aftermath of the vitiating, sixteen-year War of the Holy League, which his patron Köprülü Amcazâde Hüseyin Paşa brought to a close in the 1699 Peace of Karlowitz. At Karlowitz the Ottoman Empire made large territorial concessions to European states for the first time. Amcazâde Hüseyin had come to power after the battle of Zenta in 1697 against strong ulema opposition, seeking to secure peace and to enact reforms, and Naîmâ used the preface of his first chronicle in 1702 to endorse his patron’s widely unpopular foreign and domestic policies.<sup>334</sup> It is the latter, his defense of Karlowitz’s unfavorable terms, which is of particular interest here.

Naîmâ’s preface consists of several parts which together liken Karlowitz to earlier Islamic peace treaties. He opens, after an unmistakable title,<sup>335</sup> with the Prophet Muhammad.

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Ottoman translation and gloss as “Hasan Kâfî el-Akhisarî ve Devlet Düzenine Ait Eseri *Usûlü’l-Hikem fî Nizâmi’l-Âlem*,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 10-11 (1979-1980): 239-278.

<sup>333</sup> “(Qâla) Kay Khursaw: A‘zam al-khaţâyâ muhâraba man yuţalibu al-şulh. Qâla Ardashîr Bâbak: Lâ asta‘malu al-sayf illâ li-man ‘aşâi, haythumâ takaffî al-aşân, wa mâ atşadâ li’l-‘adw bi’l-şawl wa’l-naşl idhâ kâna yûthiru fîhi al-ķawl al-faşl.” *Al-Aqhişârî*, 171-174.

<sup>334</sup> See Thomas on Naîmâ and his work. Also *Târih-i Na‘îmâ*, 1: xiii-xxxii; Kütükoğlu, “Vekayi’nüvis,” 111-112; DİA, s.v. “Naîmâ.”

<sup>335</sup> “[This preface] has been arranged in a foreword, two sections, and a conclusion in order to clarify the issue of making peace with infidel kings and the Christians of the whole world, that the realm may be ordered and subjects given respite.” Emended from Thomas, 70. Cf. text in *Târih-i Na‘îmâ*, 1: 10.

God ordains periods of war and peace, writes Naîmâ. But while Muhammad was endowed with divine power and could do as he liked, he taught the community to observe secondary causes in many matters. So, for instance, though he might have easily decimated the pagan Arabs, he chose in the Peace of Hudaibiya to uphold the appearance of causes (*hifzen li'-suveri'l-esbâb*).<sup>336</sup>

The historian in this passage is referring to one of the most famous treaties in Islamic history. At Hudaibiya in 628 the Prophet made peace with his Meccan enemies under harsh terms,<sup>337</sup> recounted by Naîmâ in an extract from Yusuf Nâbî's prophetic vita. According to him the moral of Hudaibiya is to act through worldly causes. Muhammad was not forced to make peace but did so in order to teach the community a valuable lesson: "Well do wise men know that the Prophet's capitulation to the enemy at the Peace of Hudaibiya was not – forgive the expression! – due to weakness, but rather his desire to instruct the community to avail themselves of worldly contingencies."<sup>338</sup>

As Naîmâ explains, the Prophet's example remains valid for the Ottomans insofar as all dynasties and polities are subject to flux. After setting forth the various stages of dynasties following Ibn Khaldûn, he notes that wise men discourage kings from entering wars in the presence of serious disorder, of which extended campaigns and disunity are two causes. In the course of history many rulers have therefore preferred peace to war. Indeed, he says, some have even chosen the "lesser of two evils (*ehven-i şerreyn*)" and braved crises to preserve their realms

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<sup>336</sup> *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 10-11.

<sup>337</sup> On Hudaibiya see EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Al-Hudaibiya" and "Hudna"; DĪA, s.v. "Hudeybiye Antlaşması"; Khadduri, 210-213; and Wilson Bishai, "Negotiations and Peace Agreements Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Islamic History," in *Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya*, ed. Sami A. Hanna (Leiden, 1972) 56-58.

<sup>338</sup> *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 20. Thomas' phrase "the means at hand" does not quite capture the causal connotations of *suver-i esbâb-ı mümkin*, 69-73.

from the infidel, drawing reproach for the sake of the general welfare. Naîmâ then offers two such examples from al-Maqrîzî and al-Shîrâzî on the Ayyubid struggle for Jerusalem: Saladin and al-Kâmil, who respectively retook the city from Crusaders in 1187 and ceded it to them by treaty in 1229.<sup>339</sup>

By way of conclusion Naîmâ comes full circle to the War of the Holy League. The prolonged nature of the war led to bankruptcy and military crisis, he writes. Restoring order and the treasury depended on a period of rest and tranquility, “so that it was necessary, through a truce, to sheath the vengeful sword.” Yet whereas leading jurists knew a truce was the only resolution, they prolonged the war in the hope of obtaining a “victorious peace (*sulh-i gâlibâne*).” Naîmâ lavishes praise on Amcazâde Hüseyin and his negotiators, who at last ended the war.<sup>340</sup>

All told, Naîmâ’s preface offers a shrewd defense of Karlowitz and conveys three main points.<sup>341</sup> First, the historian shows that unfavorable terms with non-Muslims have historical precedent in the Peace of Hudaybiya and surrender of Jerusalem, both of which were treaty models *par excellence*.<sup>342</sup> Second, he implies that the Peace of Karlowitz is strictly temporary. For, as Naîmâ’s readers knew, both of the above examples ended in renewed war after a short reprieve. Finally, the preface communicates the notion that a temporary truce will aid the dynasty and lead to further conquest and the recovery of lost territory. The Prophet Muhammad captured

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<sup>339</sup> *Târih-i Na’îmâ*, 1: 21-30, 30-33.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 45-48.

<sup>341</sup> Here I follow Abou-El-Haj, “Ottoman Attitudes Toward Peacemaking”; *idem*, “The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe, 1699-1703,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969): 467-475; *idem*, “Ottoman Diplomacy at Karlowitz,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87 (1967): 498-512. See also Thomas, 80-83.

<sup>342</sup> Bishai, 56-58, 60-61; Khadduri, 210-213. For an instance of Hudaybiya in the juridical literature, Kruse, 232.

Mecca and the Ayyubids Jerusalem in the years following their treaties. This, too, Ottoman readers knew well.

It bears reiterating that this defense is ideologically charged. Abou-El-Haj observes that Karlowitz was a watershed in that it marked Ottoman agreement to a more or less permanent peace with Austria, Russia, Poland, and Venice. However, the preface labors to present the treaty as consistent with the Ottoman militant ideal and with past agreements: as a temporary peace before resuming war against the infidel. Naîmâ was above all attempting to lessen the ideological dissonance caused by defeat. To accept peace as permanent would be to admit defeat, and “the acceptance of defeat...would amount to a total abandonment of the ideological justification of the Ottoman state and would have led to the dissolution of the emotional bond this theory effected in the Ottoman social fabric.” The result for Naîmâ was a sort of make-believe.<sup>343</sup>

The preface, lastly, is filled with events and terms carrying heavy intellectual baggage, all marshaled to vindicate Karlowitz. Naîmâ’s mention of secondary causes recalls the very same debates on agency discussed in Chapter Two, for example. His historical examples bring to mind the triumphal career of early Islam and remind readers that peace, when necessary, is a justified but temporary respite. And his use of the terms “the lesser of two evils” and “victorious peace” introduce key arguments on the legal and moral merits of peace that, while not fully developed here, resurfaced frequently in later years.

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<sup>343</sup> Abou-El-Haj, “Ottoman Attitudes Toward Peacemaking,” 136; idem, “Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier,” 467-468. Also Aksan, “Ottoman War and Warfare, 1453-1812,” in *Ottomans and Europeans*, 161.

### *The Early Eighteenth Century*

Some recent publications associate the early eighteenth century with a more pacific outlook. As said before, between 1699 and 1739 the Ottomans fought a number of limited wars with mixed success, partly redeeming their losses at Karlowitz and Passarowitz with the reconquest of Azov and the Morea, and securing the favorable Treaty of Belgrade. Whether these events overlay softening perceptions of war, however, is less certain.

In her study of the self-appointed social critic and crank Fazlızâde Ali, Marlene Kurz proposes the emergence of new values in this period centered on peace and tranquility – a “*râhat*-oriented” zeitgeist in her words. She bases this mindset in part on Fazlızâde’s interminable complaints, particularly what he saw as the neglect of jihad:

Indeed our people no longer wage war [*husûmet etmez*] for the faith. Mind yourself! With most infidels there is concord – appeasement, that is. Both high and low have now put aside zeal for religion and the aim of gaza and wish to live with the infidel as brothers, since they have no desire to fight them for the sake of religion. Today everyone wants only income and profit, office and high rank, pleasure and comfort. You watch what will now befall them because they are thus!<sup>344</sup>

For Kurz, the early eighteenth century was a time of worldliness and renewed Ottoman self-confidence in spite of military failures, and witnessed the final rejection of the militant ethos. With this, she hints at a profound change in self-identity: “the privilege of being Muslim no longer needed to manifest itself in military successes, but resulted from the unique position the Muslim occupied in the universe and his intimate relationship with God.”<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Kurz, 29-30, 255. I have emended her translation.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, 272-273.

Besides Kurz, others have argued that a “negative” or at least “defensive” view of war emerged in the early century. This trend is usually illustrated by the *sulhiyye*, a rare poetic form eulogizing peace which emerged during the period. Bilkan, for instance, asserts that the *sulhiyye*, notable examples of which marked the Peaces of Karlowitz and Passarowitz, echoes a deep pessimism, a longing for peace, and an aversion to war in Ottoman society.<sup>346</sup> In their studies of Passarowitz and Belgrade, furthermore, Murphey and Güngörürler respectively stress a transition from unilateralism to reciprocal diplomacy and a timid, defensive Ottoman mindset, a willingness to make peace even on unfavorable terms.<sup>347</sup>

There is of course great variety in these interpretations and it may be that the early eighteenth century resists any unified characterization. Yet the idea that militant ideology was abandoned is unconvincing. To the contrary, Fazlızâde Ali’s protests equally suggest that some Ottomans still embraced a traditional view of the world and of relations with non-Muslims, and felt that peace was, far from a virtue, a moral peril. The very rarity of the *sulhiyye* also militates against using it as proof of major change.<sup>348</sup> What is more, early eighteenth century political writing seems to contradict assertions of a widespread inclination to peace. Although Palabıyık would believe that intellectuals like İbrahim Müteferrika and Sarı Mehmed Paşa were averse to war, they do not in fact deviate much from traditional rhetoric. Certainly their work does not

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<sup>346</sup> Bilkan, 603-604. Also Palabıyık, 193-194; Yurdusev, “Ottoman Conceptions of War and Peace,” 202-203.

<sup>347</sup> Rhoads Murphey, “Twists and Turns in the Diplomatic Dialogue: the Politics of Peacemaking in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in *The Peace of Passarowitz, 1718* (West Lafayette, IN, 2011), 73-91; Selim Güngörürler, “Governors, Authors, and the Porte: Ottoman Perceptions and Policies during the Period Preceding the War of 1736-1739,” *Tarih* 2 (2010): 69-91.

<sup>348</sup> Bayram Rahimguliyev has identified four. “Osmanlı Edebiyatında Dönüşümün Şiiri: Sulhiyyeler” (master’s thesis, Bilkent Üniversitesi, 2007).

reject it.<sup>349</sup> Even the more radical arguments for peace late in the century – particularly by Ahmed Resmî Efendi and Vâsîf – attest to rancorous debate, for they were directed at those who continued to see war as a glorious, profitable exercise. The early century was at best a time of tentative doubt, not of major change.

### ***Küçük Kaynarca***

The 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca ended a six-year war with Russia on the most unfavorable of terms. Kaynarca marked the first time in which the Ottoman Empire ceded a primarily Muslim territory, the Crimea, an illegal act according to holy law, and the Ottomans dragged out the conflict for over two further years to avoid this condition. Furthermore, Kaynarca sparked intense debate over reform as well as Ottoman militancy itself. Two defenses of the treaty figure here, one traditional and one more radical. Both authors, incidentally, were Vâsîf's contemporaries and peers.

The first is a short essay called *Nuhbetü'l-Emel fî Tenkîhi'l-Fesâd ve'l-Halel* (*The Choice Desire for the Rectification of Disorder*) by Dürrî Mehmed Efendi (d. 1794). Dürrî Mehmed, a scribe in the imperial chancery, held various wartime posts, helped negotiate a truce in 1772, and served as a delegate to the 1792 peace conference in Sistova. He was later *reis efendi*.<sup>350</sup> He wrote *Nuhbetü'l-Emel* in 1774, he says, alarmed at the empire's many ills.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Palabıyık, 194-196. Sarı Mehmed Paşa's chapter on jihad is for instance very conventional, *Ottoman Statecraft: the Book of Counsel for Vezirs and Governors*, ed. and trans. W.L. Wright (Princeton, 1935), 121-132.

<sup>350</sup> On Dürrî Efendi's life and career, Kayhan Atik, "Kayserili Devlet Adamı Dürrî Mehmed Efendi ve Layıhası," in *II. Kayseri ve Yöresi Tarih Sempozyumu* (Kayseri, 1998), 69-74; SO, 2: 424; *Sefînet*, 135-136. MEHÂSİN 3, 11a-11b.

<sup>351</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 282a-283a. The work is part of a miscellany compiled by Ahmed Câvid Efendi, Atik, 70; Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu* (İstanbul, 1961), 1: 310-311.



*Nuhbetü'l-Emel* is equally a reform tract and a justification of Kaynarca. Dürrî first explains that states, like men, pass through phases of growth, maturity, and decline. Thus while the young empire could fight ceaselessly against the infidel, it was eventually forced, in accordance with the nature of the age (*ber-muktezâ-yı tabî'at-ı dehr*), to balance war with peace and now fight, now “sheath the vengeful sword in the scabbard of repose.” Dürrî dates this shift to approximately 1592, the hijri millenium, as the necessary result of the empire's maturity or stasis (*sinn-i vukûf*). It was no longer possible for the dynasty to wage continuous, victorious war, he says, and thereafter victory and defeat came in equal measure.<sup>352</sup>

However, Dürrî maintains that this condition is not irreversible. It is the duty of statesmen to make a return to “the most preferable state of constant victory [*hâleti evlâsı olan dâimâ galebe tavrı*]” and, during peacetime, to purge defects in the body politic as so much bad blood. Wise men therefore value intermittent peace in order to protect the health of the realm. Dürrî further says that the 1768-1774 war with Russia weakened and bankrupted the empire. Consequently, “the statesmen preserved the dynasty from further debility by making peace and worked to gain a reprieve for reform [*li-ecli't-tedbîr*] according to the Persian verse, ‘Danger must be averted before it strikes.’” It was imperative to utilize this hard-won truce to enact reform.<sup>353</sup>

Dürrî returns to Kaynarca after setting forth a number of his specific reform proposals.<sup>354</sup> The empire made an unfavorable peace with Russia, he concedes, but although such a situation seems incomprehensible, as long as the statesmen pursue reform they can alter the treaty's terms and perhaps force the Russians to abandon their designs on the Crimea. He urges caution, however. It may require a period of at least five to ten years to prepare for war. If the Russians

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<sup>352</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 283a-284b; Atik, 71.

<sup>353</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 284b-286a.

<sup>354</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 286a-294b; Atik, 71-73. He divides these into seven sections on tax collection, venality, the Janissary muster rolls, and other subjects.

make demands in the meanwhile, it would be better to dissimulate (*müddârâ*) “and perhaps sometimes...to agree to their demands in accordance with what holy law will allow [*belki ba‘zen...mesûllarına dahi hasb-i mâ yüsâ‘adete’ş-şer‘ müsâ‘ade olunmak ehven görünür*].” Dürrî punctuates the essay with a reflection on the 1099 fall of Jerusalem and its recapture by Saladin after a period of reconsolidation.<sup>355</sup>

*Nuhbetü'l-Emel* is a fairly traditional defense. Like Naîmâ, Dürrî Mehmed depicts peace as a temporary and necessary reprieve, which has historical precedent and will ultimately benefit the dynasty. Peace here is a necessary evil, while “constant victory” remains the ideal. These similarities with Naîmâ are hardly coincidental. Dürrî’s phrasing, use of the biological metaphor, and choice of historical example intimate that he took Naîmâ as a model.

The second defense of Kaynarca comes from the pen of Ahmed Resmî Efendi (d. 1783). Resmî, a diplomat and former ambassador, was like Dürrî Mehmed and Vâsîf a member of the chancery during the 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman War with a very real stake in Kaynarca. Indeed, he had himself negotiated and signed the treaty on 21 July 1774 at the cost of rank and reputation. The treatment of peace in his last and most famous work, *Hulâsatü'l-İ‘tibâr* (*A Summary of Admonitions*), is thus highly personal and can be partly read as an apology.<sup>356</sup>

*Hulâsat* is part history and part political advice. Composed around 1780, when the Ottomans were again on the verge of war with Russia, its purpose was to dissect the late war and to discourage statesmen from repeating similar mistakes. Many of Resmî’s “admonitions” target

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<sup>355</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 294b-296a.

<sup>356</sup> I have published this text along with an English translation as *A Summary of Admonitions*. On Resmî’s life and work see Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*; idem, “Ahmed b. İbrahim,” in *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, [www.ottomanhistorians.com](http://www.ottomanhistorians.com); Bilge Ercilasun, “Ahmed Resmi Efendi’nin Türk Yenileşme Tarihindeki Yeri,” in *Atsız Armağanı* (İstanbul, 1976), 127-146; Ethan L. Menchinger, “Peace, Reciprocity, and the Discourse of Reform in Late Eighteenth Century Ottoman Didactic Literature,” *Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal* 2 (2007), [www.lurj.org](http://www.lurj.org), accessed 12 May 2013.

logistical and military matters like provisioning and leadership, but over and above these concerns is the critique of a mindset – the militancy of those who in his view had incited and prolonged the war with Russia.<sup>357</sup>

Resmî not surprisingly puts war and peace at the forefront of his history, starting with the preface. While he grants that warfare is endemic to mankind, following the Quran, he disagrees that enmity must be the basis of “world order (*nizâm-ı âlem*).” Reasonable minds know that prosperity depends on peace and always prefer peace over war:

Yet the scoundrels who due to indiscretion and inexperience care not to attain such a customary, desirable rule, and believe it incumbent on the People of Islam to annihilate all infidels from the world, or to always grind the enemy's nose into the ground and show him his place, say: There is no blessing without action. These countries have been taken by the sword. The Padishah of Islam's fortune is supreme, his ministers well-seasoned, his sword keen; the Grand Vezir is devout and valiant, shrewd as Aristotle. After raising 12,000 elite soldiers who pray with the community five times daily, what a blessing it shall be to go unto *Kızıl Elma!*<sup>358</sup>

This sort of bellicose rhetoric is reproduced throughout the work to undermine the credibility of Resmî's opponents and expose their ignorance. His main aim is to contrast the wisdom of men like himself with the “ideological bankruptcy of the ‘scoundrels.’”<sup>359</sup>

Resmî's most novel contribution, however, is the idea of the “necessity and benefits of peace as the principle tenet of government policy.”<sup>360</sup> As first signatory to Kaynarca, the author

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<sup>357</sup> Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 108-110; *A Summary of Admonitions*, 15-21.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, 2a, foliation for both translation and text.

<sup>359</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 17. Examples can be found at 4b-5a, 10a, 14a-14b, 24b-25a, 48b. See also Berkes, 57-58.

<sup>360</sup> Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 199-201. Also *idem*, “Ottoman Political Writing,” 36.

naturally defends his role in securing a necessary treaty, but he also asserts the universal value of peace and the need to pursue it at all times, even during victory. In his most extended defense, for instance, inserted in the narrative following the failure of negotiations at Foksani in 1772, Resmî argues that peace is supported by both holy law and reason (*şer'an ve 'aklan*) and is always justified. Peacemakers through the ages have flourished, he says, “nor has the man been seen who was injured by peace.” Resmî adds, supplying many examples, that history is filled with the ruins of dynasties who failed to appreciate this fact.<sup>361</sup> In doing so he draws a stark analogy between the behavior of his empire and its European adversaries; the analogy is implicit and unfavorable.

*Hulâsat*'s defense of peace represents a distinctly radical strain. Aksan observes that Resmî played a key part in the “rationalization of war” in the eighteenth century: the development of an ethos among the Ottoman elite that allowed individuals a wider role in and greater control over the outcome of warfare. The rejection of war as a political imperative was part of this. Resmî argues here and elsewhere for peace, defined borders, and negotiation and diplomacy, thus repudiating two pillars of Ottoman ideology: militant exceptionalism and an ever-expanding state.<sup>362</sup> To Resmî peace was no temporary evil but a virtue to be sought at all times. He also (perhaps for the first time in Ottoman history) explicitly linked peace to prosperity and military adventurism to destruction rather than glory.<sup>363</sup> It is possible, albeit speculative, that his position rests in part on a dissenting view of the empire's dynastic “age.” Whereas Dürri Mehmed and Naîmâ thought they lived in an age of stasis (*sinn-i vukûf*), Resmî, an avid reader of

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<sup>361</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 33b-37a. Resmî is most explicitly apologetic about Kaynarca in his second addendum, 43a-45a.

<sup>362</sup> See Aksan on Resmî's originality, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 184-201; idem, “Ottoman Political Writing,” 32-36.

<sup>363</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 17 n. 20. Cf. Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 179-180.

Ibn Khaldûn, in at least one earlier work links his cautious policy to the empire's "decline (*sinn-i inhitât*)."<sup>364</sup> This would at least explain his frequent references in *Hulâsat* to "the nature of the age (*tabî'at-ı dehr*)."<sup>365</sup>

Yet perhaps because it was radical, Resmî's argument does not initially appear to have had much influence. As Dürrî Mehmed's more restrained defense reveals, the 1768-1774 war disabused many of the empire's military superiority but the terms of debate remained much the same. Indeed, Resmî was himself constrained by them. Although he speaks of peace as a general good, he carefully qualifies this as *müdârâ* – dissimulation or feigned friendship – implying that peaceable relations with non-Muslims cannot be fully genuine.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, as we will see below, not even Halil Hamid Paşa's reformist circle in the 1780s, to which both Resmî and Ahmed Vâsîf were linked, was willing or able to endorse his style of pacifism.

### ***Vâsîf on Peace: the Crimean Crisis and the "Lesser of Two Evils"***

On 8 April 1783 Russia formally annexed the Crimea, the climax of a nine-year struggle following Küçük Kaynarca. The Ottoman elite had never truly accepted Crimean independence. In the years after 1774 they harbored hundreds of Tatar refugees, dispatched two failed military expeditions in 1778, and several times found themselves on the brink of war. Always they hoped the loss was temporary. The empire was thus faced with a stark choice: accept the annexation as

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<sup>364</sup> İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, "Bir Türk Diplomatının Onsekizinci Yüzyıl Sonunda Devletler Arası İlişkilere Dair Görüşleri," *Belleten* 47 (1983): insert, 43; *A Summary of Admonitions*, 23-24. Naîmâ argues that the empire had entered the fourth of five stages, characterized by contentment and surfeit, around the siege of Vienna in 1683, Thomas, 77-78; *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 21-30, 44. Dürrî specifies that the empire was in its age of stasis rather than decline, TOP nr. 1438, 283b-284a, 285b. See moreover Hagen and Menchinger, "Ottoman Historical Thought," 98-100.

<sup>365</sup> This includes variations *'âdet-i dehr* and *tavr-ı dehr*. *A Summary of Admonitions*, 4a, 8a, 35b, 36a, 45a, 53a.

<sup>366</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 36b, 37a, 48b.

a *fait accompli* or prepare for war. As the crisis dragged into the summer and fall of that year, the mood in Istanbul was dark and foreboding.<sup>367</sup>

Ahmed Vâsîf composed his chronicle's first volume in the midst of this crisis, spending much ink in support of Grand Vezir Halil Hamid Paşa, his patron and leader of what is sometimes called the "peace party." This title is a misnomer as all, at least in public, held that the peace was no more than a truce. As the historian writes, the Ottomans had always suspected Russian designs on the Crimea and were reluctant to make peace during the 1768-1774 war. Fearing the consequences, they rejected negotiated settlements to fight for better terms. But while military sedition eventually forced them to accept the "abominable" peace of Kaynarca, he says, the treaty remained a source of shame and they consoled themselves with the hope of revenge and, after a period of truce and military reform (*mütâreke sûretinde*), of retaking the Crimea.<sup>368</sup> Clearly, then, this was not a debate over peace in the Resmian sense. The chief question was instead whether the empire was ready to wage war.

The immediate Ottoman response was to temporize. Halil Paşa held a council at the home of the *şeyhülislâm* over whether to lodge a formal protest, which, as Vâsîf records, revealed deep divisions in the government. Halil Paşa argued against a protest on the grounds that his military reforms were incomplete and that it might be interpreted as a declaration of war; he wished to buy time until the spring. However, he met firm opposition from his rival the Grand Admiral Gazi Hasan Paşa and the *şeyhülislâm*. The dynasty's honor was at stake. How could they stay silent when the Russians had so brazenly seized the Crimea? The council ultimately decided to

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<sup>367</sup> On the Crimean crisis, Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 170-184; M.S. Anderson, "The Great Powers and the Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1783-4," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 37 (1958): 17-41; Alan Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772-1783* (Cambridge, 1970), esp. 57-63, 128-152.

<sup>368</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 9-10; MEHÂSİN 1, 8b-9a.

issue a protest, but Vâsîf notes that Halil Paşa delayed it until the empire’s military preparations were further advanced.<sup>369</sup>

The arguments of each side can be better grasped in Vâsîf’s commentary on these events. While the Ottomans delayed and sought mediation, Austria, Russia’s ally, issued an ultimatum for losses against Mediterranean piracy. Meanwhile, the Prussians in the fall of 1783 advised the Ottomans that annexation set a dangerous precedent and that Austria, with regard to the “balance of powers [*tarîk-i muvâzeneye i’tibâren*],” would likely try to wrest away a piece of the empire for itself. They urged the Porte not to capitulate but to find an ally and to mobilize for war.<sup>370</sup>

Many statesmen clearly thought it best in this situation to act assertively and, in case of war, to trust in God for victory. In council over the Austrian ultimatum, for example, the Istanbul judge Müftîzâde Ahmed Efendi stood and implored his colleagues to reject the demands, come what may, as they were a pretext and against holy law. A “decisive response” was best [*kat’ice cevâb verilmek evlâdır*]: “And if by their own choosing they break the treaty...then God willing the winds of victory will doubtless blow to our armies and this Sublime State’s ill-wishers will be confounded.” All in attendance agreed.<sup>371</sup> Müftîzâde repeated these sentiments in another council on 29 November 1783. Although he was willing to accept mediation with the Russians, he said, no doubt if war broke out God’s ordination would manifest itself and whoever broke the treaty would suffer His wrath. Halil Paşa could continue his reforms thereafter.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 28-29, 32-34; MEHÂSİN 1, 24b-25a, 28a-30a. Aksan proposes this meeting occurred in mid-1783 and summarizes Vâsîf, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 180-181. Also Fisher, 137-139.

<sup>370</sup> On these two events *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 37-41, 59-61; MEHÂSİN 1, 32b-36b, 49a-50b.

<sup>371</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 39-40; MEHÂSİN 1, 34b. Müftîzâde explains himself using legal reasoning.

<sup>372</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 64; MEHÂSİN 1, 53b. Also Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 181-182.

Vâsîf, conversely, stresses caution and means other than war – in his words, the “lesser of two evils (*ehven-i şerreyn*).” Given Austria’s vehemence, he says, it was obvious they would have broken the treaty on the least pretext and attacked. Everyone favored decisive action, but the Ottomans yielded in order to buy time:

The danger in waging war before the state’s preparations were complete was manifestly clear, hence all honest, disinterested men agreed that to presently dampen this conflagration, purely with a desire to gain time, was an act of good policy and judgment. (Strophe by the author) “The wise man’s good judgment ‘tis / Often more handy than sword or spear / For whenever he useth his sword / All things are at once at stake.”<sup>373</sup>

As for the Prussians, the historian claims they had vested interests in pressing the empire into an uncertain war (*harb-ı mechûlü’l-netîce*). Yet, he admits their proposal was not without benefit:

If we suppose that the empire in capitulating chooses the lesser of two evils [*ihdiyâr-ı ehven-i şerreyn*] and immediately afterward unites with binding oaths, we would still require at least several years, by God’s grace, to purge our own differences, properly organize the army and ordnance, and respond against all enemies by land and sea. But if, as previously, we abandon foresight for recklessness, then God forbid the Prussians’ advice becomes probable. It need not be said that the ever opportunistic infidel will increasingly covet Muslim lands... However, if we avoid such imprudence and give total freedom to those who, as with the efforts of the past year, mind state affairs and are charged with reform [*memûr-ı nizâm*]; if, ignoring the slanders of the jealous and malicious, we are firm, courageous, and discount sophistry even in the face of initial

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<sup>373</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 41; MEHÂSİN 1, 36a-36b.



troubles, it is not improbable that the Lord, God willing, will us grant us the Crimea and many territories besides, just as He ordained victory in the Morea.

He concludes with an Arabic hemistich: “We judge by what is external / God knows best the secrets of hearts.”<sup>374</sup>

Here it is necessary to say a word about the phrase “lesser of two evils.” “Choosing the lesser of two evils (*ihdiyâr-ı ehven-i şerreyn*),” referenced earlier by Naîmâ, is a legal maxim and form of juristic preference (*istihsân*) based on necessity (*zarûret*).<sup>375</sup> Hanafî law permits jurists in certain situations to make rulings more suitable, convenient, or conformable to a given case. Under necessity otherwise illegal acts can be lawful, as expressed in another maxim, “Necessity permits what is prohibited.”<sup>376</sup> There are strict limits to the legal condition of necessity, though. These include that it is temporary and can relax the law only so long as it persists. Circumventing the law, moreover, must not lead to greater harm or injury.<sup>377</sup> To “choose the lesser of two evils,” then, means, when faced in a state of necessity with two illicit options, to choose the less onerous and damaging.<sup>378</sup> Vâsîf therefore deploys this term to justify otherwise illegal concessions.

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<sup>374</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 60-61; MEHÂSİN 1, 49b-50b.

<sup>375</sup> On juristic preference see Saim Kayadibi, *The Doctrine of Istihsân (Juristic Preference) in Islamic Law* (Ankara, 2007); EP, s.v. “İstihsân.” Also Bahadır Eroğlu, “Türk Siyasetinde Anahtar bir Kavram: Ehven-i Şer,” *Köprü* 72 (2000).

<sup>376</sup> “Al-đarûrât tubih al-mahzûrât” or in Ottoman “zarûretler memnû‘ şeyleri mubâh kılar.” Article 21 in Cevdet, *Mecelle-i Ahkâm-ı Adliyye* (İstanbul, 1882/3), 26. Also Kayadibi, 208-210; EP, s.v. “Đarûra.” Uriel Heyd discusses this phrase in relation to nineteenth century reform, “The Ottoman ‘Ulemâ and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Maĥmûd II,” in *Studies in Islamic History* (Jerusalem, 1961), 63-96.

<sup>377</sup> Ali Haydar, *Dürerü'l-hukkâm şerhu mecelleti'l-ahkâm*, ed. Raşit Gündođdu and Osman Erdem (İstanbul, 2000), 1: 53-57; Kayadibi, 215-217.

<sup>378</sup> Article 29, Cevdet, *Mecelle*, 26. Haydar glosses: “Şerreyn, şerrin tesniyesi olub hayrın mukâbilidir ki nâ-meşrû‘ şey demektir. Yâni bir kimse iki şerden, ta‘bîr-i diđerle iki nâ-meşrû‘ emirden birisini işlemeđe mecbûr olduđunda, hangisi ehven ve fenalıđı az ise 21. maddeye binâen onu ihtiyâr ile yirmi ikinci madde hükmünce diđerini terk eder,” 1: 58. See also the commentary of Salî Rustum Bâz al-Lubnânî, *Sharĥ al-majalla* (Beirut, 1986), 32.

Two insights arise from the chronicle's use of the "lesser of two evils." One is that both Vâsîf and his opponents were disputing in legalistic terms. Austria had confronted the empire with two unacceptable choices: an indemnity or loss of territory in war.<sup>379</sup> But while Müftûzâde Ahmed and others argued the illegality of submission and felt it their duty to venture war, trusting in God, Vâsîf held that submission was not only justifiable but preferable according to the law. The second insight is that "choosing the lesser evil" is provisional by definition. The legal literature makes it clear that necessity is strictly temporary and that legal exemptions expire with the state of necessity.<sup>380</sup> Likewise, peace in this case was to be borne only as long as necessity dictated. The chronicle explains that after a period of reform the Ottomans could triumphantly resume conquests and recapture the Crimea, just as they had captured the Morea peninsula in 1715.<sup>381</sup>

It is also important to consider the causal premises of these disputes. Müftûzâde and others appear to have advocated action and implicit trust in their cause, the justness of which would be manifest on the battlefield. In early December, 1783 Müftûzâde complained bitterly to Gazi Hasan Paşa about Russia's seizure of the Crimea and said, as he considered the matter, any compromise was impossible. What must happen if we respond firmly, he asked? Must we all simply acquiesce? If the Russians declare war we will trust in God and respond in kind – that is quite the truth of it! Gazi Hasan Paşa sympathized but pointed out that the empire faced two

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<sup>379</sup> Either of these would render an agreement illegal. Panaite, 290-291.

<sup>380</sup> Articles 22, 23, 24 in Cevdet, *Mecelle*, 26; Haydar, 1: 53-55; al-Lubnânî, 30-31; Kayadibi, 216-217.

<sup>381</sup> The Morea appears to have been a touchstone for many Ottomans after 1774. See further *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 79; MEHÂSİN 1, 67a.

powerful opponents and lacked all the requisite causes of warfare – troops, treasure, and able command.<sup>382</sup>

By contrast, around the same time Halil Paşa solicited private suggestions from his councilors. Bekir Paşazâde Süleyman Beyefendi's remarks embody the activist approach of the Grand Vezir's circle. After recommending that war wait several more years and numbering the empire's challenges, he reflected:

While I have no doubt that God is almighty and powerful and will help the weak and oppressed, it is undeniable that the divine practice is always to create everything through causes. God alone has knowledge of the outcome of future events; therefore, to open the gates of war with such potent enemies while secondary causes [*esbâb-ı zâhire*] are entirely lacking, relying on a supernatural victory [*nusret-i gaybiyye*], is like taking mortal poison and trusting overconfidently in the antidote's unknown efficacy... God forbid if there were a rout at the outset. It would be wretched for the empire.<sup>383</sup>

This was likewise the point of Vâsîf's above-quoted hemistich – to reiterate the recklessness of an anti-causal approach.

The debate over the Crimea came to a head on 18 December 1783. By Vâsîf's account, with the Russians awaiting a final decision, and insisting any further delay meant war, Abdülhamid I ordered Halil Hamid Paşa to convene a general council “to decide on war or peace [*ihtiyâr-ı selm ü harb zımnında*].” The sultan desired a unanimous decision in strictest secrecy, in line with the empire's situation and holy law.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 82; MEHÂSİN 1, 70a-70b. Mentioned in Chapter Two above.

<sup>383</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 85-86; MEHÂSİN 1, 73a-73b.

<sup>384</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 89-90; MEHÂSİN 1, 76b-77a. Aksan dates this event 8 December 1783, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 182. The text shows 23 Muharrem or 18 December.

The minutes of this council, which Vâsîf inserted into his chronicle, are remarkably vivid and emotional. Halil Paşa first had the relevant documents read aloud and addressed the council. He reminded them that they served the empire and should say candidly whatever was best for the realm, whether war or peace. There would be no recriminations but they must speak: “Here your stature does not matter. This council must end with a decision – do we capitulate or wage war? It is not possible to delay, nor to give any answer other than one of these two choices.”<sup>385</sup> The Grand Vezir and *şeyhülislâm* met an initial hesitation with urgency: “Why are you silent? You must speak the truth, whatever it is!” Sâdık Molla Efendi, a member of the ulema, rose first and said that in the circumstances peace was preferable to war and the proper course. Müftûzâde Ahmed Efendi followed and remarked that the decision did not properly belong to them, but to the sultan. Halil Paşa rebuked him. This was not advice at all, he said, for the sultan had ordered the matter resolved in council.<sup>386</sup>

Certain voices next spoke in favor of peace. Gazi Hasan Paşa drew attention to the empire’s frailty, signaling that he now stood with the Grand Vezir. He said that war must occur through secondary causes, two of which, the army and treasury, were wholly absent. Launching a campaign without these would be suicide, yet he and Müftûzâde confirmed that the Russians wanted an immediate answer.<sup>387</sup> Another statesman, Süleyman Penâh Efendi, for his part compared the situation to the late war with Russia, a disaster. Now they faced two formidable powers. Gazi Hasan surmised it was three or four if one counted minor allies. Penâh Efendi continued that the greatest danger lay in Istanbul's vulnerability and that peace was best.<sup>388</sup> Halil Paşa too expressed his support for peace. “My own wish,” he said, “is not to shrink from war and

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<sup>385</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 90; MEHÂSİN 1, 77b-78a.

<sup>386</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 91; MEHÂSİN 1, 78a-78b.

<sup>387</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 91-92; MEHÂSİN 1, 78b-79a.

<sup>388</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 92-93; MEHÂSİN 1, 79b-80a.

say, 'Let there be no campaign.'" He vowed that were the empire ready he would trust in God and act, but such was not the case and a campaign was premature.<sup>389</sup>

The Chief Accounting Officer (*muhâsebe-i evvel*) Süleyman Feyzî Efendi then asked the ulema to comment on the matter's legality. Two, Müftüzâde and Tefvîk Efendi, said that the legality of war and peace depended on knowing the state's strength or weakness, of which they professed ignorance. Halil Paşa breathlessly castigated them: everything had just been detailed item by item. But he pursued the point and a long discussion ensued on the army's readiness.<sup>390</sup>

At this stage the tide began to turn against war. The head of the arsenal (*tersâne-i âmire*) Sırrı Selim Efendi pointed out that even Gazi Hasan, the most militant vezir, was wary, and Hasan agreed, saying, "I cannot say war is fitting at a time like this. It would end badly, heaven forbid. In this case there is nothing better for the Sublime State than peace."<sup>391</sup> Halil Paşa again asked for a legal opinion on the matter. The *şeyhülislâm* consulted his peers and Müftüzâde Efendi answered that the law required they choose the lesser of two evils. Here, he said, if the evil of a campaign surpassed the evil of peace, they must choose peace. The *defterdâr* reminded him that the dangers of war had already been weighed. What were the dangers of capitulation? Müftüzâde's response was that the Russians had broken a treaty and that there were many Muslims in the annexed territory. To capitulate was to accept this injury and the subjection of Muslims – an apparent danger. The judge Atâullah Efendi added that the Crimea gave Russia supremacy on the Black Sea, raising the specter of blockade.<sup>392</sup>

Other councilors were quick to qualify submission. Come what may, observed one, the empire must continue its reforms lest the Russians raise their demands. They should consider the

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<sup>389</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 93; MEHÂSİN 1, 80a-80b.

<sup>390</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 93-95; MEHÂSİN 1, 80b-82a.

<sup>391</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 95; MEHÂSİN 1, 82a-82b.

<sup>392</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 96-97; MEHÂSİN 1, 82b-83b.

matter temporary until better able to respond: “You cannot consider this a permanent peace [*Bunı sulh-ı müebbed zann etmelü değıldir*]” he said.<sup>393</sup> Halil Paşa, too, likened capitulation to a truce, as thereafter they could continue preparations and launch a campaign. At last returning to the point, Süleyman Feyzî Efendi prompted the ulema a third time. The *fetvâ emîni* said that if the empire's weakness and inability to wage war were thus, peace was permitted by holy law. His colleague Müftûzâde concurred that peace was lawful. The Grand Vezir polled all the men. Peace was unanimous but would be kept in complete secrecy. “God damn him who speaks of this meeting elsewhere,” said one.<sup>394</sup>

Vâsıf's analysis of these proceedings, found in an addendum, also justifies peace as the “lesser of two evils.” The empire's defense depends entirely on the treasury, army, provisions, and the statesmen's unity, he proceeds, and it is self-evident that without even one of these factors resistance is impossible. The protracted campaigns of 1768-1774 had eroded state order, and since these matters had been ignored after the war the empire's bankruptcy and incapacity and the army's cowardice had allowed Russia to achieve its aims. “And so,” he writes,

It was widely known that the empire was in grave danger, surrounded by enemies awaiting the least pretext. As a result, it was as if a cancer had stricken the realm's vulnerable body. If care was not immediately taken to excise it, with sound ministrations, it would metastasize and (God forbid!) destroy the polity itself. Since a limb must as a rule be amputated for the health of others, the present decision, which was permissible according to the law and made unanimously, was under the circumstances a sort of “choosing the lesser of two evils.”<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 97; MEHÂSİN 1, 83b.

<sup>394</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 97-99; MEHÂSİN 1, 83b-85b.

<sup>395</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 99; MEHÂSİN 1, 85b-86a.

It is well to add that Vâsîf's imagery in this brief passage encapsulates the entire legal argument from necessity and recalls two further juristic maxims: "Choose the limited injury to avert the general" and "Remove the greater injury with the lesser."<sup>396</sup>

Vâsîf anticipates possible objections to his argument, as well. Certain simpletons, he continues, could not fathom the empire's malady and protested, saying, "What need was there to accept this situation [*Bu hâletin kabûlüne ne zarûret mess etdi*]?"<sup>397</sup> Vâsîf refutes them through the Peace of Hudaibiya, when the Quraysh laid heavy claims on the early community and in which the empire's situation has precedent (*mebnî 'ale'l-esâs*). Yet Vâsîf is careful to specify that these two events are not commensurate. The Prophet's hand was not forced and he might have annihilated his enemies without drawing his sword, with a mere *coup d'oeil*. His inclination to peace was simply "instruction in a blessed matter to the community," as Muhammad necessarily had knowledge of what was and what is to come.<sup>398</sup>

This passage bears an unmistakable resemblance to Naîmâ's defense of Karlowitz. In addition to using Hudaibiya to show precedent, Vâsîf introduces a distinctly causal rationale for peace that supports the reform efforts of his patron. Also as in Naîmâ, his inference is that peace is a necessary but temporary evil, no more than a truce. These similarities suggest that the addendum, like Dürri Mehmed's essay, may have found its ultimate inspiration in Naîmâ. The fact that Vâsîf places more weight than the latter on legal grounds for peace – the "lesser of two evils" – takes nothing away from his overriding point. This was to be a temporary peace.

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<sup>396</sup> "Zarar-ı 'âmmî def' için zarar-ı hâss ihtiyâr olunur" and "Zarar-ı eşedd zarar-ı ahaf ile izâle olunur." Articles 26 and 27, Cevdet, *Mecelle*, 26; Haydar, 1: 56-58; Kayadibi, 216. The classic case is the government's demolition of private houses to prevent a fire from spreading.

<sup>397</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 86a. İlgürel transcribes this passage incorrectly, *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 100.

<sup>398</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 100; MEHÂSİN 1, 86a-86b.

Vâsîf's earliest treatment of peace lends itself to the following conclusions. Firstly, war and peace during the Crimean crisis seem to have been matters of causal and legal controversy. The acrimonious disputes of the period turned largely on the extent to which war could or should be constrained by human reason and the law. These issues were left unresolved when the empire officially recognized the annexation of the Crimea on 8 January 1784. Second, the terms of debate over war and peace in the 1780s remained much as they had been in the late seventeenth century. Peace was still deemed exceptional, an expedient, and intellectuals like Vâsîf could draw on a literary model some eighty years old without, presumably, sacrificing effect. If militancy was on the wane, then, the rhetoric persisted. Even the most liberal Ottoman statesmen could not publicly escape it.

Still, the presence of this defense in the dynastic chronicle hints that even a qualified peace was highly contentious, at least toward Russia. The conservative backlash was considerable. The perception that the government had abdicated its duties was such that some ulema branded Halil Paşa an infidel and, evidently, threatened the statesmen with revolt and the sultan with deposition.<sup>399</sup> Abdülhamid I, meanwhile, and with good reason, conferred with the *şeyhülislâm* about how the empire could legally break its agreement; nor were soldiers on the frontier informed of the council's decision.<sup>400</sup> While Halil Paşa's circle carried the argument, the loss of the Crimea stoked popular rage and contributed in the following year, 1785, to the Grand Vezir's fall and murder, the collapse of Vâsîf's own reformist faction, and to the rise of belligerent voices in the divan.

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<sup>399</sup> Beydilli, "Islâhât Düşünceleri," 26. See also Berkes, 67; Uzunçarşılı, *Sadrâzam Halil Hamid Paşa*, 242-244, 246. Vâsîf records the appointment a hard-line *şeyhülislâm* and critic of Halil Hamid, İvâzpaşazâde İbrahim Efendi, *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 234-235; MEHÂSİN 1, 173a-174a.

<sup>400</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 108, 143; MEHÂSİN 1, 93a-93b, 124b-125a.



### *The Maçın Boycott, 1791*

Ahmed Vâsîf's next major treatment of peace dates to the 1787-1792 war and the so-called Maçın Boycott. Following the Battle of Maçın on 9 July 1791, in which the Ottoman army was destroyed as a fighting force, Grand Vezir Koca Yusuf Paşa opened negotiations with the Russians. Selim III, who preferred a "victorious peace (*ceng olunarak sulh*)," had agreed but changed his mind upon learning their demands, in particular that the Dniester River should mark the new frontier. He instead instructed the Grand Vezir to fight for better terms.<sup>401</sup> By that time, however, Vâsîf had already concluded a truce with Nikolai Repnin and Koca Yusuf's commanders flatly refused to fight. On 11 August 1791 they engaged Vâsîf to put their refusal into words in a *mahzar* or memorandum, which they sent to the sultan. At least one scholar describes this event as unprecedented in Ottoman history.<sup>402</sup>

Vâsîf's role in the *mahzar* is somewhat unclear. Neither he nor many contemporaries mention the boycott and ensuing scandal. Only Edîb Efendi records it.<sup>403</sup> In his chronicle, Vâsîf admits that Russian terms were harsh but stresses that the army had no power to resist. Indeed, Repnin was adamant and threatened to dissolve negotiations unless he could present a sealed voucher from the army. Vâsîf says he reported his situation in detail and advised the statesmen at Maçın to act according to whichever alternative, war or peace, was beneficial to the empire. In the end they decided to seize the opportunity, chose the "lesser of two evils," and sent Vâsîf the said voucher to approve the truce and basic peace terms. Documents were exchanged with

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<sup>401</sup> Ahmed Fâiz provides Selim's reaction in Istanbul in *Rûznâme*, 31-36. See also Shaw, 64-66. The sultan had rebuffed peace proposals in 1790 for similar reasons: "Be-fazl-ı Bârî fevz ü zafer-i yârî oldukda sûret-i galebede sulh ihtiyâr olsun." MEHÂSİN 2, 47b.

<sup>402</sup> Beydilli, "Sekbanbaşı Risalesi'nin Müellifi Hakkında," 221-222.

<sup>403</sup> In Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 239-247. I have compared the edited text against *Târîh-i Edîb*, UT nr. 5203, 118a-121a (former copy of Kılıslı Muallim Rıfat Bilge). The original document is still undiscovered.

Repnin on 10 August 1791 and the next day he returned to the army. The chronicle's account ends there.<sup>404</sup>

This reticence is not terribly remarkable. As mentioned in Chapter One, not only was the boycott a blatant, indeed shocking, insubordination, but Vâsîf personally drew the sultan's wrath for yielding to Russian terms and soon lost his position, spending a year in professional limbo and, it seems, penury. It was probably unwise to recall Maçin so soon after his 1793 reinstatement as court chronicler.<sup>405</sup> For this reason Vâsîf's connection to the work comes to us indirectly, through *Üss-i Zafer*, where Esad Efendi identifies him as the author of *Muhassenât* and the *mahzar*.<sup>406</sup>

The Maçin *mahzar* is dated to 11 August 1791, the very day Ahmed Vâsîf returned to the army from negotiations in Galatz.<sup>407</sup> On the said day, the document opens, a number of officials and Janissary officers gathered in the *kethüdâ bey*'s tent. The Grand Vezir had received word from Istanbul and was reconsidering peace, he informed them:

Today our prosperous lord wants to know whether you favor war or peace. His majesty the sultan has ordered by rescript that we fight, take revenge on the enemy, and so have an honorable peace [*şânlû musâlaha*]. Our lord says he shall therefore fight and cannot

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<sup>404</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 108a-110b.

<sup>405</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 121a-122a; *Rûznâme*, 36; *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), xxx-xxxî.

<sup>406</sup> *Üss-i Zafer*, 119-120; Beydilli, "Sekbanbaşı Risalesi'nin Müellifi Hakkında," 221-223. Cf. MAC, 61-62.

<sup>407</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 242; UT nr. 5203, 118a. Âsım Efendi records a meeting, clearly the same, on 5 August, *Târîh-i Âsım*, 1: 25-29. This appears to be an error, however, as all other sources corroborate the document's internal date. For example, Said b. Halil İbrahim, otherwise identical to Âsım, gives the date as 11 August, Abdullah Altun, "Said b. Halil İbrahim'in 'Tarih-i Sefer-i Rusya' Adlı Eseri: Transkripsiyon ve Değerlendirme," (master's thesis, Erciyes Üniversitesi, 2006), 87-90. *Rûznâme* also indicates that the decision reached Istanbul on 17 August; a delay of almost two weeks seems unlikely, 36. See also *Târîh-i Cevdet*, 5: 160-165.

act otherwise. He desires an answer. Discuss what is best here and then apprise the Grand Vezir, be what may.<sup>408</sup>

Much discussion followed. All those present spoke of the army's condition, raised various concerns, recalled the soldiers' notorious lack of mettle, and how they were deserting on the least pretext. The *mahzar* relates that the officials confessed it impossible to wage war with such an army and that all preferred peace: "We swear to it here and in our lord's presence – in a word, in both the here and hereafter. We have nothing else to say."<sup>409</sup>

The officials were next summoned to the Grand Vezir's pavilion where he addressed them:

Earlier I submitted the peace terms from General Repnin to the sultan along with my other dispatches. But according to the sultan's latest rescript and the *kaymakâm paşa*'s letters, to make peace with the enemy without a fight must dishonor the empire. How can peace be in the empire's interest? What difference is there in having the Dniester as the border rather than the Danube? Immediately weigh war on one hand and peace on the other – let us win a victory, by God's grace, and may it lead to an honorable peace [*musâlahanın şânlû olmasını mûcib*]. We are accused of not doing enough to fight, told to take revenge, with God's aid, on the enemy. So, you see, the rescript's contents are thus. I am ordered to war by the sultan. I cannot favor peace now. What say you?<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 242-243; UT nr. 5203, 118a.

<sup>409</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 243; UT nr. 5203, 118a.

<sup>410</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 243; UT nr. 5203, 118a.

After clarifying the sultan's will, Koca Yusuf concluded, "We will prepare immediately and return to battle tomorrow. All of you go, prepare your men and make ready, trusting in God. I am of no other mind or resolution."<sup>411</sup>

The *mahzar* continues that those in attendance swore obedience but asked, once more, to broach the situation. Nothing would be better than to win a victory to defend the realm, they said, and were it up to them they would forfeit their lives. Yet one must consider the great peril the empire and its subjects faced. What was more, the army was in no condition to fight. It was one thing to talk of returning to war, they observed, but between mass desertion and the enemy's strong position a field battle (*mevdân cengi*) was out of the question. They predicted the army would disintegrate if the Russians offered battle, with no one but officers and a few other men remaining:

At present we cannot conceive of any remedy better than peace. And no matter how unfavorable this peace may be, since we are standing our ground against the enemy the empire's honor – God be praised – will be secure [*şân-ı Devlet-i 'Aliyye li'l-lâhi'l-hamd yerinde olarak nizâm bulacaktır*]. But if we give battle and are put to rout, what will the enemy do? They will issue heavy demands and force us to make peace under the shame of defeat [*mağlûbiyet âri üzerimizde kalarak sulha mecbûriyyet iktizâ eder*].<sup>412</sup>

All those in council, then, favored a voluntary peace as the best course. With God's grace they could put the realm to order, reform the troops, arrange everything as necessary, and then five to ten years later seek revenge and retake what was lost. "It is impossible otherwise [*illâ gayrî imkânı yokdur*]," they said.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 243-244; UT nr. 5203, 118a-119a.

<sup>412</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 244-245; UT nr. 5203, 119a.

<sup>413</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 245; UT nr. 5203, 119a-120a.

According to Vâsıf, Koca Yusuf Paşa replied that he too agonized over how to defeat the Russians and manage the army. Nothing had worked and he had inclined to peace to salvage the empire's honor. But now the sultan ordered him to war. He could not disobey.<sup>414</sup> The council answered in unison:

The damage and disgrace of this will redound upon the empire! [*bunun rezâleti ve mazarratı Devlet-i 'Aliyye'ye râci' olub*] What can weaklings like us do? If the army does not fight, must we not defend the fortresses remaining here and particularly Ibrail? If the imperial army moves hence we have no doubt Ibrail will fall to the enemy and that even greater humiliations will follow. We therefore favor this peace.<sup>415</sup>

Koca Yusuf told them he could not send such an answer to the sultan. "You write out the proper course among yourselves and make your decision; you are responsible [*siz bilürsüz*]."<sup>416</sup>

The Grand Vezir next produced the voucher that had been approved, by correspondence, as the basis for treaty terms. "Now look here, the empire will opt for peace with the Russians on these terms," he told them.

Consider this carefully. Should we approve the voucher or not? Should we give battle or not? You must decide today and give me an answer. I am of no mind but to fight. I have allowed all of you to speak truly and in the future hold you responsible before God. No matter what sort of reckoning you give on Judgment Day, do not mince words here but answer and speak the truth.<sup>417</sup>

In the end all advised approving the voucher, chose peace, and had their decision recorded in a sealed memorandum. The council ended, says the *mahzar*, with a promise to defer

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<sup>414</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 245; UT nr. 5203, 120a.

<sup>415</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 245; UT nr. 5203, 120a.

<sup>416</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 245; UT nr. 5203, 120a.

<sup>417</sup> Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 245-246; UT nr. 5203, 120a.

to the sultan but also a plea for haste, as the Russians were unaware of the empire's difficulty: "We consider this a blessing for both faith and country... We have chosen what will save the empire's honor and what is beneficial for our religion."<sup>418</sup>

The Maçın *mahzar* is not Vâsîf's own view of the matter as such. The document reads as council minutes and is presumably based on actual conversations that took place, offering up an array of justifications for peace. Yet we can safely assume that Vâsîf subscribed to these arguments in addition to putting them to paper. His chronicle may say nothing about the boycott, but it generally depicts peace in the 1787-1792 war as an opportunity, "the lesser of two evils," and "an unmitigated blessing."<sup>419</sup> As Vâsîf's part in negotiating a truce and drafting the *mahzar* furthermore attests, he gave active support to peacemaking.

The linchpin of the *mahzar*'s defense is again the idea of peace as the "lesser of two evils." The council framed their refusal to fight in terms of the realm's integrity and security. Their lives were immaterial, they said, but the army's weakened state presented too great a risk and defeat might bring deeper peril and heavier Russian demands. They thus advocated peace as a reprieve; the empire could try its luck again after another round of reforms. Peace in the *mahzar*, then, is a conservative one: a temporary measure dictated by necessity and undergirded by all the pertinent legal reasoning discussed above.

Another central point of argument in this debate is the nature of an "honorable peace." Such a concern was not new. Preserving the empire's honor and avoiding dictation had been

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<sup>418</sup> "Dîn ü Devlet-i 'Aliyye'ye bu maslahatı bizler hayırlû add eyledik... Biz Devlet-i 'Aliyye'nin şânını vikâye ve dînimize hayırlû olanı ihtiyâr eyledik." Çınar, "Mehmed Emin Edîb," 246; UT nr. 5203, 120a-121a.

<sup>419</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 38a, 62a, 89b, 102a-103a, 110a-110b.

issues previously at Karlowitz and Passarowitz.<sup>420</sup> According to Abou-El-Haj, the honor and dignity of the empire required tangible concessions because the Ottoman view of war and peace, based on *force majeure*, made anything less unacceptable.<sup>421</sup> Selim III's orders to fight were therefore based on a belief that submitting to negotiation damaged the empire's honor. To save face, he wanted first to gain some sort of victory – an honorable peace to him was a “victorious peace.”

The council, on the other hand, argued that in the circumstances a “voluntary peace” was sufficient. They had already done the realm credit by confronting the Russians, and to risk battle was to risk that honor. The empire might then be forced to make peace “under the shame of defeat.” Of course, the idea that the army willingly made peace is at odds with the total rout at Maçin and everything the council claimed about the army's debility, an incredible imposture in view of their dire situation. The issue must certainly have been important, that they would go to such lengths.

Vâsîf's treatment of peace in the 1790s – in the Maçin *mahzar* and elsewhere – shows a debate among Ottoman elites still within traditional limits. It was not possible to publicly depict peace as anything more than an interlude; not possible to justify it on any but the most constrained terms. Selim III's conflation of honor and victory shows, moreover, that the link between the empire's military fortune and “honor” in peace persisted to the end of the century. In this view peace was neither permanent nor based on “commonweal,” but prescriptive and wedded to a militant ethos. This would only begin to change at the turn of the century.

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<sup>420</sup> Nâîmâ writes that some jurists hoped for “victorious peace through a brave attack [*bir hamle-i dilrâne ile sulh-ı gâlibâne*],” *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 45-46. Also Murphey, “The Politics of Peacemaking,” 80-81, 90 n. 11.

<sup>421</sup> Abou-El-Haj, “Ottoman Attitudes Toward Peacemaking,” 134-135; idem, “Ottoman Diplomacy at Karlowitz,” 511.

### ***Küçük Kaynarca: “War is Unpredictable”***

Inklings of change and a more pensive outlook first appear in Vâsîf’s later volumes. Reference to peace as the “lesser of two evils” ceases. A more ambiguous and uncertain turn takes place: “War is unpredictable,” says Vâsîf. This may seem minor, a slight rhetorical gambit, but the result is that Vâsîf loosens his earlier prescriptive, legalistic justifications of peace, based on the notion of an immutable enmity with the *dâr al-ḥarb*. Stressing man’s need and ability to control warfare and its outcome, his later work places war and peace within the purview of human agency and takes a more philosophical, humane position.

The 1787-1792 war marked a noticeable shift in Vâsîf’s views of war and peace. After 1793 he abandoned the phrase “lesser of two evils” in his chronicle in favor of those which expressed warfare’s uncertainty, its variability. Most often this was the Arabic adage “War is unpredictable in its outcome (*al-ḥarbu sijâl*)” or paraphrases thereof.<sup>422</sup> There seems to be a connection between this new approach and the historian’s dawning awareness of his world’s volatility. His experience in two wars had robbed him of certainties. His historical vision from the mid-1790s onward was therefore tinged with anxieties and doubt, as he came to see the empire’s plight and the chaos of Napoleonic Europe as part of a universal breakdown in order.

Vâsîf’s new-found skepticism was also closely related to aspects of his metaphysics and historical philosophy which, not surprisingly, he was developing at the same time. As discussed in Chapter Two, the “world of generation and corruption” is inherently unstable. God ordains periods of war and peace rather than a perpetual state of hostility and no one, believer or unbeliever, is immune to fluctuations in fortune. Vâsîf thus held in his later work that the

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<sup>422</sup> This axiom is apparently quite ancient. Freytag, 1: 384: “Bellum est situla.” See also Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. “S-J-L.” The phrases *harb mechûlü’l-netîce* and *harb mechûlü’l-âkîbet* appear as variants or paraphrases. Vâsîf’s examples are in works written after 1792. For instance, MEHÂSİN 3, 215b; MEHÂSİN 4, 35b, 290b; MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 114.



Ottomans had enjoyed three hundred years of perpetual victory, but after 1592 the empire's arms faltered according to the sense of "war is unpredictable" and its power waned. The realm's present malaise, moreover, was to him part of the French sedition spreading itself over all regions of the habitable world.<sup>423</sup>

An uncertain world naturally poses challenges to rulers and puts a premium on deliberation. Vâsîf recognized this clearly, arguing in the early nineteenth century that the application of reason and policy is preferable to violence:

It is a precept of philosophy from the beginning of the universe till now that chaos and disorder periodically appear on the face of the earth, each through a secondary cause. We know through experience that worldly disorders are removed now using bloodshed and now using the policies of military men and scribes; and it is recorded in books of ancient philosophers that settling a matter through judgment is, where possible, better than wasting lives and that one must guard against danger, for proper discernment in the vital affairs of government is to all appearances difficult.<sup>424</sup>

In a later work dedicated to Grand Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Paşa, one of the victors of the Egypt campaign, Vâsîf praises cautious military command. Hüseyin Paşa was aware of the precept that "war is of unknown outcome (*harb meçhûlü'l-nehîce*)," he says, and so exercised prudence. Even though the Ottomans were bested in certain skirmishes, according to the sense of "war is

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<sup>423</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 213a-217b; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 1a-4b; TOP nr. 1625, 2a-2b.

<sup>424</sup> "Mebde-i 'âlemden bu âna gelince basît-i gabrâda ba'zen birer sebep ile şûr u fiten zuhûrî emr-i hikemî olub kâh ihrâk-ı dem ve kâh tedbîr-i erbâb-ı seyf ü kalem ile izâle-i fesâd-ı 'âlem hâsıl olageldiği mücerreb olub ma'a vücûdî'l-imekân rey ile itmâm-ı kâr itlâf-ı nüfûsdan evlâ ve hasbe'z-zâhir vâcibât-ı mülkiyyeden olan umûr-ı siyâsiyyede fark u bâtil müşkil olduğundan verta-ı vebâle-i vukû'dan ittikâ lâzım olduğunı hükemâ-yı mütekaddimîn kitâblarında sebt ü imlâ..." MEHÂSİN 4, 274b.

unpredictable,” the admiral’s vigilance and circumspection contributed to a final Ottoman victory.<sup>425</sup>

This new perspective is more cogently set forth in Vâsîf’s volume on the 1768-1774 war and Küçük Kaynarca. As said in Chapter Two, this work was composed around 1802 within a philosophical framework governing all manner of causal relations including war and peace. In place of permanent enmity, God ordains periods of war and strife over which man has some control. War, peace, and peacemaking, though ordained by God, fall within the ambit of human agency. The work is also unique in the extent to which the author inserts himself, as an active supporter of peace, directly into the narrative.

On a mundane level the chronicle recounts bitter division in the Ottoman ranks over war and peace. Vâsîf makes this one of the text’s key themes. Indeed, the dispute between supporters and opponents of peace assumes nearly as much importance as actual hostilities, with opponents often appearing more foe than friend. One of the key issues of debate was, again, how best to secure an “honorable peace.” When formal negotiations began in 1772, Vâsîf notes that the empire moved to secure an agreement “befitting its welfare and abiding honor [*Devlet-i ‘Aliyye’nin bekâ-yı şânıyla maslahatına muvâfık*].”<sup>426</sup> What this meant in practice was contentious, though. Many statesmen on the front were convinced that it was necessary to “sheath the sword of enmity” and were ready to make to large concessions to salvage the empire’s honor.<sup>427</sup> But they faced recalcitrant opposition.

Vâsîf directs revealing sidelights onto the latter. In his account Yenişehirli Osman Efendi’s refusal to admit Tatar independence, for example, which led to the collapse of

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<sup>425</sup> ÖN, nr. H.O. 205, 8b-10a. On Hüseyin Paşa, who may have patronized Vâsîf, Nejat Göyünç, “Kapudan-ı Deryâ Küçük Hüseyin Paşa,” *Tarih Dergisi* 2 (1952): 35-50.

<sup>426</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 196-197. Also *ibid*, 2: 207.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid*, 2: 203-205, 207.

negotiations at Foksani in August of 1772, was caused by fear of reprisals from militant ulema.<sup>428</sup> Osman Efendi then became an extravagant critic of the entire process, tried to deter Vâsîf from discharging truce duties, and agitated for a return to war. He also publically and violently insulted his fellow negotiator Yâsîncizâde Efendi.<sup>429</sup> The chronicle's depiction of Mustafa III as pusillanimous, dithering, and dominated by councillors is another interesting case. At least privately the sultan appears to have felt that peace was a blessing and in the realm's best interest. Yet fear bested him and he made plans to banish the Bucharest delegation in the event of popular discontent, in order to relieve pressure on himself.<sup>430</sup>

It must be said that the opposition's aims are never openly shared. Ahmed Resmî blames the failure of the Bucharest negotiations on Osman Efendi and on high ulema at court who, he says, espoused a rigid, literalist interpretation of Tatar independence (*lafzî ezberden ma'âzallah pek biyüük günâh*) and threw the sultan into doubt.<sup>431</sup> Vâsîf says scarcely more. Nevertheless, the chronicle hints that many in the hierarchy, and especially at court in Istanbul, saw the proposed peace as dictated and in violation of the law, especially for the Crimea. It was therefore unacceptable and the sultan, under his councillors' influence, ordered the army back to war with the hope of defeating the Russians and winning a victorious peace.<sup>432</sup>

Vâsîf's own stance naturally differs and presents the war as irresponsible. A section preceding the volume, for instance, quoting extensively from Muhsinzâde Mehmed Paşa, contrasts this Grand Vezir's caution towards war with his peers' recklessness, who disregarded

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<sup>428</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 223-225. Cf. *A Summary of Admonitions*, 31a. On Yenişehirli Osman Efendi's life and career, *Sefînet*, 106-108.

<sup>429</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 225-233.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid*, 2: 245-247.

<sup>431</sup> *A Summary of Admonitions*, 33a.

<sup>432</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 249-250. Also *A Summary of Admonitions*, 40a: "Düşmanı ürküderek sulha böyle gâlibâne nizâm verile deyü İstanbul'da ve orduda karâr verilüb..."

its uncertain outcome and latent danger (*mechûlü'l-âkibet ve hatarı muhtemel fitne-i nâime-i harb*).<sup>433</sup> In his preface Vâsîf meanwhile repeats that the war was indeed “a grave affair of unknown outcome [*mechûlü'l-âkibet bir emr-i hatîr*].”<sup>434</sup> His meaning is twofold. For one, the empire was simply unprepared for war and would better have avoided the situation. But as war is an inherently risky enterprise, policy must be the best recourse. Given war’s uncertainty, Vâsîf argues that it is best to secure peace whenever possible. Importantly, here for the first time one can begin to glimpse the influence of Ahmed Resmî.

Three examples will show how Vâsîf develops these ideas in the work. The first comes immediately after the Ottomans rejected peace overtures following the 1770 Battle of Kartal. The historian scoffs at the notion that some in Istanbul could impute such advances to Russian weakness, lamenting that their refusal was a lost opportunity. Quite to the contrary, he declares, and drawing directly from Resmî’s *Hulâsat*, it is established practice for states to be peaceable in wartime and warlike in peacetime: “The outcome of war is unknown. Wise men seize the opportunity when victory has presented itself, hence the Europeans always follow this course.”<sup>435</sup>

To reiterate his point the historian adds a didactic lesson on the value of peacemaking. This section tells the tale of Maslama b. Abdûlmalik's siege of Constantinople in 717/18, a powerful historical example meant to evoke the triumphal early days of Islam. Even so, Maslama’s censure by the caliph Umar demonstrates that past wars were not waged indiscriminately. Prudence should be used and rulers must take war’s uncertainty and

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<sup>433</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 1: 314-315. Vâsîf writes that on one occasion, while the army wintered in Şumnu, Muhsinzâde explained to him the reasons for his dismissal from the vezirate. He adds this narrative in the first-person.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 2: 5.

<sup>435</sup> “Cenk vaktinde tavr-ı sulh ve vakt-i sulhda tavr-ı cenk irâesi fi’l-i kudemâ ve cengin netîcesi ma’lûm olmayub galebe el vermişiken fırsâtı fevt etmemek kâr-ı ‘ukelâ olduğundan Frenk tâifesi dahî dâim bu mesleğe iktidâ eylediklerinden...” MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 114. Cf. *A Summary of Admonitions*, 35b.

destructiveness into account. More directly to the point, says Vâsıf, “if the infidel defeats Muslims and repelling them is not possible, then making peace in order to protect other Muslims’ life, territory, and property can be considered a sort of victory.”<sup>436</sup> Peacemaking, in other words, is a desirable and even honorable path.

The second example follows the failed negotiations at Bucharest, to which Vâsıf was a party. In an extended digression the historian delves into the minutiae of negotiations between the chief delegate Abdürrezzâk Efendi and the Russian legate Obreskov.<sup>437</sup> When talks reached an impasse, he writes, Obreskov, exasperated, declared that Russian demands were the fruits of victory. What would the Ottomans do in their place? No doubt they would make impossible claims.<sup>438</sup> Abdürrezzâk Efendi deftly replied with the story of Peter I’s 1711 defeat on the Pruth at the hands of Baltacı Mehmed Paşa. Though Peter was in dire straits, Abdürrezzâk said, the empire did not press its claims but avoided bloodshed and was content with the cession of Azov. For that Obreskov admitted Baltacı Mehmed was a wise vezir. He feared that desperate soldiers would win in close quarters battle, “and so he did not lose his chance for victory: he chose peace [*yedinde bulunan serrişte-i galebe ü nusreti zâyi‘ etmeyüb sulhı ihtiyâr eyledi*].”<sup>439</sup> Whether Vâsıf faithfully recounts this conversation matters less than the message therein. The passage strengthens his general defense of peace and shows that peacemaking, used judiciously, can be

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<sup>436</sup> “Ehl-i İslâm’a â‘dâ-ı dînin galebesi vâki‘ ve müdâfa‘a müte‘azzir ü mümteni‘ olursa sâir müslimînün vekâye-i ârâzî ve sıyânet-i nefis ü mâlleri garazıyla in‘ikâd-ı sulh feth ü nusret kabîlinden ma‘dûd...” MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 114.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, 2: 246-247.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, 2: 247.

<sup>439</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 247. On Baltacı Mehmed Paşa and the Pruth Campaign, see DİA, s.v. “Prut Antlaşması.”

wiser than force; nor is peace incompatible with victory.<sup>440</sup> As the historical example asserts, moreover, this lesson was not new to the Ottomans.

Vâsîf inserts the third and final illustration into his narrative at the signing of the Treaty of Kaynarca. In an addendum, he first calls attention to how unfavorable the treaty was compared to the terms negotiated at Bucharest.<sup>441</sup> “It is obvious on the slightest consideration how much the Russians profited” in the final text, he says. But Vâsîf then proceeds to a staggering pronouncement on war and peace:

There is no question in war that money is squandered on raising levies and that rebellion arises in the land through requisite, heavy imposts. Indeed, in warfare victory and triumph are but an illusion while the comfort and ease in peace are very real. And it is detailed in the books of philosophers who once graced this world that preferring the real to the fanciful, and the known to the unknown, were among their own practices.<sup>442</sup>

This statement, which clearly echoes at least one earlier source,<sup>443</sup> epitomizes Vâsîf’s defense of peacemaking in the 1768-1774 chronicle: that war is unclear, unpredictable, unprofitable, to be avoided in favor of peace. It is also the closest he comes in the full span of his writing to a rejection of war and a radical, Resmian view of peace.

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<sup>440</sup> Menchinger, “Gems for Royal Profit,” 143-144. Resmî records a discussion with Frederick the Great on the same event in MEHÂSÎN 5, 1: 255; Virginia Aksan, “An Ottoman Portrait of Frederick the Great,” in *Ottomans and Europeans*, 75.

<sup>441</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 306-307.

<sup>442</sup> “Cenkde aksâr-ı vezâîf-i cünûd ile itlâf-ı emvâl ve tekâlîf-i şakka-ı zarûriyye ile memâlikde tevellüd-ü ihtilâl vâreste-i kayd-ı istidlâl olub bâ-husûs cenkde zafer ü nusret mevâm ve sulhda rahat ü asâyîş meczûm olub meczûmî mevâm ve ma’lûmî meczûla tercîh nakşbendân-ı kârhaneye-i umûr olan hükemâ-yı eslâfın şiyem ü ‘âdetlerinden olduğı kitâblarında tasrîh olunmuşdur.” Ibid, 2: 307.

<sup>443</sup> Cf. Faik Reşit Unat, “Ahmet III. Devrine Ait Bir Islahat Takriri: Muhayyel Bir Mülâkatın Zabıtları,” *Tarih Vesikaları* 1 (1941): 109. There is little doubt Vâsîf read this work.

The above examples and the volume as a whole therefore show a striking change of rhetoric. The older formula of peace as a necessary, temporary expedient is gone. Vâsîf instead contends that war can and should be subjected to deliberation, and that it is neither a political nor a moral imperative but can be evaluated and used, like any other tool, on the merits of reason. In doing so, he extends human agency into matters of peace and war.

It is possible to discern Vâsîf's new tone more clearly in the way his treatment of a particular event changed over time: Austria's 1774 annexation of parts of Moldavia. On 6 July 1771 Austria entered into a secret compact with the empire with promises of diplomatic and military aid, an agreement it soon disavowed.<sup>444</sup> However, after Kaynarca Austria did not scruple to exploit Ottoman weakness and summarily annexed territory in Moldavia for their "trouble" as an erstwhile ally. Vâsîf first mentions this event in a chronicle entry for the year 1783/84. It is never licit (*câiz*) to trust Christian countries, says the author, and it is especially absurd that they would aid Islam during war:

Yet during Mustafa III's reign the Austrians duped the empire and promised, in return for certain considerations, to quiet the Russians through peaceable or forcible means. They even sent soldiers into Poland and made as though ready for war. In the end, however, they were not content with the territory they gained in the clandestine partition of Poland and pressed for other advantages, claiming great expenses and demanding the agreed portion of Moldavia from the empire...And no matter how the late Grand Vezir İzzet Mehmed Paşa, the *reis* İsmail Paşa, and other statesmen tried to deflect their desires, it

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<sup>444</sup> Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, 155-157; Köse, 56-57.

was in vain. Since peace had just been made with Russia and refusal would surely have meant war, they complied according to the axiom “choose the lesser of two evils.”<sup>445</sup>

This same event takes on a slightly different character in the war chronicle. Vâsîf begins his account of “Austria's perfidy” by stating that the balance of powers (*beyne'd-diüvel muvâzene*) is a respected notion in politics and that it is customary for states to unite against an aggressor and take action. Yet this practice has lapsed, for the new states<sup>446</sup> of Europe are “opportunists [*rassad-bîn-i mekr u hiyel*]”:

It is fit to reason that human nature, which is prone to evil and vice, feigns goodwill and incessantly seeks for advantages. And as man naturally subjugates the feeble and looks for indications of weakness, statesmen know as a matter of course that if (by God's ordination) a state is defeated by its enemy and fears excess harm, neighboring states will perceive they desire peace and seize a piece of adjacent territory or condemn them so that certain untenable peace terms are concluded, which act as a sort of insidious poison. In this campaign, therefore, the Austrians secretly agreed to enter the war at a propitious time, aiding the empire against their Russian enemy. They had acted as if they would honor this provision by sending men to the frontier. Yet there was no trace of their promised aid or a declaration of war, and they indemnified the empire for their expenses and annexed perforce nine districts of territory from Moldavia. Those privy to the secrets of the age understand that the empire was exhausted by its six-year war with Russia and bore this injury of necessity.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 166-167.

<sup>446</sup> “Nev-hudûs olan devletler.” This likely refers to the French Republic, Prussia, and Russia. Vâsîf's opinion of Frederick the Great, for example, was tainted by his opportunism. *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 366; MEHÂSİN 1, 287a-287b; MEHÂSİN 4, 199a.

<sup>447</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 307-308.



Whereas Vâsif earlier explained the empire's acquiescence using legal language and in the context of enmity between the *dâr al-ḥarb* and *dâr al-İslâm*, he here stresses political calculation and a balance of powers that includes both Christians and Ottomans. The Austrians presumed, correctly, that fellow states "would look the other way at their opportunism" and took full advantage.<sup>448</sup> Had the Ottomans not gone to war and exhausted themselves, or had they acted with more savvy, the situation could have been avoided altogether. Indeed, Vâsif implies that the loss was largely self-inflicted.

This is not to argue that Vâsif rejected war outright in his late career. Although he seems to have been influenced by Ahmed Resmî, he never indulged in quite the same brand of radicalism. The key change in the 1768-1774 volume is one of premises. Metaphysically and morally, war no longer had to be perpetual and peace, by the same token, was a virtue instead of a necessary, temporary evil. To Vâsif in his latter years the outcome of war could no longer be assumed, and so it required all due diligence and care as a political tool.

### ***Conclusions***

War, peace, and peacemaking obviously loomed large in Ottoman minds as the eighteenth century drew to a close. In this way, and as in Chapter Two, it is best to evaluate Vâsif's position as part of a broad, and to all appearances contentious, intellectual debate among the Ottoman elite. What might we say about his views and how they fit into such a discussion?

We have seen that militant rhetoric in the empire was slow to change but that, from an early date, Ottoman intellectuals tried to find ways to contain warfare. We have also seen how very tortured and constrained these attempts could be. Essentially prescriptive and legalistic, they

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 2: 307-308.

used technicalities like the concept of “necessity” and the “lesser of two evils” to justify peace as an extraordinary state of affairs, a suspension of normal rules that could be nothing other than temporary breathing-space; rare was the individual who said otherwise, at least publicly. Vâsîf’s early defenses of peacemaking were of a similar sort. Like Naîmâ, Dürrî Mehmed, and others, he preserved the façade of the empire’s exceptionalism by drawing on terminology and lessons from the law and the literature of war, a trend that persisted into the nineteenth century.<sup>449</sup>

The historian’s treatment of peace shifted markedly in the 1790s and thereafter, however, evincing a philosophical bent that appears to have paralleled his growing interest in human agency and responsibility. Although he never disavowed warfare and its place in the imperial mythos, Vâsîf ultimately came to argue that war and peace were like other human endeavors open to rational control. War, inherently unpredictable, required restraint and care, while peace, no longer the exception, offered advantages that statesmen could ignore only at their own peril. This change is not minor. Rather, like the work of Ahmed Resmî Efendi a generation before, it points to a widening realm of human agency in the Ottoman conduct of war.

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<sup>449</sup> Mehmed Münib Efendi’s 1799 translation of Muhammad al-Shaybânî’s *Siyer-i Kebîr*, which was printed at the Imperial Press a generation later in 1825, is a relevant illustration. Münib also submitted an essay to Selim III on the legality of various military reforms. Kemal Beydilli, *Türk Bilim ve Matbaacılık Tarihinde Mühendishâne, Mühendishâne Matbaası ve Kütüphânesi* (1776-1826) (İstanbul, 1995), 223-225, 328, n. 7.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Moral Order of the Universe

By the late eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire stood in dire need. The crises of the period forced Ottomans of all stripes to grapple, above all, with outmoded, outperformed military forces and a foundering political system. How they did so – the nature and content of reform – has formed a major focus of scholarship in past decades. However, for Ahmed Vâsîf and his peers reform was no mere technical matter nor without controversy. Ottoman thinkers and statesmen posited a direct link between ethics and the realm's prosperity and elided the distinction between its physical and metaphysical wellbeing. Vâsîf and his colleagues saw the empire's problems as symptomatic of deeper ills in the body politic, manifestations of a disorder that was foremost of a moral or ethical nature. Any discussion of late eighteenth century Ottoman reform must first address how Vâsîf and his peers saw the empire within a larger ethico-political order.

This chapter examines Vâsîf's views, again, in a wider intellectual discussion. It situates his understanding of human nature, the polity, and justice in the Persianate tradition of practical philosophy or *hikmet-i 'ameliyye*, highlighting the close relationship he drew between individual and political virtue, and between governance of the self and polity. Like his peers, Vâsîf sensed a malaise in the empire – one grounded in a failure to uphold the universe's basic moral order.

### ***Human Nature and Social Order in Ottoman Thought***

Traditional Ottoman wisdom has it that religion and kingship are indissolubly linked. Faith and sovereignty (*dîn ü devlet*) are twins, “two rings on one finger or two gems from the same mine,” divinely ordained and inseparable.<sup>450</sup> The way Ottomans saw social order was influenced by both Islamic scripturalism and the peripatetic philosophical tradition as filtered through al-Fârâbî, Ibn Sînâ, al-Ṭûsî, Ibn Khaldûn, and others. In this view political governance was not, and could not be, a self-contained process. Rather it was more a department of theology and stood in relation to ethics “as theory to practice.”<sup>451</sup>

Any discussion of social order in the empire must begin with some necessary background in Islamic philosophy. Ottoman political thought emerged from a peculiar classical synthesis, when jurists and philosophers attempted to square the ideal Islamic community guided and ruled by Muhammad’s worldly successor, the caliph, with a fragmented political reality. Some, jurists like al-Mâwardî (d. 1058), continued to assert the caliph’s sole authority as upholder of holy law (*sharî‘a*) and head of the community. Medieval philosophers, on the other hand, eventually yielded the caliph’s temporal supremacy to lesser rulers – sultans. Borrowing from Greek and Persian thought, they tried to house the caliphate within the more hospitable confines of Aristotle’s theoretical and Plato’s practical philosophies, “to harmonize revelation, in the form of

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<sup>450</sup> Neşrî, *Ğihannümâ: Die Altosmanische Chronik des Mevlânâ Mehemed Neschrî* (Leipzig, 1951), 1: 2. See also Kınâlızâde, 26. This saying came originally from Sasanid Persia.

<sup>451</sup> E. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: an Introductory Outline* (Cambridge, 1962), 118. On the empire’s intellectual heritage, see Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, esp. 81-106. Muhammad Naquib al-Attas provides a helpful theoretical framework in “The Islamic Worldview: an Outline,” in *İslâm, Gelenek ve Yenileşme* (İstanbul, 1996), 215-241. See also Thomas Naff, “The Linkage of History and Reform in Islam: an Ottoman Model,” in *In Quest of an Islamic Humanism* (Cairo), 123-138; Anne Lambton, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship,” *Studia Islamica* 17 (1962): 91-119; idem, “Changing Concepts of Justice and Injustice from the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Century to the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> Century in Persia: the Saljuq Empire and the Ilkhanate,” *Studia Islamica* 68 (1988): 27-60.

prophetic law, with reason, in the form of the *Nomos* of the Greek city-state.”<sup>452</sup> While these thinkers took different approaches to the problem, it is important to recognize that they shared the same presuppositions about Islamic revelation. For the Ottomans, meanwhile, due perhaps to the Abbasid caliphate’s extinction, philosophical political thought proved more influential in the long-run than the juristic theory.<sup>453</sup>

Islamic political philosophy’s ultimate concern was with happiness (*sa’âda*), which, in this context, meant a twofold felicity. As said in Chapter One, true happiness was thought to occur through the theoretical (*naẓarî*) and practical (*‘amalî*) perfection of the soul, a knowledge of “existing things” and self-governance that led to worldly felicity and otherworldly salvation (*sa’âdet-i neşeteyn*).<sup>454</sup> But practical perfection required political governance. What is more, it needed a polity that could not only guarantee the life and property of subjects but also their spiritual welfare. The state’s constitution, and especially its relationship to the law, was therefore an overriding concern to philosophers.<sup>455</sup>

One of the classic problems of political philosophy, but also of Islamic thought at large, was the relationship between revelation and reason. Philosophers deemed humans “political beings,” or in Aristotle’s terms *zoon politikon*, capable of reason and political organization but also creatures. Human reason, they thought, being limited and inferior to the divine wisdom, needed guidance in the form of revealed prophetic law. This fact did not necessarily preclude human legislation or even rational inquiry. Revelation and reason could and did aspire to a

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<sup>452</sup> Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 1-5. See also Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 145-196, 219-255; Lambton, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship.”

<sup>453</sup> A notable exception is Ebu’s-su‘ud Efendi’s attempt to synthesize the caliphate and dynasty, Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ud*, 98-111.

<sup>454</sup> See again *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-ḥikma”; Kınâlîzâde, esp. 41-53.

<sup>455</sup> Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 13-15.

similar aim: happiness.<sup>456</sup> The question, then, had to do with the respective spheres of divine and man-made law in the polity.

Islamic thinkers distinguished early on between governments based on revealed law (*sharî'a*) and human law. Their verdict on the latter was not nearly as negative as we might expect, only that it was imperfect. In philosophical terms, a state based on human reason and law could secure its subjects only worldly happiness. Human law might ensure order, prevent injustice, and arrange the polity's affairs so that subjects had material welfare, but it could not grant salvation. Divine law, to the contrary, served "the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body." To be perfect the soul needed right belief through *sharî'a* in addition to reason; theoretical and practical perfection were as a result only possible in the ideal state, ruled according to revealed law.<sup>457</sup> Ibn Khaldûn in the fourteenth century identified three types of polities, for example: religious nomocracy (*siyâsa dîniyya*), the state based on reason (*siyâsa 'aqliyya*), and the "Virtuous City," Plato's republic (*siyâsa madaniyya*). Ibn Khaldûn dismissed the Virtuous City as fantasy, because it posited a community so sublimated by philosophy that it needed no ruler at all. He also felt that pure nomocracy, though ideal, had ended with the so-called "Rightly Guided (*râshidûn*)" caliphs and transformed into a polity based on reason, with

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, 15-20.

<sup>457</sup> Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 19-20, 113-121; Crone, 266-272. Especially Rosenthal on philosophers: "Revelation is for them not simply a direct communication between God and man...it is also and above all a valid and binding code for man, who must live in society and be politically organized in a state in order to fulfil his destiny. In short, it is the law of the ideal state...It provides for man's welfare in this world and prepares him for the hereafter, and thus alone guarantees his perfection and happiness as a religious being. In so doing it goes beyond the nomos, the man-made law of Greek philosophy, which knew no two-fold happiness, though it was equally designed to enable man to reach his goal, intellectual perfection," 116.

*sharî'a* as its main source of law. Still, for him the Islamic polity was better than other human states, as it was still notionally guided by revelation.<sup>458</sup>

Ottoman intellectuals profited from this philosophical legacy in the way they understood social order and the polity. If their concern with revelation, reason, and the soul sometimes took different forms, they too, for example, acknowledged from the empire's early days a basic division between divine (*siyâset-i ilâhiyye/dîniyye/şer'îyye*) and human political authority (*siyâset-i sultâniyye/'akliyye*). According to the fifteenth century author Tursun Bey, government realized the perfection of human nature, secured mankind's twofold happiness, and could be of either type: rule according to wisdom and holy law in the first instance, or, in the second, according to human reason. Moreover, although Ottomans believed revealed law provided a more infallible guide than reason, they also affirmed rule by custom, which they called *örf* or *kânûn*.<sup>459</sup>

The phrase *nizâm-ı âlem*, a pithy formula that translates as “universal/world order” and articulates, indeed, the whole of the moral universe, is the key to Ottoman political views. While it appears often in sources, *nizâm-ı âlem* has remained enigmatic and subject to debate. This is because Ottoman authorities rarely bothered to define it as a concept, as if they shared a tacit understanding over the phrase's meaning. Scholars have hence tried to relate “world order” to various political dispensations. Osman Turan, for instance, sought in it Turkic ideals of world

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<sup>458</sup> Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 84-109. A nomocracy is a government based upon a legal code. For its application to the Islamic community, and how it differs from a theocracy, see Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, 14-18.

<sup>459</sup> See Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law* (Oxford, 1973), 167-207; Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud*, esp. 24-51; Halil İnalcık, “Şerî'at ve Kanun, Din ve Devlet,” in *Osmanlı'da Devlet, Hukuk, Adâlet* (İstanbul, 2000), 43-44; Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 102-106; Mehmet Öz, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi: Tarihi Temeller ve Ana İlkeler,” *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* 12 (1999): 28-29; Coşkun Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset Düşüncesi (XVI-XVIII. Asırlar),” *Akademik Araştırmalar* 4-5 (2000): 61-62; idem, “Osmanlı Siyaset Düşüncesinde Kavramlar,” *Türkler* 11 (2002): 35.

domination; others have proposed that “world order” meant nothing more than the physical integrity of the realm, or attempted to equate it with a Pax Ottomanica.<sup>460</sup>

Recent scholarship, however, argues that *nizâm-ı âlem* more likely presupposed a universal order that was not merely physical but embraced all human social relations. The origins of this order lay in a primeval, Hobbesian “state of nature” derived from al-Fârâbî, Ibn Sînâ, and ultimately Aristotle. The idea, as Ottoman thinkers held, was that humans are by nature social beings and incline to settled life. Yet humans are also susceptible to carnal passions. If left to their own devices they will covet their neighbors’ goods, threatening to disrupt society with violence, and only government (*siyâset*) and a ruler’s administration of justice (*‘adâla*, Trk. *‘adâlet*) can restrain the passions, keep individuals in their proper social station, and make society function properly.<sup>461</sup> As Gottfried Hagen notes, *nizâm-ı âlem* had universal validity in that it was not confined to any given historical period, dynasty, or region, and so was to be distinguished from similar but purely political notions like *nizâm-ı devlet* (“order of the dynasty”) and *nizâm-ı mülk* (“order of the realm”). It also implies that kingship is necessary and ordained by God, “a divine remedy for a problem caused by weakness intrinsic to human nature.”<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 56, n. 7; Tahsin Görgün, “Osmanlı’da Nizâm-ı Âlem Fikri ve Kaynakları Üzerine Bazı Notlar,” *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* 13 (2000): 180-181; Öz, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi,” 29-30; Turan, *Türk Cihân Hâkimiyet Mefkûresi Tarihi*, 2: 1-3, 10-36.

<sup>461</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 61-71; Crone, 259-268; Kınâlızâde, 405-412; Lambton, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship,” 109-110. See also Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 61-62.

<sup>462</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 58, 61; Görgün for textual examples and analysis, 181-184. Also Berkes, 11-13; Hagen and Menchinger, 98; and Yılmaz, “Kavramlar,” 35-36. Görgün traces the term to Arabic theological works studied in Ottoman *medreses* and the concept of causal “acquisition” or *kasb*. In these works *nizâm al-‘âlam* represented an order made and sustained through individual human effort and responsibility, 184-187.



The ideal “world order” was rigidly compartmentalized. In the Ottoman period most sources cite four different groups or estates (and some three or five) under the title *erkân-ı erba‘a* or “four pillars,” a distinction going back to al-Ṭûsî and earlier which usually consisted of soldiers, scribes, artisans, and farmers. According to the theory, these groups filled specific roles in a human society that was naturally hierarchical and unchanging. Soldiers and scribes ensured stability and public welfare, while artisans produced staple goods and farmers food. Furthermore, it followed that these groups had to cooperate and remain fixed in place. Movement could not be countenanced lest it disturb the order of the world and the whole system fall into chaos. The Ottomans therefore expressed aversion to social mobility in a concept of rigid social boundaries or *hadd* – “a carefully defined hierarchical station in life for all, the observation of which caused society to function harmoniously” – as well as to any change in the structure’s legal and institutional underpinnings, or what they called “ancient practice (*kânûn-ı kadîm*).<sup>463</sup> They also frequently likened the pillars to the four elements or four bodily humors, the so-called “biological metaphor,” discussed in detail in Chapter Five, to emphasize that society was an organic whole whose equilibrium must be carefully tended.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Rhoads Murphey, “The Veliyuddin Telhis: Notes on the Sources and Interrelations between Koçi Beg and Contemporary Writers of Advice to Kings,” in *Essays*, 127-128. One definition of *kânûn-ı kadîm* was “that practice whose establishment none can recall.” See Cemal Kafadar, “The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post Süleymânic Era,” in *Süleyman the Second and His Time*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul, 1993), 38; Mehmet Öz, “Kânûn-ı Kadîm: Osmanlı Geleneği Söyleminin Dayanağı mı, Islahat Girişimlerinin Meşrulaştırma Aracı mı?” in *Nizâm-ı Kadîm'den Nizâm-ı Cedîd'e: III. Selim ve Dönemi*, ed. Seyfi Kenan (İstanbul, 2010), 59-77; idem, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi,” 31-32; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 48-52; idem, “Kavramlar,” 37-38.

<sup>464</sup> On the “four pillars,” Hagen, “Afterword,” 238-240; idem, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 63-64; Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 94-102; Kınâlızâde, 478-484; Murphey, “Veliyuddin Telhis,” 127-128; Öz, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi,” 31; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 218-223, 224-230; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 54-56; idem, “Kavramlar,” 38-39.

What ensured this equilibrium was the ruler's justice (‘*adâlet*). It is important to first note that Ottomans did not recognize justice in the modern sense of equality or impartial treatment before the law. To them social inequality was a fact of nature, ordained by God. Rather, Ottoman thinkers, guided by Aristotelian ethics, thought of justice in terms of balance. In this tradition there were four cardinal virtues – wisdom (*hikmet*), courage (*şecâ‘at*), and temperance (‘*iffet*) – each means between two vices. The fourth, justice or ‘*adâlet*, emerged in individuals who possessed the other three and was thus the embodiment of all virtue and equity in individual behavior. Injustice (*zulm*, Trk. *zulüm*), alternately, was regarded as justice’s diametric opposite. While some held that injustice was its own vice, an extreme the mean of which was justice, others thought it was really a negation of justice – that just as justice was the sum of all virtue, so injustice was not a vice itself but vice in its entirety.<sup>465</sup>

A direct link between individual ethics and political governance meant that in Ottoman thought ‘*adâlet* was a social principle, too. The ethical dimension becomes clearer if one recalls that “world order” rested on the human predisposition to vices like greed, envy, and covetousness. The ruler’s duty was to restrain these passions to allow society to function. The notable Ottoman moralist Kınâlızâde proposed three conditions for justice in a polity: keeping the realm’s social groups in equilibrium, determining each group’s merits and capacity, and

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<sup>465</sup> The literature on ‘*adâlet* is extensive. Etymologically, the term comes from the Arabic root ‘-D-L and signifies a putting to rights or putting something in the correct place. See Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, 143 n. 60, 155 n. 30; Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (New York, 2001), 179. The best article on justice in the Ottoman context is Ergene’s “On Ottoman Justice.” See furthermore DĪA, s.v. “‘Adâlet” and “Ahlâk”; Fakhry, 64, 111-115; Necdet Gök, “Türk-İslam Kültüründe Adalet Anlayışı ve Osmanlı Uygulamalarından Örnekler,” *Türkler* 11 (2002): 61-70; Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 66-67, 71-73; Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore, 1984), esp. 119-125; Kınâlızâde, 93-107; Lambton, “Changing Concepts of Justice and Injustice”; idem, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship”; Öz, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi: 30; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 56-58.

distributing posts and other benefactions accordingly.<sup>466</sup> To be just in government, then, was to apportion each subject his or her due according to their proper function and station and to preserve harmony between the “four pillars.” Injustice was a deviation from these conditions, especially the principle of *hadd*. Moreover, since politics were essentially a domain of personal ethics the just ruler needed to be individually just.<sup>467</sup> As such, justice in the last resort was rooted in personal moral qualities and the ruler’s ability (success or failure) to govern himself and others.<sup>468</sup>

In the Ottoman mind justice and injustice directly influenced the realm’s prosperity. Its instrumental role was most often voiced through the famous “Circle of Equity,” or *dâire-i ‘adliyye*, a formula generally written around the inside of a circle that describes how justice should circulate through the whole social order. The realm, it posited, can only prosper through justice, which must be upheld by observing holy law. Only a king with an army can uphold the law, which, in turn, requires wealth from subjects. Only through justice can subjects produce wealth.<sup>469</sup>

The “Circle of Equity,” an ancient device going back to pre-Islamic Persia, summarized the interdependence of kingship, justice, and prosperity. However, this prosperity did not stop with subjects’ material wellbeing. We find in close parallel a notion that a ruler’s actions affected

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<sup>466</sup> Kınâlızâde, 478-488; Ergene, 85.

<sup>467</sup> Berkes, 11-13; Gök, 62-63; Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, 122-123; Lambton, “Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship,” 119; Tezcan, “Ethics,” 117; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 56-58.

<sup>468</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 66-67. Crone writes that “moral perfection was a key desideratum in a ruler in that virtue was required for justice. Besides, the moral outlook of kings was generally assumed to affect that of their subjects,” 161.

<sup>469</sup> Kınâlızâde attributes the circle to Aristotle, 532. Also Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 64-66; Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: the Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York, 2013), esp. 127-156; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset,” 52-54.

not just the social order but the underlying order of nature itself. If Ottomans believed that justice created prosperity, they also believed that it created natural fecundity. Likewise, injustice might beget famine, drought, and physical ruin, the classic symbol of which was rain and a hadith that declared, “When rulers act wrongly, the heavens dry up.” The idea behind this, as Crone states, is that “the regularities of nature depended on a moral order which it was the duty of the king to maintain,” and that his failure to do so provoked divine warnings or wrath.<sup>470</sup> A ruler studied in virtue was in this way the linchpin of a moral order encompassing all creation, man and nature.

It would nevertheless be mistaken to think that justice was the ultimate goal of the Ottoman polity, or even what legitimated it. Boğaç Ergene astutely observes that Ottoman justice served a larger end – sustaining the primeval social order – and that “justice was generally conceptualized more as a personal quality of an ideal ruler than as a definitive characteristic of a legitimate social order.” The order’s legitimacy was based on its primeval quality rather than on justice as such.<sup>471</sup> Hagen adds that justice was a sort of universal “lubricant” for a preexisting ideal order, the “realities” of which had to be taken into account.<sup>472</sup> The ultimate end of the polity was not justice in itself, but upholding that order which best allowed humans to flourish and attain felicity in this world and the next.

We might then think of the ideal Ottoman social order as a building. The structure itself, the whole of it, is the “order of the world” or *nizâm-ı âlem*. Yet there are also essential elements inside that form and prop up the structure. Hierarchical social groups, the “four pillars (*erkân-ı erba‘a*),” provide support, encircling and sheltering which are walls and framework equating to the “Circle of Equity (*dâire-i ‘adliyye*)” and “ancient practice (*kânûn-ı kadîm*).” Holding up the

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<sup>470</sup> Crone, 158-160, 163-164. See also Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 74-75.

<sup>471</sup> Ergene, 57-58.

<sup>472</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 67.

entire edifice is the central keystone – justice (*'adâlet*), whose administration (*siyâset*) is dispensed by the virtuous ruler. This keystone sits above the structure but is crucial to its integrity. It holds the pillars in their proper place – in proper equilibrium – preventing them from toppling into each other or perforating the walls. Without justice, indeed without any of these elements, the whole structure collapses.

This of course is an idealized, simplified schema. We need only briefly consider how Ottomans construed the relationship between revealed and customary law to see that “world order” and its parts could be reinterpreted again and again in different ways. While Tursun Bey thought that revealed law was the superior basis for government, upheld both “worldly and spiritual order (*nizâm-ı âlem-i zâhir ü batın*),” and provided for twofold felicity, he admitted the possibility of government based purely on customary law and reason (*siyâset-i sultânî*), which, as under the Mongols, might ensure worldly order (*nizâm-ı âlem-i zâhir*). Kınâlızâde and Şehzâde Korkud meanwhile deemed rule based on reason as illegitimate, rejecting the “two-tiered foundation of rule,” while Kâtib Çelebi, İbrahim Müteferrika, and others argued strenuously for its validity.<sup>473</sup> Our authors’ differences say nothing, necessarily, against their sincerity or the ideal as such. Indeed, it is as an ideal that these ideas exerted most of their influence, in shaping the way Ottomans thought about society, the realm, proper rule, and even political reform.

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<sup>473</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 67-71; Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, 169-171. Hagen and Görgün admirably illustrate the fluidity of *nizâm-ı âlem*. For *'adâlet*, Ergene and Heather Ferguson’s ambitious “Genres of Power: Constructing a Discourse of Decline in Ottoman *Nasihâtname*,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 35 (2010): 81-116. Marinos Sariyannis for the “princely virtues,” “The Princely Virtues as Presented in Ottoman Political and Moral Literature,” *Turcica* 43 (2011): 121-144.

### *Ahmed Vâsîf and World Order*

Intellectual discussion in Vâsîf's day was filled with allusions to world order. As Savaş observes, eighteenth century Ottoman reformers remained concerned with the “biological view” of society, the “four pillars,” and the prevention of luxury, venality, and moral turpitude,<sup>474</sup> making fair if fleeting reference into the 1780s and 1790s to traditional Ottoman concepts of human nature and order. Vâsîf and his peers viewed reform primarily as the restoration of balance in the realm. Their work, his chronicle above all, offers ample evidence that virtue, moral renewal, and proper rule were topics of intense debate even as the Ottomans began to forge the “New Order.”

Of course, none of these debates were really new. In the early eighteenth century Naîmâ had prefaced his history with a discussion of “world order” and an extended biological metaphor, much of which he borrowed wholesale from Kâtib Çelebi.<sup>475</sup> İbrahim Müteferrika also grounded his work on reform in the traditional moral order. The preface to his printed edition of Naîmâ's chronicle begins, as does so much Ottoman historical writing, with a description of human social organization and the need for kings, whose just rule, he says, forms the “order of the world (*nizâm-ı âlem*)” that ensures mankind's affairs.<sup>476</sup> The same author's *Usûlü'l-hikem fî nizâmî'l-ümem* repeats these arguments. In this tract Müteferrika's reform proposals are strikingly novel and seem forced into the traditional moral order like a sort of bed of Procrustes, eschewing “ancient practice.” Hagen speculates that by this time world order was devoid of “meaningful content,”<sup>477</sup> but the fact is that we cannot tell whether Müteferrika invested *nizâm-ı âlem* with

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<sup>474</sup> Ali Savaş, “Lâyihâ Geleneği İçinde XVIII. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Islahat Projelerindeki Tespit ve Teklifler,” *Bilig* 9 (1999): 109-110.

<sup>475</sup> *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 21-31. Cf. Kâtib Çelebi, *Düstûrî'l-'Amel li-Islâhi'l-Halel*, in Ayn-i Ali Efendi, *Kavânîn-i Âl-ı 'Osmân der Hulâsat-ı Mazâmîn-i Divân* (İstanbul, 1863), 119-140. Parallels in Thomas, 73-76.

<sup>476</sup> In *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1894.

<sup>477</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 80.

sincere meaning, only that his arguments still resided in an overall framework of “world order” linking the realm’s prosperity to a natural, immemorial balance between the “four pillars.”<sup>478</sup>

The 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman war furnished more discussion that, at the very least, demonstrates that the concept of an immutable world order still resonated among Ottoman thinkers. In the 1774 tract *Nuhbetü'l-Emel*, for example, Dürrî Mehmed Efendi blames the realm’s late troubles on disruption in the “four elements of the state (‘*anâsır-ı erba‘a*),” an alternate reference to the pillars of Ottoman social order described as statesmen, soldiers, subjects, and the treasury. These, he says, are “final causes (‘*illet-i gâiyye*)” of the realm’s continued existence and must be kept in good order, purged of outsiders.<sup>479</sup> At the same time, Dürrî, who was apparently influenced by Naîmâ, employs the biological metaphor and an Ibn Khaldûnian understanding of dynastic rise and fall. He argues that it is possible to treat the empire and avert its decline with careful ministrations, like eliminating venality and corruption, ridding the military of outsiders, and above all restoring the “ancient practice” of Süleyman I.<sup>480</sup>

Canikli Ali Paşa’s *Tedbîr-i Cedîd-i Nâdir* is a point of contrast, for it takes a more conservative line and has been compared justly to advice tracts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Canikli Ali claims to have written this essay in 1776 wondering “whether or not the order of this world [*bu ‘âlemin nizâmı*] is possible,”<sup>481</sup> and, while conceding that military strategy and technology change, he too obviously saw reform as the restoration of the traditional *nizâm* and ancient practice. He shares, for instance, Dürrî Efendi’s concern with the

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<sup>478</sup> *Usûlü'l-Hikem*, esp. 128-144, 152-154.

<sup>479</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 282a-283a. See also Savaş, 92. In Aristotelian terms “final cause” signifies a telos or ultimate end.

<sup>480</sup> For example: “Bu sûretde kânûn-ı kadîm ile olunub ocaklarda yol ve erkâna ri‘ayet ve içlerinden hizmet ederek Sultân Süleymân ‘aleyhi’r-rahmet ve’l-gufrân kânûnı üzere yolu gelüb...” TOP nr. 1438, 86a-91b; Savaş, 92-96.

<sup>481</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 71a; Özkaya, 172-173. Savaş summarizes the tract, 96-102.

infiltration of “outsiders (*nâ-ehil*)” into activities not properly their own. To him this caused much disruption.<sup>482</sup> Yet Ali diverges idiosyncratically from the classic formulation of the “four pillars” to join four individuals (*dört direk*) – the sultan, Grand Vezir, *defterdâr*, and commissary officer – to the “edifice (*yapı*)” of subjects.<sup>483</sup> *Hadd* for him is therefore ambiguous: not necessarily a transgression of social estate but any infringement on the prerogative or even opinion of another. He complains that in his day the elite stray from their respective spheres. Whereas statesmen should only offer counsel on political matters, soldiers on strategy, and ulema on whether this advice is legal, he maintains, now the ulema give opinions on war and every ignoramus on holy law. He repeatedly urges the sultan to distribute his favor according to merit and to the qualified – notably, one of Kınâlızâde’s conditions of sovereign justice. Finally, and intriguingly, Canikli Ali advocates a much stronger sultanic role. Although no Ottoman ruler had led an army in decades, he encourages Abdülhamid I to take up command. Sultans won great conquests in the past; the army under Grand Vezirs had proven less fortunate.<sup>484</sup>

Dürri’s and Ali’s focus on proper order can be considered a leitmotiv for the era, when time and again authors gravitated to *nizâm-ı âlem* as a frame of reference for the realm’s troubles. So Ahmed Resmî began his *Hulâsat* by averring that human antagonism is the “basis of world order.” In another instance, Süleyman Penâh Efendi quoted Naîmâ approvingly in his tract on the Morean uprising to suggest that it was possible to prolong a dynasty indefinitely, the biological metaphor notwithstanding. Vâsîf himself recorded the desire of statesmen as late as

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<sup>482</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 29b-30b, 37a-37b, 47a-54b; Özkaya, 152, 156, 161-164.

<sup>483</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 22a. Özkaya, 147; Savaş, 98.

<sup>484</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. 104b, 12b-13a, 42b-54b; Özkaya, 142-143, 158-162.



1777 for “a long-lost Köprülü vezir [*sâkıt ‘an nazar görilen Köprülü vezîr gibi*],” a reference to the line of traditionally-minded seventeenth century reformers.<sup>485</sup>

What these authors suggest is that *nizâm-ı ‘âlem* was not so much at issue itself. “World order” seems to have remained an *idée fixe* in the Ottoman mentality, even if, as Hagen contends, it no longer had any “meaningful content.” Eighteenth century Ottomans were instead engrossed in peripheral issues – moral renewal, reform as a restoration of balance, and the relevance and nature of “ancient custom” – hence some like Canikli Ali Paşa focused on bringing back the old ways; others like Müteferrika abandoned *kânûn-ı kadîm* entirely for new methods; and still others disagreed on what exactly the old ways were. One sees this tendency in Vâsîf’s commentary on Canikli Ali’s work. Although the historian agreed, in principle, that reform was needed to restore the realm, he found the essay’s aggressive tone distasteful and felt it arrogated far too much importance to military commanders. To him Canikli Ali’s specific recommendations were old fashioned, relics “out of step with the times.”<sup>486</sup>

Throughout his life, Vâsîf displayed a similar implicit belief in the natural order of the world, and his written work reveals a conviction that the destiny of the realm was tied inextricably to the ruler’s administration of justice and personal virtue. Yet it is clear that Vâsîf spoke in universal terms. For him political life proceeded from the nature of humanity itself. It went without saying that humans were by nature given to carnal desires and passions, which must be restrained, it followed, sometimes by force, in order to allow society to function.

Vâsîf outlines this belief most fully in his fifth volume from the turn of the nineteenth century, in “a preface on the nature of civilization, society, and the need for political authority.” The historian states that humans are by nature political (*medenî bi’l-tab’*) and, as a result, require

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<sup>485</sup> Respectively, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 1b; Savaş, 103; TOP nr. 1406, 49b.

<sup>486</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 214a.

the society of others. God created man to cooperate in order to procure food and needs and to defend himself, “but mere civilization [*ictimâ ‘ u temeddiin*] can by no means efface his depravity or compass his probity,” he writes, inasmuch as injustice and enmity are rooted in human nature, which is guided by carnal passions and breeds conflict. Left to their own devices humans will quarrel, brutalize each other, and threaten the stability of society.<sup>487</sup>

Humans therefore require outside restraint. “An ordered regime and regular law ought to be established to educe sensual desires and inherent wants for every man,” Vâsîf declares, “that none may hinder another in his wants through force or dominance, but should be content in the desires and pleasures to which he is entitled.” This is “comprehensive government (*siyâset-i ‘uzmâ ve saltanat-ı kubrâ*)” and can occur in two ways: either through a prophetic law (*şerî ‘at-ı ilâhiyye*) or an absolute ruler (*hâkim-i mâni’*), a sultan or padişâh who wields what philosophers call “kingship or sovereign authority (*sinâ ‘at-ı mülk ü saltanat*).” Vâsîf elaborates that the foundation of kingly rule is “pure justice (*‘adl-ı mahz*).” The ruler, who is indispensable, must hold sway over all others:

He must be able to govern justly [*hakkâniyyet üzere*] and command so that all may fear him, but not tyrannize any by iniquity or spite. Society should be stable because of his rule, and men's affairs, livelihood, and offspring ordained according to the natural order [*nizâm-ı tabî’î*].<sup>488</sup>

These ideas are all quite familiar, even hackneyed. They were at the basis of the empire’s sociopolitical order and part of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic tradition Ottomans inherited from medieval Islamic philosophy, so ubiquitous that the source from author to author is impossible to establish. Ibn Khaldûn spoke in nearly the same terms; indeed, Vâsîf may be

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<sup>487</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 4-5.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid, 2: 6-7.

paraphrasing the great North African. But the moralist Kınâlızâde had an identical view of social order and likely no exposure in his lifetime to Khaldûn.<sup>489</sup> Rather than the source, what is important is that Vâsîf could still credibly uphold this complex of ideas on the cusp of the modern period, at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Judged by Vâsîf's written corpus, his particular vision of society also continued to rest upon compartmentalized social groups or the so-called "four pillars," and he made passing reference throughout his career to these as bastions of the ideal order. The army, for example, was "one of the four pillars that outwardly maintains the edifice of state."<sup>490</sup> All people must furthermore belong to one of the pillars and none should infringe on the prerogatives of the others:

According to Islamic philosophers, rational individuals are divided into four estates: they are either soldiers [*'askerî*], craftsmen and merchants [*sûkî*], scribes [*ehl-i kalem*], or farmers [*hars u zirâ'at erbâbî*]. To leave outsiders as they are is improper and they should be forced into one of the estates. Some philosophers say that anyone who refuses to join one of the said groups must be killed, lest they trouble the people. Likewise, according to the sense of "Keeping each group to its own occupation orders the realm and

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<sup>489</sup> Cf. Ibn Khaldun text and translation; Kınâlızâde, 405-412. Fleischer argues convincingly that Khaldûn's entry into Ottoman intellectual circles must have occurred after figures like Mustafa Âli and Kınâlızâde, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldûnism' in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," in *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology* (Leiden, 1984), 46-68.

<sup>490</sup> "Bekâ-ı bünyân-ı mülk ü devlete be-hasbi'l-zâhir vaz' olunan erkân-ı erba'anın birisi tavâif-i 'askeriyye olub..." MEHÂSİN 1, 135a.

vice versa,” no class must be compelled into the occupation of another class, as when merchants or producers are sent to war, for this causes chaos.<sup>491</sup>

For Vâsîf one of the signal functions of the ruler's justice was to keep these groups in their proper spheres, as any attempt by commoners to infiltrate higher stations – to exceed their bounds (*hadd*) – could unravel the very fabric of society. He avers in his fourth volume that though humans may be equal in terms of creation or as Muslims, society requires them to be unequal. In obtaining a livelihood to sustain the species, the lowly and the slave require a master:

If all men were equal at all times in wealth, status, and leisure, they would, following the wisdom, “Were men equal they would all be destroyed,” have no need for each other, a livelihood, or industry. This would clearly throw the world into chaos and spoil man’s livelihood.<sup>492</sup>

Vâsîf concludes, then, that it is part of the kingly administration of justice (*siyâset-i mülkiyye*) to reduce people to their station and keep them in their particular sphere.<sup>493</sup>

Conversely, a deficient justice on the part of the ruler or failure to accord each his due courted disaster. For one, it could affect the realm's material prosperity. So, for example, Vâsîf dwells from time to time on the need to keep agriculturalists from migrating to cities and to enforce sartorial laws. The one protects the realm's income, as farmers are producers of wealth,

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<sup>491</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 169a-169b. The groups were therefore fixed and impermeable. Cf. Kınâlızâde, who lists five estates (scholars, orators, administrators, warriors, and merchants) and five types of “outsiders,” 451-453.

<sup>492</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 183a.

<sup>493</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 183a-183b. Also: “Fark-ı ifrâd-ı beşer için ‘anasıl vaz’ u ta‘yîn olunan hudûd u merâtibin hıfz u vekâyesi kavânîn-i mer‘iyye-i mülkiyyeden olub şu sebebden ki her şahs hâline göre mekel ve mülâbesini ta‘dîl etmese ‘adem-i ihâta-ı vârid ile zulm ve ‘udvân ve gasb-ı emvâl-i zîr-destân misillû bir nev‘ fesâd irtikâb etmek lâzım gelür.” MEHÂSİN 2, 15a-15b.

while the other inhibits those of lower station and more dubious moral character from being driven to greed, envy, and perhaps serious crimes.<sup>494</sup>

Yet for Vâsîf sovereign justice seems to have ensured not merely the order of the realm but nature itself, for injustice could trigger natural calamities and divine wrath. His biography of the late Osman III, who died in 1757, reveals how this is so. In spite of his generosity and compassion for the poor, we are told, Osman had a mercurial character as a result of spending his adult life sequestered in the palace. He was rash, compulsive, and prone to unpredictable mood swings. The sultan was moreover venal. His corruption brought the conduct of the court to a very base level and he once reportedly executed a Grand Vezir for a bribe. Vâsîf lists a number of omens that occurred during Osman's reign in token of God's anger, reckoning, among other things, two great fires in Istanbul, plague, the freezing of the Bosphorus in 1755, the pillage of the Mecca caravan, and other "trials and afflictions."<sup>495</sup>

The preface to Vâsîf's second, 1789-1794 volume encapsulates his understanding of the natural social and moral order and how it must be maintained. Bringing the whole critical apparatus together, he writes:

Let it be known that for mankind the ordering of faith, justice, and righteousness are possible through diversity in occupation and temperament and the procreation of the species through necessary mutual aid. For were not some men base and others noble, and if the lowly had no need of the noble, there must be general equality and, owing to conflicting desires, two opinions on a single matter. And thus there would everywhere be chaos and certain conflict; the common people would rush to destroy each other and the

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<sup>494</sup> MEHÂSÎN 2, 15a-15b, 122a-123a; MEHÂSÎN 3, 54a-54b; MEHÂSÎN 4, 183a-183b.

<sup>495</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 1: 92. Hâkim's chronicle, his main source, does not contain these criticisms. Cf. TOP Bağdat Köşkü nr. 231, 244b-246b.

order of the world [*nizâm-ı âlem*] and creation would come utterly undone – “Were men equal they would all be destroyed.” It is therefore needful that in every era there be a perfect being [*bir vücûd-ı kâmil*] to adeptly administer the law [*nâmûs-ı siyâseti tekmîl*], ruling such disparate people according to their merits and “keeping them in their proper station” through the scales of justice that order all creation.<sup>496</sup>

Vâsîf’s understanding of “world order” closely follows that of earlier Ottomans. He assumed that it was universal, moral, essentially unchangeable to the point of being natural law, and required the oversight of a virtuous and just ruler. What is more, *nizâm-ı âlem* directly affected how he saw personal morality and politics. Vâsîf’s devotion to the idea reflects the influence of practical philosophy, which fused the two, and allows us to explore more closely how eighteenth century Ottoman intellectuals conceptualized governance and reform, moral as well as political.

### ***Practical Philosophy as Governance***

If world order depended on justice, then justice required the cultivation of personal and political virtue through philosophy (*hikmet*). As said in Chapter One, for Vâsîf philosophy formed a guide to moral education (*edeb*) and a necessary link between knowledge, virtue, politics, and the ultimate Good: the perfection of the soul and individual and communal salvation. In philosophical discourse, this meant perfection in both mind and deed, or more technically in the speculative (*hikmet-i nazariyye*) and practical (*hikmet-i ameliyye*) spheres of philosophy.

Premodern Islamic philosophy began with the human soul or *nefs*. Following Hellenic tradition, this soul was deemed tripartite and each part assigned a different ken of responsibility.

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<sup>496</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 2a-2b. The latter quotation is from a hadith.

Thinkers identified the vegetative or concupiscent soul (*nefs-i nebâtî/behîmî*) with growth, sustenance, reproduction, and appetite. The animal or irascible soul (*nefs-i hayvânî/sebû'î*) was responsible for sense, locomotion, voluntary movement, and defense, while the rational soul (*nefs-i nâtîka*) governed understanding and action, hence things like speech and higher reflection. Each soul harbored different moral tendencies. Whereas the concupiscent soul continually urged evil and the irascible soul vacillated between carnal appetites and remorse, the rational soul was free from sensual appetites.<sup>497</sup>

The human soul was also the seat of moral action and had speculative and practical faculties, mirroring a basic division within philosophy. Ottoman thinkers categorized *hikmet* in terms of knowledge that lies inside or outside the bounds of human volition. “Speculative philosophy” included what we might call “pure science,” or subjects that exist independently like metaphysics, mathematics, and all branches of natural science, while “practical philosophy” dealt with voluntary human action and governance, whether of the self (ethics), family (economics) or polity (politics).<sup>498</sup> Particularly in its lower natures, so it was thought, the soul is inclined to carnal appetites and must be suborned by willpower to the *nefs-i nâtîka*. This came about first through the cultivation of knowledge in the speculative faculty, by rising through levels of intellect (*'akl*) until the soul joined the active intellect, and, second, of virtue in the practical. Virtue as an activity, then, was a conscious subordination of the carnal to the rational soul in

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<sup>497</sup> The terminological confusion arises from differences between Plato and Aristotle, which Ibn Sînâ later attempted to reconcile. A three-fold Quranic division of the soul also roughly corresponded to the philosophical: the *nefs-i emmâre*, the carnal mind when fully dominant; the *nefs-i levvâme*, the carnal mind when resisted but unsubdued; and the *nefs-i mutmainne*, the carnal mind when fully conquered. On the soul's composition see Black, 308; Kınâlızâde, esp. 62-70, 79-88; EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Nafs”; DĪA, s.v. “Nefis”; Fakhry, 64-66, 132-133; Nasr, 248-250; Saryiannis, “Princely Virtues,” 127; Tezcan, “Ethics,” 112.

<sup>498</sup> Kınâlızâde, 41-53; *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-ḥikma”; Tûsî, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 26-29; Tezcan, “Ethics,” 111-112. See also J. Stephenson, 329-338.

accordance with wisdom, for “if the practical faculty accords with the rules of the speculative faculty, it produces virtue; if the animal powers, vice.”<sup>499</sup>

To Ottomans like Vâsîf, then, and notably to the canonical authorities Taşköprüzâde, Kınâlızâde, and Kâtib Çelebi, “practical philosophy” represented a passage from potential to action. The aim of moral education (*edeb*) was to develop self-discipline in the “practical faculty” based on speculative knowledge. Taşköprüzâde, for example, said that ethics as a science concerned the carnal dispositions (*al-malakât al-nafsâniyya*) and how to regulate them.<sup>500</sup> Kınâlızâde later observed that ethics studies human action, and that practical philosophy allows men to perceive what actions are virtuous and vicious and how to purify their rational souls by acquiring the one and abjuring the other – a perfection of action.<sup>501</sup> Kâtib Çelebi for his part said that ethics, as it compassed practical philosophy, was “a science for the virtues and how to grace the carnal soul with them; and for the vices and how to get the soul to renounce them.” Its subject was the description of moral behavior, traits of character, and the *nefs-i nâtika* itself.<sup>502</sup> He added elsewhere that philosophy as a whole was “the perfection of the speculative faculty...and the perfection of the practical faculty through the acquisition of a consummate inclination for virtuous, moderate actions between excess and dearth.”<sup>503</sup>

As ethics was a “science for the virtues,” we must try to define these virtues more precisely. Taşköprüzâde quite aptly called them “the moderation of a faculty.”<sup>504</sup> As said earlier, Ottomans posited that the cardinal virtues attached to the soul's three faculties, hence temperance (*iffet*) belonged to the concupiscent soul, bravery (*şecâ'at*) to the irascible soul, and wisdom

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<sup>499</sup> DİA, s.v. “Nefis.” Also al-Attas, 236.

<sup>500</sup> *Miftâh al-sa'âda*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-akhlâq.” See further Crone, 169.

<sup>501</sup> Kınâlızâde, 42-43.

<sup>502</sup> *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-akhlâq.”

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-ḥikma.”

<sup>504</sup> *Miftâh al-sa'âda*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-akhlâq.”



(*hikmet*) to the rational soul. As well, each of these virtues held a balance between two vices, one an extreme of dearth and the other of excess. For example, temperance was the mean between the excess of debauch (*fücûr*) and the dearth of self-denial (*humûd*), while bravery balanced foolhardiness (*tehevviür*) and cowardice (*cübn*). There also existed a number of virtues subsidiary to each cardinal virtue, such as perspicacity (*zekâ*), clemency (*hilm*), patience (*sabr*), contentedness (*kanâ'at*), and others.<sup>505</sup>

How then do virtues occur? In *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* Kınâlizâde begins from the moral trait or *hulk*. The soul, he holds, has faculties of action and intellection – practical and speculative faculties – and the carnal and irascible impulses from which moral traits emanate can either be virtuous, vicious, or neutral. Virtue occurs when an action derived from these accords with sound reason and in moderation; vices when it is immoderate, either in excess or dearth. Lastly, justice in personal conduct comes only when there is equilibrium in the soul's three levels – when one develops the other three cardinal virtues.<sup>506</sup>

As said before, Islamic and Ottoman thought elided personal morality and good governance and held ethics to be the singular variant of economics and politics, naturally at the heart of the latter two.<sup>507</sup> Justice had a very personal cast, through the cultivation of the cardinal and so-called “kingly virtues” like ambition (*ulüvv-i himmet*), patience (*sabr*), and sound judgment (*isâbet-i rey*). Moral education was therefore a requisite moderating tool. However, there was some amount of debate among intellectuals over the possibility of ethical reform – of changing a person's moral character. Kınâlizâde raised three views on this subject. Some authorities, he offered, said that ethical reform is impossible because moral traits are innate,

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<sup>505</sup> Kınâlizâde, 96-97, 99-104. Sariyannis, “Princely Virtues,” esp. 122-128.

<sup>506</sup> Kınâlizâde, 93-107. Also DİA, s.v. “Âdalet” and “Ahlâk”; Fakhry, 111-112.

<sup>507</sup> Crone, 161; Kınâlizâde, 91; Tezcan, “Ethics,” 111-112, 117.

whereas others contended that reform can occur insofar as moral character is either innate or habitual. A third view held that all moral behavior can be changed, as character stems entirely from external causes.<sup>508</sup>

This issue of ethical reform was related in turn to another controversy: the soul's natural composition. According to Kınâlızâde some claimed the soul was naturally good and only later became corrupt. Others insisted that the soul was created from an impure nature and hence could reform itself gradually, with God's aid, while the majority thought it neither essentially good nor evil but capable of both. Galen supplied a fourth opinion that there were three types of souls: a very few were naturally good, more were naturally evil, and most were equally inclined to good or ill. Likewise could the human soul be categorized in terms of its speculative and practical capacities. There were those, "mature (*kâmil*)" and "pure (*münezzeh*)," that had perfection in both. Some were "mature" but "impure," being proficient in the speculative but not the practical, while others were "immature" but "pure," or proficient in the practical but not the speculative. Still others failed in both faculties.<sup>509</sup>

Ottoman intellectuals disagreed on certain details when it came to the soul and moral reform. Kınâlızâde seems to have believed that all moral behavior could be changed, citing it as scholarly consensus.<sup>510</sup> He therefore would have objected to the middle position expressed by Kâtib Çelebi, that moral character (*hulk*) is a deeply rooted disposition which proceeds from the carnal soul, acts readily and spontaneously, and has two parts: the innate and the habitual. The first cannot be altered, he claimed. The second, which initially acts through volition, becomes

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<sup>508</sup> Kınâlızâde, 50; Fakhry, 144.

<sup>509</sup> Kınâlızâde, 50-51; DĪA, s.v. "Ahlāk."

<sup>510</sup> Kınâlızâde, 51-52.

ingrained practice, and the benefit of ethics is to expose the carnal soul's innate dispositions and teach virtuous habits.<sup>511</sup>

Whatever their views, these thinkers did largely agree on the value of practical philosophy. Kınâlızâde pointedly disavowed the view that moral education is ineffective, as, if taken to an extreme, it would enslave many to their passions. Whichever view is correct, he said, it is clear that there is a need for practical philosophy because at least some humans are capable of changing their moral behavior.<sup>512</sup> What is more, the central importance of sovereign justice and virtue to Ottoman intellectuals meant that moral education, justice, and philosophy served as linchpins in the whole scheme of universal order. The moralist not inadvertently made this point when he urged kings to cultivate wisdom (*hikmet*) and justice:

For as the body reaches its ideal [*kivâm*] through nature, nature through the soul, and the soul through the intellect, so the realm reaches its ideal through the king, the king through the administration of justice [*siyâset*], and the administration of justice through wisdom [*hikmet*]. When wisdom is known in the realm and holy law in the king, there is order and subjects gain all possible perfection. But holy law shall be forsaken if wisdom is abandoned; and when the law is forsaken the king's majesty shall disappear, disorders arise, and blessings be obliterated.<sup>513</sup>

### ***Governance of the Self: Virtue and Vice***

Vâsîf's use of "practical philosophy" indicates that he took the moralists' lessons to heart and, at least in part, saw ethical instruction and virtue as major components of his history. It will be

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<sup>511</sup> *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. "İlm al-akhlâq."

<sup>512</sup> Kınâlızâde, 52.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid*, 488.

recalled that for Ottomans ethics stood in relation to politics as theory to practice. The just ruler was supposed to be a virtuous “perfect man” – one who had acquired perfection in mind and deed – and had a duty to guide his subjects accordingly. Kınâlızâde in this way likened the ruler to a doctor: in order to govern, he had to know what was the health of the realm, in what its equilibrium consisted, what formed its possible maladies, and how to cure them.<sup>514</sup> Vâsîf too voiced this thought in history when he expressed the need for a “perfect being” to rule and uphold order.<sup>515</sup> For him self-rule was an inherent part of the art of statecraft as well as one of history’s manifold benefits.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the historian spiced his work liberally with passages on simple virtues or vices from *hikmet-i ‘ameliyye*. For example, in a section from his sixth volume Vâsîf records how the *şeyhülislâm* İvazpaşazâde İbrahim Beyefendi (1774-1775) was dismissed because of colleagues’ backbiting, and then digresses on intrigue and court rivalry with “a lesson” on envy (*hased*). Envy, he says, arises from a combination of two other vices, greed (*tama’*) and ignorance (*cehl*), since the envious have an unwarranted sense of entitlement. It is also of two sorts. One is a lesser, “honorable envy,” which does not begrudge comfort to others but merely hopes to attain it. This envy is laudable if it aspires to spiritual matters; if to worldly matters, it is blameworthy. The other type is malicious. Those who are envious in this way are filled with self-love and ambition, smitten with a desire for power, and seek to destroy others. Envy among vezirs, ulema, and other ministers is of this sort.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Kınâlızâde, 473. Cf. Thomas, 76. See further Charles Butterworth, “Early Thought,” in *A Companion to Muslim Ethics*, ed. Aryn Sajoo (London, 2010), 31-51; Crone, 163-164; DİA, s.v. “Ahlâk.”

<sup>515</sup> For instance, MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 6; MEHÂSİN 2, 2b. Vâsîf elsewhere uses the term for a statesman, MEHÂSİN 1, 142a-142b.

<sup>516</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 28b-29b. Cf. his likely source Kınâlızâde on envy, 227-233.

Greed (*tama* ‘) is another common vice, one which Vâsîf treats in his fourth volume. Here the historian comments on the behavior of a statesman, one Mehmed Efendi, who was dismissed as *anadolu muhâsebecisi* due to his incessant complaints about the position’s salary. Mehmed had independent means, says Vâsîf, and could well manage his affairs without a post, but he disdained his good fortune out of avarice and ignorance and treated his benefactor, the dynasty, ungraciously. Continuing, the historian counsels that while men are naturally attracted to vanities, wise men content themselves with their appointed lot and earn tranquility in both worlds. Greed leads its victims to pride and folly, to reject divine blessings appointed them from pre-eternity, and in the end to despair and frustration.<sup>517</sup>

A further apposite passage from the fourth volume tells readers about clemency (*hilm*), with an exemplary tale told on the authority of Abdürrezzâk Efendi. It seems that one day Abdürrezzâk was visiting the *şeyhülislâm* Mirzâzâde Mehmed Efendi, who was known for being particularly clement. As they conversed, Vâsîf records that a “disgruntled Arab” suddenly burst in, threw down his turban, berated Mirzâzâde for treating him unjustly, and stormed off in high spleen. Mirzâzâde then turned, smiling, and said, “My lord, what say you about the frightful din this fellow caused by throwing down his turban?” and astounded Abdürrezzâk with what, to him, was an admirable display of indulgence. Yet here Vâsîf disagrees. He adds in gloss:

In my humble opinion such a degree of clemency is nonsensical. It is far from virtuous if someone is provoked but fails to become angry, insofar as courage, indignation, righteous anger, revenge, and ardor are considered personal virtues the lack of which must be

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<sup>517</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 111b-112a. This volume also speaks of the embezzlement of large sums of money by several statesmen. Vâsîf turns the story into a cautionary tale using historical examples from early Arab history. The moral is to spurn greed and avarice (*tama* ‘/ *hirs*) in favor of temperance (‘*iffet*), 254a-255b.

despised. In the words of the philosophers, “Respectable men spurn overindulgence, for such comes from fools.”<sup>518</sup>

The jurist's clemency was to Vâsîf's mind not a virtue at all, but overindulgence – and hence, a failure to mete out proper justice.

Single virtues and vices in Vâsîf's work are also integrated into larger moral themes, most notably practical philosophy's major concern, restraining carnal desire. Carnal desire lies at the heart of vice and particularly worldliness and vanity. Ottomans believed that humans were inherently given to such urges by the lower souls. Incited to evil, men desire trifles and luxuries and automatically incline to passions, misled by good fortune and oblivious to divine anger.<sup>519</sup>

Two examples will suffice to show how carnal desire is presented in the history. The first comes from Vâsîf's fifth volume in an entry on a mid-eighteenth century *defterdâr*, Hilmî Mustafa Efendi. Though skilled, this scribe abandoned himself to sensual pleasures and inclined one day to wine and the next to business. The historian claims that eventually his life caught up with him and he was left plagued by debts and creditors, deserted by friends, dispossessed by the sultan, and exiled. The final blow came upon inquiry into his accounts, which showed a pattern of misappropriation. Mustafa Efendi was executed. Vâsîf reflects that this servitor was actually an expert accountant and a kind-natured man of effort and generosity. Yet he chastens those who waste their God-given gifts in pleasure and vanity, declaring that most become bankrupt,

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<sup>518</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 17a-18a. Clemency was a subsidiary virtue of bravery in the irascible soul. Kınâlizâde, 96, 100-102. Forgiveness and clemency also arose as problems in Christian moral literature. Andrew J. Romig, “In Praise of the Too-Clement Emperor: the Problem of Forgiveness in the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*,” *Speculum* 89 (2014): 382-409.

<sup>519</sup> For example: “Nüfûs-ı beşeriyye emmâre bi's-sû'dır.” MEHÂSİN 4, 152a. See also MEHÂSİN 2, 149a.

impoverished, or are struck down by the sword of justice. Such has happened countless times in history.<sup>520</sup>

In another case Vâsîf offers a personal perspective on worldly conceit. On 5 February 1802, two days after the end of Ramadan, the statesmen gathered at the imperial palace for general appointments, each anxious for a position. That very day, however, *kaymakam* Abdullah Paşa suddenly took ill and died. The Grand Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Paşa stood in his place and hastily ordered the appointments, invested candidates in office, and sent everyone home, astonished. No one could recall such an event ever taking place – a “bizarre misfortune” and “cause for admonition,” Vâsîf calls it, insofar as God demonstrated His great power to the statesmen on the one day of the year in which they all gathered together. Yet he admits most of his peers were indifferent and thought only of their own vanity. He saw firsthand (*reyül'-‘ayn meşhûd*), he says, how such men were consumed by their avarice for posts and prestige, gossiping to each other about how little there was and how many there were who wanted it.<sup>521</sup>

A second theme, closely related to carnal desire, is that of fickle fortune. The passions blind us to the fact that material prosperity is fragile, and Vâsîf’s work is filled with reminders of men, deceived in good fortune, who forsook justice, foresight, and God in pursuit of their desires only to meet a sudden reverse, a crashing fall. Sırrı Selim Efendi, one of Vâsîf’s colleagues, exemplifies this pattern in his 1777 dismissal to Baghdad. It seems that Selim once humiliated an unknown *kapıcıbaşı* named Darendeli Mehmed, haughtily refusing him an audience. In time the same Mehmed Efendi rose through the ranks and became Grand Vezir, all the while remembering the slight, and upon his appointment made Sırrı Selim the governor of Baghdad, ostensibly as an honor but in actuality to punish him, knowing the appointment would be

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<sup>520</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 168-170.

<sup>521</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 107a-107b.

ruinous. Vâsîf reflects: it is utter ignorance to be haughty to one's equals, however unknown, on the strength of a tenuous fortune. Wise men see material things for what they are worth (*'an 'ilm-i hakâiki üzere*) and people according to their deserts (*be-hasb-ı takâtihim*). Many times an unknown is raised up by fortune and causes one to regret thoughtless slights, sometimes on the pain of financial or personal ruin.<sup>522</sup>

The moral peril of office forms a third theme. Ottomans in general had ambivalent views on worldly power as enticing and dangerous.<sup>523</sup> Human nature makes it so, for power puts one into a position to gratify pride, avarice, and other lusts; it therefore corrupts. Ottoman officials faced bribery, venality, factional pressures, and customarily had to give superiors "gifts," which Vâsîf and his colleagues accepted as necessary corruption that came with office. Grand Vezir Koca Ragîb Paşa once even advised an official who was disturbed by venality to dissociate himself from court and obtained for him a provincial governorship.<sup>524</sup>

At the same time, Vâsîf reminds us that holding authority can pose mortal dangers to the soul. One of the best illustrations of this is his extended, if hypocritical, sermonizing on his former patron Halil Hamid Paşa. Halil Paşa began his career in the chancery with integrity, but over time, and especially as Grand Vezir, was apparently seduced by power and became imperious, unjust, and avaricious. Vâsîf blames Halil Paşa's downfall largely on his vanity and weakness for pleasure, which led him to peculate and defraud the treasury. He was also deceived by fortune.<sup>525</sup> But be that as it may, a statesman must be aware that problems can occur equally in the dereliction of power as in its abuse, for those in authority are apt to avoid decisions that could damage their position or reputation. As Vâsîf observes,

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<sup>522</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 60b-61b. See also his entry on Dervîş Mehmed Paşa's death, *ibid*, 59b-60a.

<sup>523</sup> Hagen and Menchinger, 98.

<sup>524</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 195.

<sup>525</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 181a-183a.



Willpower can unleash hidden lusts which, once unleashed, cause a decrease in effort, and carnal desires are in this way a sort of satanic suggestion...It is tried and true that the fruit of irresolution is hardship and sometimes death.<sup>526</sup>

The point of these lessons is that carnal desires do not bring happiness. Quite the contrary, man's uncontrolled passions lead to wholesale self-destruction, a danger against which Vâsîf frequently warns readers. The world of generation and corruption, he says, "the world of conceit," is ever trying to ensnare the heedless:

The sensible avoid artifice's grasp but others are seized. Climbing high on fortune's wheel, they purge their hearts of fear of God, amass wealth, confound illicit for licit, devote themselves to gain and advantage, and fall headlong into perdition [*istidrâc*]. They thus give themselves entirely over to worldly and sensual pleasures and...as wise men have seen countless times, are reprobated unto divine justice.<sup>527</sup>

Restraint (*sabr*) and contentment (*kanâ'at*) – subsidiary virtues of temperance<sup>528</sup> – are by contrast surer guides to happiness in this world and the next. "Honoring the carnal soul with a slight effort is better than making a great effort to debase it," he advises, "for, verging on trumpery, the latter takes needless labor for things that will not bring contentment."<sup>529</sup> A person who seeks such desires lives in constant anxiety. Accepting one's lot and learning contentment is the more virtuous behavior:

It is well-established that temperance comes from accepting one's lot and that any desire beyond this is a useless burden...If the world and its spoils belonged to one man, his

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<sup>526</sup> "Esbâbda irâde tecrîd-i şehvet-i hafîyyeden ve makâm-ı tecrîdde irâde esbâb-ı inhitât-ı himmet-i 'aliyyeden olub bu bâbda nüzû'-i nefis ü heyecân devâ'î-i desâîs-i şeytâniyyedendir." TOP Hazine nr. 1638, 13b. See also MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 83-84.

<sup>527</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 11a.

<sup>528</sup> Kınâlızâde, 102-104.

<sup>529</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 112a.

share would be daily bread, shelter, and enough clothes to cover himself. The rest is clearly luxury...Plato was asked “What is the world’s chief joy?” He replied:

“Contentment with one’s lot.” “And what is the world’s chief care?” He said: “Worldly desire and greed.”

Vâsîf concludes that these vices owe to ignorance (*cehl*), for if the ills of reason are many, the greatest and most severe in terms of its wickedness is ignorance. But while humans are naturally ignorant, they can also be led to salvation by moral improvement.<sup>530</sup>

The solution to vice is for individuals, rulers above all, to cultivate restraint, self-governance, and personal reform – moral education, in other words – through the precepts of practical philosophy. In the early 1790s Vâsîf chronicled the dismissal of *şeyhüislâm* Hamidzâde Efendi, who was worthy and intelligent. Had Hamidzâde tried to reform himself, he remarks, to restrain his severity and act with care and deliberation, his term would have been a moral boon. Yet he acted poorly, precipitately,<sup>531</sup> and the moral is that rulers must have time and independence if they are to be experienced and impartial, for according to philosophers the corruptive qualities of sovereignty (*‘avâriz-ı mefâsid-i mülkiyye*) become progressively ingrained in people's souls. Swift reform is impossible and requires care. Those who are rash are disappointed and endanger the dynasty to which they owe their affluence.<sup>532</sup>

How rulers might apply such lessons is illustrated in Vâsîf’s curious ethical tract *Râhibnâme*, which again shows practical philosophy’s links to knowledge, virtue, and politics. *Râhibnâme* tells of a wise ascetic or monk (*râhib*) in pre-Ottoman Byzantium who harbors an

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<sup>530</sup> Here he also cites the exegesis of Ibn ‘Abbâs, who interpreted “the good life (*hayât tayyiba*)” as “contentment (*kanâ‘a*),” as well as a hadith: “The best of my community is one who is contented; the worst is one who is greedy.” MEHÂSİN 4, 112a-112b. Cf. Fazlızâde, for whom contentment and patience were ways to pacify the carnal soul, Kurz, 253-268 passim.

<sup>531</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 78a-79b.

<sup>532</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 79b.

impossible love for the emperor's daughter and eventually wins political power. However, it is above all a discourse on judgment, restraint, and the kingly virtue of patience (*sabr*). Vâsîf introduces this work by discussing patience's source and usefulness. He writes:

Some philosophers claim that all things have an essence and that patience is the essence of reason [*'akl*], while others say patience is a faculty or part of reason. Kingly patience, meanwhile, consists of firmness in all the faculties of the heart. The first faculty is clemency [*hilm*], whose fruit is pardon; the second is deliberation [*te'eni*] and cautious, mild words, whose fruit is the realm's prosperity; and the third is bravery [*şecâ'at*], which begets firmness. Patience means enduring bitter adversity. Its object is swallow one's cares and await better opportunity.<sup>533</sup>

Vâsîf argues that seemingly impossible things can be gained through the virtue of patience. In more detail, he says that experiential reasoning (i.e. *'akl-ı tecârübî*) and the ability to understand sensibilia through past adversity give humans certain premises (*mukaddemât*) by which they can see the benefit or harm of an action. Some of these premises are universal, some particular, and by applying them it is possible to learn self-control and attain the things one wants.<sup>534</sup>

We see in countless examples throughout Vâsîf's work that the stakes of self-reform were quite high – death in this world, damnation in the next. The onetime Silistre governor Osman Paşa is a case in point. As discussed in Chapter One, Osman was an energetic, intelligent commander, but also prideful and harsh. After the 1774 Treaty of Kaynarca the sultan appointed him to Bender, but Osman defied the order and fled to Rumelia, where he let his clients pillage the inhabitants. The sultan's agent finally surprised him at Lepanto, incognito, and took him back

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<sup>533</sup> TOP Hazine nr. 386, 1b.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid, 2a.

to Istanbul for execution.<sup>535</sup> According to Vâsîf Osman Paşa knew the wages of justice and injustice but failed to reform or exercise control. “When men are heedless,” he writes,

When they cease to serve God; when they flout lawful orders from the sultan, God’s caliph; when they harm subjects by extorting money in the cities they govern, to spend it on lusts of the flesh; when they obstinately abandon the boons that arise through justice – though they may try to escape justice [*seyf-i siyâset*] in this world, Aristotle writes on the divisions of justice that in the hereafter they will suffer the most violent of torments.

Osman let worldly gain cloud his judgment. He gave license to those Vâsîf calls “vagabonds” and “a plague on the poor” and was therefore killed.<sup>536</sup>

Of all the chronicle’s exempla, Halil Hamid Paşa most visibly symbolizes hubris and the danger of unregulated passions. As said earlier, Vâsîf’s critique of his erstwhile patron must be taken with a hefty grain of salt, in that Halil Paşa’s fall placed him in a grave situation. Others close to the Grand Vezir were dismissed or executed, and even though Vâsîf speaks in the virtue tradition we must realize that he condemns the Grand Vezir at least in part to exculpate himself.

Halil Paşa, he begins, was not initially devoid of integrity or devotion, and was admired by the elite for his long chancery service. His knowledge of state affairs was unparalleled, and he gained the sultan’s favor and began to rise in rank, as *amedci*, *büyük tezkireci*, and finally *reisülküttâb*. However, his first inklings of power boded ill. Vâsîf alleges that Halil alienated peers with his “conceit” and, once in power, unjustly exiled rivals and bullied the court into submission. As Grand Vezir he also took full advantage of his position for self-aggrandizement. Having the sultan’s solemn promise of independence, and though he had reproached earlier Grand Vezirs for augmenting their income, he hoarded wealth and expropriated wealthy

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<sup>535</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 20b-21b.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid, 21b-22a.

statesmen. Vâsîf charges that Halil Paşa's avarice and greed were major causes of his downfall, and that, among other things, he alienated crown lands as tax farms to his followers for a little cash up front and embezzled from the treasury.<sup>537</sup>

At last, writes the historian, the Grand Vezir's brutal behavior provoked God's wrath: anyone familiar with fickle fortune knows that divine vengeance (*intikâm-ı ilâhî/siyâset-i ilâhiyye*) strikes down those who satisfy their own concupiscence and are fooled by the world's fleeting fortune. Such dispensations are a warning. What is more, anyone who would dare to amass canonically ambiguous wealth for sensual pleasures or abuse justice must end up as an outcast from the courts of this world and heaven (*gayr-i mahmûd ve dergâh-ı kurb-ı sûrî ve m'anevî'den matrûd*). Vâsîf says that Halil Paşa's improper behavior therefore reached the sultan and he was dismissed and exiled to Gallipoli. Under pressure from the Grand Vezir's enemies, Abdülhamid I then decided to make an example of the vezir to ensure the realm's stability. An agent delivered his severed head to Istanbul, as a warning.<sup>538</sup>

While Vâsîf admits that Halil Hamid Paşa was perceptive, intelligent, and a skilled bureaucrat, he alleges he was absorbed with vanities and avarice. He was also imperious. Since he had the sultan's full discretion, he so thoroughly browbeat the statesmen that they equally feared to advise or praise him. Had he preserved his integrity and followed God's and the sultan's will; had he dutifully overseen state affairs; had he preserved unity in the bureaucracy, treated all with courtesy, and avoided avarice – outwardly, he probably would have escaped this

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<sup>537</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 181a-182b

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, 181a, 183a-183b.

event. Linking injustice to the order of nature itself, Vâsîf further claims that omens and strange dreams attended Halil's death, which astrologers had predicted years before.<sup>539</sup>

### ***Governance of the Polity: Ottoman Political Thought***

To understand ethics is to grasp the basic premises of eighteenth century Ottoman views of politics, for the latter were an extrapolation of ethics onto the larger community. "Politics," or *siyâset-i müddin*, formed the third and final branch of practical philosophy. Its Ottoman iteration can be traced to the Aristotelian concept of *politikê* and the Neoplatonic "Virtuous City (*al-madîna al-fâdîla*)," distilled by al-Fârâbî, Ibn Sînâ, and later moralists like al-Ṭûsî, Davvânî, and the widely popular Kınâlizâde. Ottomans made ethics the lodestone of politics, whose stated aim was to ensure justice in the body politic and, hence, the most propitious conditions for the community to achieve material and spiritual felicity.<sup>540</sup>

How did Ottoman thinkers define politics? Of course, there was no single conception or less still a coherent theory, and we are confronted with a concept that is diffuse, vague, but invariably joined to the ethical tradition. For example, Kâtib Çelebi classified politics (*siyâsat al-madîna*; lit. "the governance of the city") as a branch of practical philosophy which discusses "the knowledge of communal affairs in a city."<sup>541</sup> To Kınâlizâde it concerned "the actions dealing with social intercourse in the inhabitants of cities and realms." "Ethics is naturally at the

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid, 183b-184b. Vâsîf casts doubt on how seriously he takes these omens with the phrase, *vallahü'l-a'lem*, "God only knows."

<sup>540</sup> Kınâlizâde's third book and parts of the second discuss politics and the "Virtuous City," esp. 400-522. See also *Miftâh al-sa'âda*, s.v. "İlm al-siyâsa"; Tezcan, "Ethics," 111-112, 117; DİA, s.v. "Siyâset."

<sup>541</sup> *Kashf al-zunûn*, s.v. "İlm al-ḥikma."

basis of politics,” he added.<sup>542</sup> Taşköprüzâde’s article on the subject (*‘ilm al-siyâsa*) meanwhile offers one of the most extensive definitions:

[Politics] is a science that treats rulership, government, politics, and positions like sultans, kings, commanders, scribes, judges, scholars, and treasurers... Its subject is the city’s estates and their governance; its benefit is knowledge of the social groups of the Virtuous City [*ijtimâ‘ât al-madîna al-fâdila*]; and its aim is to restrain each from the other and to preserve them.

Taşköprüzâde continues that “this science requires rulers first of all and then other people, because men are political by nature [*madanî bi'l-ṭab’*], and enjoins living in the Virtuous City, abandoning vice, and knowing how to serve the people of the city and profit by them.” Politics therefore involve the proper function of power and authority in themselves, the condition of officials, and subjects and their welfare.<sup>543</sup>

One idea Ottomans accepted implicitly from the medieval tradition was the need for an absolute, and absolutely just, ruler. Political governance along with ethics were thought to originate in the primeval order of the world and the dictum that humans are “political by nature,” an idea attributable to Plato and Aristotle.<sup>544</sup> Men must live and work together to survive. However, they also need outside restraint and guidance to contain passions which ever threaten to tear society apart. As said before, this argument formed a sort of “natural law” at the center of ideas of order, society, and sovereignty. As also treated earlier, Ottoman thinkers recognized that restraint and order might occur through revelation or reason, through prophets or kings, and the justice they laid down in accordance with either holy law or rational precepts. The tension

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<sup>542</sup> Kınâlizâde, 45-46, 91.

<sup>543</sup> *Miftâḥ al-sa‘âda*, s.v. “‘Ilm al-siyâsa.”

<sup>544</sup> Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 15.

between *shar‘* and *‘akl* was well-established, as attested in the ubiquitous influence of Ibn Khaldûn and works like that of Tursun Bey.

Another parallel strand of thought derived more or less directly from the Neoplatonic tradition of the Virtuous City, taken from Arab and ultimately Hellenic philosophers. Kınâlızâde divided political associations into two basic types: the “Virtuous City (*medîne-i fâzıla*)” and the “Vicious City (*medîne-i gayr-i fâzıla*)” In his description virtuous cities are governed benevolently (*siyâset-i fâzıla*) by rulers who seek moral perfection and happiness, are just, cherish subjects, fill the city with good works, and master their appetites. Vicious cities, as would be expected, are governed wickedly (*siyâset-i nâkısa*). Such rulers are unjust, consider their subjects slaves, and want only to satisfy their carnal souls through tyranny (*tagallüb*).<sup>545</sup> Kınâlızâde further subdivides these cities according to the characteristic vice – there can be, he says, “ignorant cities (*medîne-i câhile*),” “vicious cities (*medîne-i fâsıka*),” and “erring cities (*medîne-i dâlle*).” Each of these categories has an assortment of types.<sup>546</sup>

Naturally, not all Ottomans accepted the philosophical tradition and its approach to government. Scripturalist countercurrents found a ready audience and are perhaps best known from the work of Birgivî Mehmed Efendi, whence sprung the seventeenth century’s puritanical Kâdızâdeli movement. This sort of revivalism was quite different from the “Virtuous City” and looked back to the idyll of the early community for a model of governance. Although he was no Kâdızâdeli, for example, Fazlızâde Ali took a scripturalist tack when he called for religious purification and demanded that the community return to the ethical mores and practices of

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<sup>545</sup> Kınâlızâde, 455-457.

<sup>546</sup> Kınâlızâde, 445-446. Ignorant cities hold incorrect beliefs, vicious cities have right beliefs but incorrect actions, and erring cities seem like virtuous cities but have corrupt, and thus incorrect, beliefs. See further DİA, s.v. “Ahlâk”; Fakhry, 136-140; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 137-138.



Prophet and his companions.<sup>547</sup> The chronicler Câbî Efendi (d. 1814?) also recorded an anecdote in which one eighteenth century dignitary was unceremoniously grabbed by the ears and nose by three men and given the “advice” that the realm was neither Sublime nor Ottoman but an “Islamic state (*devlet-i muhammediyye*).” “Anyone who betrays this state has betrayed the Prophet and faith and needs swift punishment,” they said. “You may be below the sultan and above other vezirs, but you should show more loyalty to the Islamic state and fear no one; keep this well in mind.”<sup>548</sup>

The grist of philosophical ideas was nevertheless highly popular in the Ottoman Empire throughout the eighteenth century, though this point is not without controversy. Marinos Sariyannis has proposed that the “moral interpretation” of politics, focusing on individual virtue, largely dissolved in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “As for the eighteenth century writers,” he adds, “they seem to have ignored moral issues [entirely].”<sup>549</sup> In close parallel is Heather Ferguson’s hypothesis that Ottoman conceptions of justice underwent a similar demoralization in the same period, a shift away from justice as an extension of the ruler’s personal virtue to one of abstracted rulership.<sup>550</sup> On the other hand, Kemal Beydilli convincingly argues the very opposite: that eighteenth century Ottoman statesmen and thinkers increasingly conflated personal and political morality. He attributes this development to the empire’s weakened state and its urgent need to keep engagements, a “making a virtue of necessity” that

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<sup>547</sup> Kurz, 9-10, 89-100.

<sup>548</sup> Ömer Câbî, *Câbî Târihi*, ed. Mehmet Ali Beyhan (Ankara, 2003), 84; Beydilli, “Islâhât Düşünceleri,” 37. There was also much variety within this perspective. See Cemal Kafadar, “Myth of the Golden Age,” 42-46; Ahmad Dallal, “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993): 341-359.

<sup>549</sup> Sariyannis, “Princely Virtues,” 134-136, 140-141. He follows Hagen’s notion of a seventeenth century “dissolution of the moral discourse over legitimacy.”

<sup>550</sup> Ferguson, 95-98.

clashed jarringly with European *raison d'état*.<sup>551</sup> Indeed, although our grasp of the period's intellectual history is still quite limited, it supports Beydilli's position that the "moral" view of politics was by no means in retreat. Ottomans appear to have fully accepted the metaphysical connections between politics and morality.

When the historian Naîmâ prefaced his work with a defense of Amcâzâde Hüseyin's reformist policy, for example, he spoke of political rule based on human reason and holy law. Borrowing from Kâtib Çelebi's reform tract *Düstûrî'l- 'Amel*, he equated the first with royal policy, part of practical philosophy, and the second with divine commands based on scripture. To him this binary separated the Ottomans from Christian Europe. Naîmâ felt that divine law is different from law derived from reason and a guiding principle to all Islamic rulers, while Christian kings rule by reason alone. This favored the Ottomans, since whoever obeys holy law gains happiness in here and the hereafter, but those who disregard it suffer God's wrath.<sup>552</sup>

Müteferrika also placed politics within the larger moral order of the world. In his preface to Naîmâ's history, beginning with the argument from natural law, he writes that kings and rulers ensure worldly prosperity, punish evildoers, and must exercise justice to restrain their subjects and keep them in their proper places. Such is the order of the world (*nizâm-ı 'âlem*). As Naîmâ observed, he further states, a dynasty is composed from human society and requires a vigorous ruler to execute the demands of religion and governance: politics, derived either from reason (*'aklî*) and practical philosophy or from holy law and scripture (*şer'î*), are necessary for the rise and subsistence of every dynasty.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> Kemal Beydilli, "Dış Politika ve Ahlâk," *İlmî Araştırmalar* 7 (1999): 47-56. Sariyannis does not seem to have consulted this article.

<sup>552</sup> *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 21, 25. Parallels in Thomas, 73-76.

<sup>553</sup> Müteferrika in *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1894-1895.

Müteferrika was well aware of specific forms government could take – monarchy, democracy, and aristocracy – but argued that the combination of rule by revelation and reason served the Ottomans. Holy law is peculiar to Islamic rulers, he clarifies. All who utilize it are victorious and win felicity in both worlds, while God punishes those that disregard the law. Politics derived from reason, meanwhile, called royal politics, are “those laws formed by philosophers in accordance with the needs of the time and as a guiding principle for all, for the ordering of state affairs and of the realm.” Though distinct, the two are not mutually exclusive and may even ultimately coincide in their outcome. Christian monarchs have no divine law and must base the order of their realms entirely on reason, but not so the Ottomans.<sup>554</sup> Müteferrika, who argued for thorough reform from the top down, indicates that the dynasty must therefore access the universal benefits of reason alongside revelation, saying that philosophers warn against negligence in either holy law or reasoned politics. Any measure of indifference will ruin the realm and inevitably lead to its dissolution and decline (*zevâl*).<sup>555</sup>

These examples suggest that Ottomans in the eighteenth century shared a belief in exceptionalism and the conviction that something had gone quite wrong. Whatever their position – for a strong reformist hand, a return to “true religion,” or aggressive application of reason – all advocated some variety of reform and a common understanding of order. However, Naîmâ and Müteferrika both contain an undercurrent justifying reason or at least making it palatable to a moral view of the dynasty. There seems to have been an association in the popular mind with

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<sup>554</sup> In *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1895; *Usûlü'l-hikem*, 164-165. In the tract *Usûlü'l-hikem*, he repeats that the empire has an advantage over its rivals precisely because they, Christian kings, must rely on reason alone to order their kingdoms, *Usûlü'l-hikem*, 170-172, 191. Gottfried Hagen points out that rational and revealed governance are not necessarily opposed in point of law, but rather in the authority that enforces them. Hence the famous saying that “the world is not destroyed by unbelief, but by injustice.” “Legitimacy and World Order,” 70-71.

<sup>555</sup> In *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1895.

reason – cold, calculating, Machiavellian – in contrast to the Ottomans’ more ingenuous self-perceptions. This opposition emerged boldly in the century’s final decades, when European concepts of politics challenged the moral view. In *Sevânihü'l-Levâyih* (ca. 1803), Behiç Efendi calls “politics” or *politika* “a European term that in our time means to act through trickery and deceit, but whose original meaning is *umûr-ı siyâsiyye* or *tedbîr-i müdîn.*” His definition presents a stark contrast between the politics of the philosophers and the crass politicking of Europeans, in the sense of “spinning lies.”<sup>556</sup>

### ***Vâsîf on the Ideal Ruler, Politics, and Proper Rule***

Ahmed Vâsîf too employed this philosophical paraphernalia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although he never presents a schematic political theory, we can make accurate observations about how he saw such things as the ideal ruler, governance, and, importantly, the moral order of the universe.

It is well to note first that Vâsîf shared his peers’ anxieties and the belief that something has gone terribly wrong for the Ottomans. His history’s earliest volume, dedicated to Halil Hamid Paşa, expresses a hope that this Grand Vezir would be the long-awaited “renewer of the age.” Later in his career he likewise praised Selim III effusively as the Platonic philosopher king, the “perfect being.”<sup>557</sup>

Philosophy was without doubt the leaven of Vâsîf’s ideal ruler. His earliest explicit statements on this subject appear in the preface to his second volume from 1794, where he draws

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<sup>556</sup> Beydilli, “Dış Politika ve Ahlâk,” 50-51. Râtîb Efendi, who appears to have heavily imbibed contemporary European political theory, used the term in this pejorative sense but also wrote that “every state must bend [politics] to its his own affairs and advantage, and order it, justly, according to the country’s temper, nature, custom, and faith.” *Ebubekir Râtîb Efendi*, 221-224.

<sup>557</sup> Respectively, MEHÂSİN 1, 8b; MEHÂSİN 2, 2b.

on the concept of the Virtuous City and especially the *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* of Kınâlızâde. It is proven in practical philosophy, he writes, that the kingly administration of justice (*siyâset-i mülkiyye*) is of two sorts: virtuous (*siyâset-i fâzıla*) and vicious (*siyâset-i nâkîsa*). Virtuous rule imposes justice, strengthens the faith, promotes integrity and firm belief, and governs and nurtures the realm and subjects. A virtuous ruler is called “Commander of the Faithful.” Vicious government, however, seeks sensual pleasures and natural lusts, wields injustice, wrongfully seizes goods, and enslaves subjects. This sort of rule is also known as “tyranny (*tagallüb*).” Virtuous rulers, he adds, cleave to religion, faith, reason, and wisdom:

Mastering their passions and nature, they treat subjects kindly, order the realm through justice, integrity, and benevolence, have as their basic aim felicity and the perfection of morals, and are thus fit to be called “Shadow of God” and “Master [*ulû’l-emr*].” Yet vicious rulers incline to iniquity, forsake integrity and moderation. Through force, the tyrant considers his subjects as so much chattel and so many slaves while he himself is enslaved to concupiscence [*nefs-i emmâre*], and fills his realm with fear, suffering, contention, discord, enmity, and ruin.<sup>558</sup>

Beyond political virtue, the historian uses this discussion of rulership to assert the dynasty’s exceptionalism. “Religion and kingship are twins,” he declares; “one cannot be achieved without the other.” Religion is thus like the foundation and kingship the support – for a foundation is destroyed without support and a baseless support is toppled – and for this reason just rulers like the Prophet spread the benefits of justice into the non-Islamic world. The Ottoman sultans particularly strengthened the faith in this way, he avows, and were endowed with God’s aid and known for great wisdom and reason. They fostered their realm with beneficent rule,

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<sup>558</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 2b-3a. Following Kınâlızâde closely.

enforced the law, and overwhelmed their subjects with kindness. Vâsîf then lavishly praises Selim III, who, he says, from his accession ruled virtuously to alleviate injustice, gird the frontiers, and other duties. He voices the hope that Selim's fortune will grow ever stronger and that he will acquire the means (*esbâb*) of taking revenge on the enemies of the faith and realm. God willing, they will be crushed, the realm prosperous, and all people made joyous.<sup>559</sup>

We can gain more insight into Vâsîf's political ideal by his words on two other posts and how they served the ruler: the Grand Vezir and *şeyhülislâm*. His first volume notes that the vezirate is "the noblest position in the empire, the utmost governmental rank." Here we read that the Grand Vezir personally administers the men of the four pillars, which form the order of all realms, and he must arbitrate between them.<sup>560</sup> A distinguished individual ought therefore to hold this post and should, assuming the realm's honor, know the public's needs and act as a barrier between the ruler and people to prevent either side from altering the proper balance (*inhirâf-ı mizân ile tarafeyn tuğyân etmemek maslâhatı için miyânedede berzah-ı hâil olub*). He must ultimately be responsible for all affairs and the welfare of faith and country, equitable to all, and an independent overseer. Because of all this, Vâsîf maintains there is no more arduous service than to be Grand Vezir.<sup>561</sup>

In this way the Grand Vezir represents an extension of the ruler's worldly authority, *devlet*. He depends on approval from God, the sultan, the people, and himself – that is, on four competing claims, and his course in governance must lie on the straight path with loyalty to God and the law. Vâsîf asserts that the vezir can only hold his position, and obtain prosperity in both

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<sup>559</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 3a-4a.

<sup>560</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 172a.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, 172a-172b.

worlds, if he acts disinterestedly, keeps everyone in their station, takes council with experienced, wise men, and abjures vice and impropriety that might form a pretext to his enemies.<sup>562</sup>

The *şeyhülislâm* represents on the other hand *devlet*'s twin, *dîn*, the divine law and faith. It is his duty to act independently, and he must uphold the law and exhort the Grand Vezir toward justice. Vâsîf counsels that those in this position are charged with delivering divine commandments, speaking truth to power, and advocating the general welfare of *dîn ü devlet* to authorities.<sup>563</sup> To execute the law, guard the state's honor, obstruct venality, increase the treasury, strengthen defenses, and prosecute injustice – these are the *şeyhülislâm*'s guiding principles and, he adds, the foundations of state order (*usûl-ı nizâm-ı mülk ü devlet ve esâs-ı bünyân-ı saltanat*). None can be neglected and it is his duty to address concerns to the sultan.<sup>564</sup> Furthermore, the *şeyhülislâm* must work with the Grand Vezir, the representative of the ruler's worldly authority, “to right the state's affairs together and endeavor for the state's greater honor.” Neither should he plot and intrigue against the other nor remain silent in the face of injustice, as this injures the realm and is an abdication of responsibility.<sup>565</sup>

A still broader sense of the ideal political order comes to us from the preface to Vâsîf's fifth volume, written in the early years of the nineteenth century. Like so many Ottomans before him, Vâsîf here presents an argument from nature and distinguishes between governments based

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<sup>562</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 172b; MEHÂSİN 4, 315b-319a. See also the examples of İvazpaşazâde in MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 185-186; Derviş Mehmed Paşa in MEHÂSİN 6, 50a; and Şerif Hasan Paşa in MEHÂSİN 2, 74b-76b.

<sup>563</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 185a-186a. Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi also depicted the *şeyhülislâm* and Grand Vezir as the representatives of *dîn ü devlet*, respectively. Marinos Sariyannis argues that this suggests an abstraction of the concept of the state as distinct from the ruler's personal, charismatic power, “Ruler and State, State and Society in Ottoman Political Thought,” *Turkish Historical Review* 4 (2013): 100-101.

<sup>564</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 185b-186a.

<sup>565</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 29a; MEHÂSİN 1, 186a; MEHÂSİN 3, 188a-189b.

on divine and human law. He likewise has it that the temporal ruler must be just, a philosopher king having both intellectual and moral perfection:

Philosophers call this individual the absolute ruler [*hâkim 'ale'l-ıtlâk*], his rule kingship and sovereign power; modern men call him Caliph, his function the caliphate; Plato calls him the Philosopher King; Sufis call him the Axis of the Universe or Perfect Man; and in the parlance of state, they call him padişah, şahañah, and his function sovereign power [*saltanat*] or sovereign law [*kânûn-ı hükûmet*]. . . In fine, both religious and sovereign power involve defending the faith and serving the Lawgiver as his deputy on earth. . . In the idiom of philosophy this concept is called “kingship” or “sovereign authority.” The one responsible for its practice is called sultan or padişah.<sup>566</sup>

According to Vâsîf the Ottoman dynasty has fulfilled this role more perfectly and more justly than any before them except the Rightly-Guided caliphs.<sup>567</sup> The passage validates Selim III as a “philosopher king” like his namesake Selim I, and is yet another assertion of Ottoman exceptionalism.

We can safely presume that the historian believed in the dynasty’s moral underpinnings as well as the bond between justice, material prosperity, and victory over enemies. Vâsîf referred frequently to this relationship in his work. To provide a clear illustration, he records in his second volume sedition in Rumelia, where petty magnates were extorting subjects. The weak are a divine trust, he warns. Not only is their protection incumbent on just sultans, but the removal of oppression and injustice begets material prosperity (*'imar-i bilâd*) and God's approbation.<sup>568</sup> In another instance he baldly declares that “willful injury for trifling advantage is completely

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<sup>566</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 6-7.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid, 1: 8-10.

<sup>568</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 151b-152a. See for further examples, ibid, 149a; MEHÂSİN 4, 301a-303b.



unsuited to the rules of proper governance (*kânûn-ı zabt-ı şevârid-i mülkiyye*).” It provokes God’s wrath and can redound on the treasury.<sup>569</sup>

Still, the administration of justice required a firm hand. Vâsîf’s ideal was an absolute ruler governing in accordance with law and reason and commanding the obedience of his subjects (*itâ’at ulû’l-emr*). Shared rule, like some sort of “commonwealth,” was out of the question. The sovereign had to conform all his affairs to holy law to ensure his subjects’ moral and physical welfare,<sup>570</sup> and this included, when appropriate, resort to force. Indeed, a ruler’s duties demanded the promotion of reform in subjects, nurturing their moral qualities and pruning wickedness like a regal gardener. The figure is apt. “Philosophers liken the world to a garden,” he explains, “and urge virtuous rulers to be informed of blossoms and plants and compare their subjects to branches.”

When a branch grows crooked one must straighten it through horticulture, otherwise it loses its original nature and comes to resemble wild brambles. People are exactly like this. The philosophers have shown that letting subjects go uncorrected causes them to exceed their natural disposition and become most intractable.<sup>571</sup>

In such circumstances force was justified. In Vâsîf’s opinion prudent states wisely liquidate these types, whether high or low.<sup>572</sup>

There is no doubt that Vâsîf merged personal and public virtue, the ethical and the political, and in this way reflects what Beydilli considers the characteristic quality of eighteenth century Ottoman political morality. Whether this approach was in fact “nothing more than

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<sup>569</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 226a-227b.

<sup>570</sup> For instance, MEHÂSİN 1, 93b. Cf. Sariyannis, “Ruler and State,” 102-103.

<sup>571</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 174b. Cf. Kınâlızâde, 452.

<sup>572</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 190-191.

making a virtue of necessity” by a weakened empire is less certain.<sup>573</sup> Ottomans were of course no strangers to expediency. But the framework of political thought in the empire, the tradition of Aristotelian and Platonic practical philosophy itself, inescapably merges the two.

Up to now we have surveyed Vâsîf’s thoughts on his own dynasty. Yet the Ottomans’ distinction between revealed and human law raises some intriguing questions. What of justice? Is it possible for non-believers to be just? Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is yes – it is possible for non-Muslim rulers to be just, at least in the imperfect sense mentioned above; for rational rule, if properly understood, will implement the same measures as revealed law, the problem being rather the authority that enforces them. In his second volume, for example, Vâsîf chronicles the recapture of Oran in Algeria by Barbary corsairs and writes that, during his Spanish embassy, he met inhabitants of this city in Barcelona and Madrid and upbraided them for accepting infidel rule. They retorted that they had done so of necessity, due to iniquity and heavy exactions – so, he quips, it is clear to what end injustice and oppression led!<sup>574</sup>

Vâsîf comments in the same way on Rumelia, critiquing its disorders with praise, of all people, of the Chinese. “Although it is not possible to govern as justly as the Rightly-Guided caliphs and imams,” he says, with quotations from scripture, “to completely abandon justice leads to disorder and ruin, following the sense of ‘Something should not be fully abandoned just because it cannot be fully realized.’”

For although the Chinese profess false religions and are a diverse people, histories attest that their realms have been stable for 3,000 years because they obey their long-

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<sup>573</sup> Beydilli, “Dış Politika ve Ahlâk,” 49.

<sup>574</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 132a-132b.

established laws and desire justice above all else. Highwaymen and other rabble do not exist in their lands and their subjects are ever healthy and prosperous.<sup>575</sup>

He then relates that the Grand Vezir, knowing that “justice is the essential cause of subjects’ tranquility and of the realm’s prosperity,” urged justice on the new governor of Rumelia, who in turn acted “with the most trifling justice” and calmed the rebellion. “Thus those who are privy to the secrets of fortune know, on the least reflection, to what extent the superiority and virtue of pure justice would reach.”<sup>576</sup>

Ottoman political morality can be brought into greater relief if we consider how the historian classified European states. To Vâsîf the empire’s political morality differed in very basic ways from that of its non-Muslim rivals. To him Europeans pursued amoral, changeable politics; they were opportunists who could not be trusted. For example, in an entry on the 1790 appointment of Azmî Efendi as Prussian ambassador, he says that European leaders are guided by “satanic insight” (*‘ukûl-ı şeytâniyye*), a sort of Mephistophelian reason which allows them to organize affairs and, by gathering advantages of a perhaps dubious nature, to expand their territories, increase revenues and population, and make their realms prosper. Not only that, but Europeans eagerly sacrifice treasure, family, and kin for trifling gains and are fragmented from putting political matters before religious ones.<sup>577</sup> His description recalls Behiç Efendi’s understanding of politics (*politika*) not in the traditional sense of *siyâset-i müdüin*, but as trickery and ruse.

Frederick the Great of Prussia embodied this brand of mercenary politics for the historian, who was likely familiar with him through sources like Ahmed Resmî’s embassy report,

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<sup>575</sup> MEHÂSÎN 4, 303a-303b

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, 301a-303a, 303b.

<sup>577</sup> MEHÂSÎN 2, 63a.

written after a 1763/64 visit to Berlin and which speaks at length about Frederick's personality, style of rule, and foreign policy.<sup>578</sup> Vâsîf regarded Frederick's achievements with something like awe, noting he won glory and territory, was an expert in mathematics and warfare, and was largely successful in his wars against Austria and Russia. He disapproved of his duplicitous means, however. We are told that Frederick considered only how to defeat his enemies, and even claimed he could not be faulted if he broke a treaty because of the advantages gained; treaties were only to be respected in commercial dealings, where war was a danger to commerce. Vâsîf therefore counsels prudence: it never permissible to trust Christian states, who will continue to undermine the terms they have signed with the empire as long as they are able.<sup>579</sup>

The Russian empress Catherine the Great, the Ottomans' chief nemesis of the late eighteenth century, affords another tableau. Vâsîf was well-informed about her, most notably that she was a German princess who overthrew her husband, Peter III, with the help of officers and the brothers Orlov, and seized power for herself over her son Paul. He also gives a sound account of the Pugachev rebellion. Not surprisingly, however, his depiction is entirely unfavorable and contains nothing like his veiled awe for Frederick: Catherine was immoral, enslaved by carnal passions, and took lovers; she was depraved and corrupted her own son, the crown prince, to divert him from rule; and she was unnatural, a female usurper who killed her husband. In short, Catherine was a paragon of iniquity.<sup>580</sup> Vâsîf consequently presents Pugachev not as a pretender to the throne, as he was in fact, but a rebel seeking to protect the Russians from wanton injustice and restore the rightful heir. Catherine's success was, to his mind, based on divine trial or *istidrâc* rather than on justice or even human reason. She was thus able to

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<sup>578</sup> See Aksan, "An Ottoman Portrait," 67-80.

<sup>579</sup> MEHÂSÎN 4, 199a. See also Frederick's obituary in MEHÂSÎN 1, 287a-287b.

<sup>580</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 1: 238, 2: 286-288; MEHÂSÎN 3, 146b-147a.

overcome Pugachev, “and, according to the sense of ‘Verily are wounds long-lived,’ reigned a long while and continued to terrorize her neighbors.” After she died, Vâsîf specifies that she went straight to hell and Russia’s power was broken.<sup>581</sup>

In the ethical tradition these Christian rulers and their regimes were imperfect. Being non-Muslim, they could not access holy law and so could not ensure their subjects twofold felicity. However, Christian kings could and at times did utilize human reason, thereby providing their subjects stability, material prosperity, and perhaps even justice. As Vâsîf suggests, though, reason without the underpinning of revealed religion and morality was hollow, little more than cheap trickery. In the tradition of the Virtuous City such realms might be “ignorant” or “erring.” Catherinean Russia probably qualified as a “vicious” regime.<sup>582</sup>

The great upheaval of the day – the French Revolution and its concept of political liberty – confronted Vâsîf and his peers with a different order of regime entirely, a species of tyranny worse than the most malicious Christian kingdom. Like Edmund Burke, the historian reviled the new French government. To him absolute rule was imperative and political “freedom,” such as it was under the Republic, a complete perversion of the natural order.

Ottoman elites generally were suspicious of the revolution. If at first some welcomed it as a possible counterbalance to their enemies, like Ahmed Fâiz Efendi, who prayed it might “spread like syphilis” in Europe, statesmen were quick to realize that the revolutionary ideology struck at the empire’s faith and sovereignty root and branch. In the early 1790s Ebubekir Râtib Efendi worried about the spread of Jacobin propaganda, the outbreak of general war, and that freedom would “metastasize like cancer.” In 1798, *reisülküttâb* Ahmed Âtîf Efendi wrote a report that

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<sup>581</sup> MEHÂSÎN 5, 2: 287-288; MEHÂSÎN 3, 147a. Cf. with Resmî, who also ascribes her success to *istidrâc*, *A Summary of Admonitions*, 51a-53b.

<sup>582</sup> Kınâlizâde, 445-446. DÎA, s.v. “Ahlâk.”

took note of the revolution's irreligion and the dangers posed thereby, blaming the lot on materialists and atheists – for him, law without religion was clearly not enough to guarantee public order and tranquility.<sup>583</sup> After the surprise invasion of Egypt that same year, the Ottoman declaration of war charged the revolutionary government with spreading sedition to the other states of Europe, devastating them, seizing people's property, and loosing basic human bonds with their “freedom.”<sup>584</sup>

Vâsıf's earliest references to the revolution appear in his third volume in a section entitled “Revolution in France.” This entry reappears in his unfinished chronicle of the Egypt campaign and in a printed copy in his drafts, which may suggest he was preparing it for wider dissemination, perhaps as a pamphlet. Interestingly, Vâsıf was less concerned with possible threats to the empire's faith than to its social order. Lewis claims that contemporary Ottomans were most shocked by the revolution's secularism,<sup>585</sup> but the historian, at least, was well-able to envision regimes based on revealed law, human law, or some combination of the two. The new

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<sup>583</sup> The most detailed work is Sendesni's *Regard de l'historiographie ottomane sur la révolution française et l'expédition d'Égypte* (Istanbul, 2003). Also Zeki Arıkan, “Fransız İhtilâli ve Osmanlı Tarihçiliği,” in *De la Révolution française à la Turquie d'Atatürk: la modernisation politique et sociale. Les lettres, les sciences et les arts* (Istanbul, 1990), 85-100; Faruk Bilici, “La Révolution française dans l'historiographie turque (1789-1927),” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* (1991): 539-549; Zafer Gölen, “Reisülküttap Raşid Efendi'ye Göre İhtilal Sonrasında Fransa'nın Politik Yaklaşımları,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 14 (2000): 12-15; Bernard Lewis, “The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey: Some Notes on the Transmission of Ideas,” *Journal of World History* (1953): 105-125; Yeşil, *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, 167-175, 195-196; idem, “Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes: Ebubekir Ratib Efendi's Observations,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and North African Studies* 70 (2007): 283-304.

<sup>584</sup> MEHÂSİN 4, 200a-200b.

<sup>585</sup> Lewis, “Impact of the French Revolution,” 123.

French regime posed a danger because, to him, it had neither ruler nor law. It was quite literally lawless.<sup>586</sup>

Vâsîf introduces the revolution, through which the French “brought the world into chaos,” by saying it was inspired by the English colonies in the New World. This situation excited the French rabble and they “all unscrupulously discussed the advantages of independence (*serbestlik*) and being without a ruler (*tahte ’l-hüküm olmamak*),” thinking that freedom and equality would bring prosperity. They did not consider the benefits of being under sovereign rule, he says, but preferred to be plunged into tyranny (*istibdâd*) and anarchy (*teferrüd*).<sup>587</sup> Such as they were, these “perverse” designs were nonetheless concealed by certain “universal causes (*esbâb-ı kevnîyye*).” The kingdom, bankrupt, took on loans and economies which the inhabitants felt unjust. They therefore invoked a custom one hundred years in abeyance and convened the various estates in a parliament (*meclis*). Vâsîf writes that the king was unable to suppress or placate this rising and that the rebels, confident in their new powers, tried to remedy the realm’s ills and form a new government that would prevent tyranny. The king capitulated. However, “the disdain of absolute government and the demands of the state’s honor would not bear the burden of shared power,” and Louis tried to escape to Vienna but was captured and killed. The rebels then grew powerful through *istidrâc* and forced most other states into obedience to “the hellfire of rebellion which forms this new regime.”<sup>588</sup>

To emphasize the revolution’s complete perversity and immorality in terms an Ottoman reader would grasp, Vâsîf added a marginal note that compares the republicans to the ancient Persian cult of Mazdak. “The false sect (*mezheb*) that the French created is like that of the

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<sup>586</sup> This also explains why Vâsîf was less repelled by Napoleon, who, he felt, had restored stability and monarchical authority to France. MEHÂSİN 4, 269a-270b.

<sup>587</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 196a-196b; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 4b-5a; BOA.Y.EE 90/33.

<sup>588</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 196b-197b; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 5a-6a.

perverted philosopher Mazdak, which arose in the reign of Kaykubad b. Firuz b. Yazdegird,” he explains. Mazdak subscribed to a radical belief in the equality of high and low, and as the rabble are vulnerable to evil, many converted, indeed even Kaykubad was led astray and drove his subjects into error, putting objectors to cruel torture. It was Kaykubad’s son that broke the spell. When Kaykubad ordered the crown prince to conform, the son explained to his father that common ownership of goods and women confused lineages and made inheritance claims invalid. It would make rulership and the administration of justice (*riyâset ü siyâset*) impossible, which restrain subjects and secure obedience to the divine law. He then laid proofs against Mazdak. Kaykubad recognized the truth of his words and executed the prophet.<sup>589</sup> Any of Vâsîf’s peers would have agreed that this was a wise course of action.

### ***Conclusions***

Ahmed Vâsîf’s work reveals a deeply philosophical view of government, one which resonated still among Ottoman elites in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This view begins with the Persianate tradition of practical philosophy. For the historian political problems were essentially moral problems, in that, in practical philosophy, politics was an extension of individual ethics and all depended on the stabilizing presence of an all-moral, all-just, absolute sovereign and his representatives. This discourse had a long and storied history as well as an established vocabulary; “world order,” the crucial operative phrase, tied together human nature, the polity, justice, and realm’s physical and metaphysical welfare such that any disorder, any disruption therein, was inevitably couched in moral terms.

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<sup>589</sup> MEHÂSÎN 3, 197b; MEHÂSÎN (EGYPT), 6b. In the *Shahname* a Zoroastrian priest presents these arguments rather than the crown-prince. *Shahnameh: the Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York, 2006), 679-683.



As I have attempted to demonstrate, Vâsîf's stance was also part of a larger discourse in late eighteenth century Ottoman intellectual life over the law, justice, ethical probity, political morality, and order. Contrary to what some have argued, these subjects attracted much attention and were far from settled as the empire stood on the cusp of the modern period. Just as Vâsîf and his colleagues conflated the ethical and political, they saw the empire's malaise as a basic rupture in the divinely ordained order, an order any attempt at reform had to restore. In this way, the moral order of the Ottoman universe gives us an adequate framework for Chapter Five, where we will more closely assess eighteenth century political reform.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Eighteenth Century Ottoman Reform

Traditionally, scholars have viewed eighteenth century Ottoman reform as hopelessly ad hoc, obstructed by cultural blinkering and a collective failure of will. The Ottomans were too insouciant, too complacent, too self-satisfied and blinded by bigotry to adopt anything that Christendom could offer. This may be partly true in its way. Certainly, at least, the dynasty's supposed exceptionalism convinced many that a return to victory required only a return to proper ways and true belief. It is also true that the eighteenth century elite was riven by faction. Yet we must take into account that reform and Ottoman discussions thereof, even during Selim III's so-called "New Order," were thoroughly enmeshed in the traditional concepts of world order and balance. It is crucial to look more closely at some of these discussions, and especially what was meant by "New Order."

This chapter examines how Vâsîf and his cohort conceptualized political and military reform up to the turn of the nineteenth century. As argued above, one sees an essential continuity in the idea of order or *nizâm*. There was no Ottoman *crise de conscience*, as Kafadar has said.<sup>590</sup> Reformist or not, Ottomans shared similar metaphysical assumptions and saw reform primarily as a restoration of balance, with debate focused on issues within the greater concept of world order like the nature and relevance of *kânûn-ı kadîm* and the use and legitimate application of reason. Vâsîf's own position evolved with the discourse over his career, and notably expanded

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<sup>590</sup> Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1998): 43. Cf. Edhem Eldem, "18. Yüzyıl ve Değişim," *Cogito* 19 (1999): 189-199.

the amount of agency he was willing to grant reformers. He could bend, but not yet break, the fundamental concept of an immutable world order.

### ***“World Order” and the Problem of Reform***

The ideal of “world order” permeated Ottoman thought in the early modern period but exerted perhaps its most powerful influence in conditioning the way statesmen and intellectuals thought about political reform. As Hagen observes, *nizâm-ı âlem* described a primordial order that had the force of a natural law, endowed with a “sacral aura.” In theory, it could be observed but not altered. “The order,” he says, “can be disrupted but not changed. The alternative is not a different order, but chaos.”<sup>591</sup> Reform, then, by definition, was a restoration of the status quo.

What Ottomans could debate were the reasons behind and possible solutions to the empire’s apparent weakness. They sought answers from inside the system, because, in their opinion, they already had a successful template – the institutions and practices that supported the universal moral order, *nizâm-ı âlem*, which in turn girded the empire and ensured its survival. Ottoman elites for the same reason largely supposed that problems were internal rather than proof of European superiority in power or institutions.<sup>592</sup> Indeed, the governing ideology of the empire could not envision Europe’s superiority in any real sense, or any alteration in the primordial universal order.

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<sup>591</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 62. See also Öz, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi,” 29-30.

<sup>592</sup> Ali Akyıldız, “Osmanlı Bürokratik Geleneğinin Yenileşme Süreci: Yenleşmeyi Zorunlu Kılan Nedenler,” in *İslâm, Gelenek ve Yenileşme* (İstanbul, 1996), 129-131; Eldem, “18. Yüzyıl ve Değişim,” 190-192, 195-197; Kafadar, “Myth of the Golden Age,” 37-48. İlber Ortaylı, “Osmanlı’da 18. Yüzyıl Düşünce Dünyasına Dair Notlar,” in *Osmanlı Düşünce Dünyası ve Tarihyazımı* (İstanbul, 2007), 95-96.

The first discussions of reform began in the sixteenth century with inklings of a “decline” in the empire, when elites tried to identify sources of political disorder in advice treatises called, variously, *nasihatnâme*, *siyâsetnâme*, or *islahatnâme*. These writings became a distinct literary genre by the seventeenth century and have attracted much attention. In fact, they form one of the few well-lit crannies in Ottoman intellectual history.

Initially, scholars interpreted advice literature as ruminations on actual political disorder. In this view, Ottoman statesmen were describing “symptoms” of a very real disease, imperial decline, and prescribing remedies to restore the empire’s institutions to a classical form reached during the “Golden Age” of Süleyman I.<sup>593</sup> Such is no longer the case. No longer do we assume the literature reflects a real state of decline, for instance. Rather, as Douglas Howard, Cemal Kafadar, and others have argued, the tracts represent on one hand intense intellectual debate within the elite over questions of reform, in response to the empire’s changing political, social, and moral fabric.<sup>594</sup> Mustafa Âli’s scathing indictment of the bureaucracy or Kâtib Çelebi’s prosaic discussion of the empire’s military-fiscal complex must therefore be understood as part of distinct political and intellectual milieux; or, in Howard’s words, “a crucial dialogue among

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<sup>593</sup> For example, Bernard Lewis, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline,” *Studia Islamica* 1 (1962): 71-87; Pál Fodor, “State and Society, Crisis and Reform, in 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Mirror for Princes,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 40 (1986): 217-240; A.C. Barbier de Meynard, “Considérations sur l’histoire ottomane d’après un document turc,” in *Nouveaux mélanges orientaux* (Paris, 1886), 52-81.

<sup>594</sup> There is a sizeable literature on this topic, notably Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, “Ottoman Nasihatname as a Discourse Over Morality,” in *Mélanges professeur Robert Mantran: études réunies et présentées par Abdeljelil Temimi* (Tunisia, 1988), 17-30; Doug Howard, “Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of Asian History* 22 (1988): 52-77; idem, “Genre and Myth in the Ottoman Advice for Kings Literature,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans*, 137-166; Kafadar, “Myth of the Golden Age”; and Ferguson, 81-116. Fleischer’s *Bureaucrat and Intellectual* was the first monograph to examine this problem in the work of an individual, Mustafa Âli.

Ottoman intellectuals of the post-Suleymanic age concerning the bases of Ottoman sovereignty and legitimacy.”<sup>595</sup>

On the other hand, reform treatises suggest that the notion of decline grew largely out of Ottoman historical consciousness itself. The literature reveals, for one, an awareness of social malaise, an anxiety that something had gone badly wrong, which was then transmitted to Western intellectual discourse as “decline.”<sup>596</sup> As Kafadar has it, this consciousness of decline was also accompanied by nostalgia for “a past which was believed to have been the locus classicus of Ottoman ‘universal order,’ *nizâm-ı ‘âlem*,” upheld by the empire’s institutions and *kânûn*. Indeed, in his opinion the contrast between a better past and a corrupt present formed the “major axis” of Ottoman historical thought from the sixteenth century onward.<sup>597</sup> Reform unsurprisingly focused on restoring institutions in accord with *kânûn-ı kadîm*, an approach typified by the efforts of Murad IV, Mehmed IV, and the Köprülü vezirs, a “dynasty” of seventeenth century military strongmen.

From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, Ottomans thinkers often illustrated this perception of reform by invoking the “biological metaphor,” likening the social order to an organic entity and its different groups to the four elements, the four humors, or to human faculties. Kınâlızâde, for example, compared the “four pillars” to the elements of nature – earth, air, fire, and water – and claimed the body politic should be maintained through a balance of

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<sup>595</sup> Howard, “Ottoman Historiography,” 54.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid*, 73-77.

<sup>597</sup> Kafadar, “Myth of the Golden Age,” 38-40.

these groups just as the human body is maintained through a balance of elements. The administration of justice (*siyâset*), to him, like medicine, is how harmony is achieved.<sup>598</sup>

In later centuries Kâtib Çelebi and Naîmâ too used the biological metaphor. In the tract *Düstûrî'l- 'Amel*, Kâtib Çelebi added the humoral theory to the elements, to which he then integrated the human faculties and an Ibn Khaldûnian notion of dynastic life cycles. Like Kınâlızâde, he agreed that the proper functioning of society depended on a proper balance among groups in the body politic, and that the reestablishment of harmony could be enacted by the administration of justice. Naîmâ for his part adopted these ideas from Kâtib Çelebi, echoes of which are perceptible well into the nineteenth century.<sup>599</sup>

The biological metaphor communicates two things about how Ottoman intellectuals saw social order and political reform. First, it implies that disorders in the body politic were reversible – that, given proper ministrations, there was always a possibility of treating and extending the life of the dynasty. Second, the metaphor makes it clear that the function of politics and the administration of justice was foremost to uphold or restore the ordained order. As Berkes has observed, Ottomans invariably couched reform in terms of upholding *nizâm* or order, even if they might have disagreed on the correct solution. Most discussions from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century in this way enjoined the restoration of “ancient practices” or *kânûn-ı kadîm* as the necessary course of action.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Kınâlızâde, 479-480. Tadaşi Suzuki, “Osmanlılarda Organik bir Yapı Olarak Toplum Görüşünün Gelişmesi: Osmanlı Sosyal Düşünce Tarihinin bir Yönü,” *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi* 14 (1987): 374-377.

<sup>599</sup> *Düstûrî'l- 'Amel*, 122-138; *Târih-i Na 'îmâ*, 1: 21-25. See also Suzuki, 377-392; Hagen and Menchinger, 99-100.

<sup>600</sup> Berkes, 8-19. On *nizâm* and *kânûn-ı kadîm*, especially in terms of political reform, see also Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 67-71; Mehmet Öz, “Kânûn-ı Kadîm,” 59-77; idem, “Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Siyasi Düşüncesi,” 29-30, 31-32; Savaş, 88-89, 109-110; Yılmaz, “Osmanlılarda Siyaset Düşüncesi,” 47-52; idem, “Kavramlar,” 35-38.

Yet Ottoman attitudes were not so facile as lamenting the “Golden Age” or dogmatically insisting on a return to ancient practice, at least as fixed concepts. Praise for Süleyman was at times tinged with criticism, and likewise did intellectuals single out Mehmed II, Bayezid II, and Selim I to praise or censure contemporary policy and rulers. In a similar manner, “ancient practice” could mean very different things to different authors. Indeed, Kafadar maintains that the sheer size and diversity of Ottoman reform literature speaks to the empire’s vigor rather than its decline, a conclusion still to be tested for the eighteenth century.<sup>601</sup> If the past formed the template for action, it was a highly flexible one.

The traditional view of eighteenth century reform has also been challenged in past decades. As noted, this older view supposes the elite’s efforts were stymied by cultural blinkering and a naive longing for the “Golden Age.” It follows that their failure to meet the challenge of Europe’s military ascendancy resulted from a lack of consensus but also conservative reaction, which mobilized opposition against reformers in revolts in 1702, 1730, 1740, and most latterly against Selim III in 1807.<sup>602</sup>

More recently, scholars have tried to understand reform in terms of the empire’s internal dynamics and a highly conflicted response to military defeat. It is correct to say that the main impetus for reform was defeat and loss of territory and that it was initially limited to the military. It is also correct, in general, that opposition came from lower-ranking ulema and Janissaries, who objected in religiously charged language. However, as Beydilli and Şakul have shown in two

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<sup>601</sup> Kafadar, “Myth of the Golden Age,” 39-48; idem, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” 43, 62-65. His insights seem valid for the eighteenth century, as when Ahmed Resmî criticized Süleyman in a 1771 essay for expansion into Yemen as a way to argue against unrealistic territorial ambitions, Parmaksızoğlu, 532-533. Ahmed Vâsîf for his part idealized Selim I’s justice and conquests, no doubt to encourage his namesake Selim III, MEHÂSİN 5, 1: 9-10.

<sup>602</sup> This view is summarized in Akyıldız, 129-130; Avigdor Levy, “Military Reform and the Problem of Centralization in the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1982): 227-249; Üstün, 9-60 passim.

important articles, the scope of reform expanded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century to include many aspects of economic and social life. Indeed, Şakul claims to see in Selim's reforms the empire's first attempt at social engineering, and in his reformers the first ideologues.<sup>603</sup>

Likewise, Levy observes that this was not necessarily a battle between "conservatives" and "reformers," or between "reactionaries" and "progressives." Reform threatened vested interests in the Ottoman elite. Those interests voiced their opposition in cultural and religious terms, in what became a deadly ideological contest with a shared, symbolic vocabulary.<sup>604</sup>

While certainly to be preferred, this interpretation wants further elaboration. For one, it does not tell us how Ottomans envisioned reform or how, as Kafadar points out for an earlier era, their positions could be and were quite diverse. There was surely as much "intense intellectual debate" over reform in the eighteenth century as in the sixteenth and seventeenth, for example, if not more, which scholars are only now beginning to explore. Similarly, the interpretation undervalues Ottoman thinkers' cultural conditioning and continuity in concepts like order and balance. It is unlikely that we can so neatly separate the ulema's and Janissaries' defense of material interests and their use religious rhetoric. Nor can one simply discount the Ottomans' belief in a universal order or the innate superiority of their institutions – in the exceptionalism that pervades our sources – in shaping general approaches to reform.

How much influence these ideas carried during Ahmed Vâsîf's day – particularly the meaning of *nizâm* in the empire's European-style reforms – remains an open question. Is there for example a direct connection, as some have claimed, between the traditional Ottoman world

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<sup>603</sup> Beydilli, "İslâhât Düşünceleri," 25-26; Şakul, 118-123, 149-150.

<sup>604</sup> Levy, 227-229. For a later period Erşahin, 37-41.



order and the “New Order (*Nizâm-ı Cedîd*)” of Selim III?<sup>605</sup> If so, what was this relationship? Did Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals conceive of these reforms as new in the fullest sense – as a new universal dispensation to replace the old?

As we have already seen, some scholars point in this direction. For example, Gottfried Hagen argues that *nizâm-ı âlem* had lost its relevance by the early eighteenth century. If seventeenth century authors used “world order” to invoke a threat of chaos, the redress of which was to be sought in restoring social harmony and “ancient practice,” eighteenth century reform looked outside the traditional order to the purely political order mentioned in Chapter Four, *nizâm-ı devlet / mülk*. Thus, he says, İbrahim Müteferrika could “[parade] the entire arsenal of traditional concepts before the reader, only to argue his reform agenda which is either unrelated or outright opposed to the Ottoman state tradition.” World order, in his opinion, was devoid of meaning by the early eighteenth century, and little more than a rhetorical ploy.<sup>606</sup>

Others scholars suggest in an interesting parallel that morality in Ottoman political thought yielded diminishing returns by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Ferguson, for example, posits that the concept of justice became abstracted in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while for Sariyannis the “moral interpretation” of politics, focused on the ruler’s personal virtue, gave way in the seventeenth century to more pragmatic outlooks. Although he grants that the Ottoman ethical tradition never died out, and perhaps revived in the nineteenth century, eighteenth century writers ignored moral issues.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Görgün, 187-188. See also Yüksel Çelik, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd’in Niteliği ve III. Selim ile II. Mahmud Devri Askerî Reformlarına Dair Tespitler (1789-1839),” in *Nizam-ı Kadim'den Nizam-ı Cedid'e*, 571-572; Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 191-198; DİA, s.v. “Nizâm-ı Cedîd”; Yeşil, *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, 139, 163, 233.

<sup>606</sup> Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” 80-81.

<sup>607</sup> Respectively, Ferguson, 95-98; Sariyannis, “Princely Virtues,” 134-141. Yeşil posits a similar shift away from personal morality to a concept of “order,” but beginning with Ahmed Resmî

Such conclusions are premature. For one, the impression that the ethical tradition receded in the eighteenth century only to revive in the nineteenth is problematic, if not outright unlikely, and challenged by Chapter Four's conclusions. More probably, these authors' findings reflect the fact that none surveys the eighteenth century. We can, for example, easily read Ahmed Vâsîf's words on a rumored drought and famine in 1791, mentioned in Chapter Two, within the traditional discourse on the ruler's morality: as a rebuttal of accusations that the sultan's iniquity had caused the heavens to dry up.<sup>608</sup> More important, though, is the plain fact that Ottomans continued to draw on concepts like "world order," the "four pillars," and "ancient practice" in their discussions of reform, either explicitly or tacitly, into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even if "world order" was reduced to rhetoric, it retained its power as an ideal and influenced how Ottomans thought and spoke of reform.

In its conceptualization eighteenth century Ottoman reform is best described as a form of restoration. Christopher Tuck notes that reform can encompass such widely different activities as innovation, adaptation, restoration, or imitation and is shaped by certain ways of thinking about the world.<sup>609</sup> Ottoman elites shared assumptions about the empire and its place in a larger divine order, which constrained the scope of their thinking. Although they may have agreed something was wrong, and even that change was needed, there is no reason why they should have preferred imitation or innovation over other methods. "It may be clear that one has lost," writes Tuck. "It is often far from clear why one has lost, or what an individual defeat might say about one's longer

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and Süleyman Penah Efendi in the late eighteenth century. *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, 163 and note 327. If there was in fact a shift, it may have been from the morality of the ruler to the morality of society as a whole, following the example of the Kâdızâdeli. My thanks to Gottfried Hagen for this suggestion.

<sup>608</sup> TOP nr. 1638, 10a-10b.

<sup>609</sup> Christopher Tuck, "'All Innovation Leads to Hellfire': Military Reform and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31 (2008): 468-469. Others have made comparable points. Akyıldız, 130; Eldem, 195-197; Ortaylı, 96.

term military potential.”<sup>610</sup> Whether ulema, scribe, or military man, eighteenth century Ottomans had yet to question the validity of the traditional moral universe but recognized the need for reform – at least in the sense of restoring balance and returning the realm to its dominant position.

### ***Reform as Restoration: the 1770s and 1780s***

Political reform in the early part of Ahmed Vâsîf’s career remained cloaked in a traditional garb. This is not to imply any lack of debate, for the issues were heated to the point of danger. Reform was no “polite exercise,” as Beydilli says, but posed a mortal peril to its advocates even before it could be put into application.<sup>611</sup> Instead, elites focused on how to repair what they saw as a disordered realm and restore the empire’s supposed exceptionalism. In these discussions the most pressing questions were two: the precise nature and value of *kânûn-ı kadîm* and, closely related, the extent to which human reason might be applied to solve political problems.

The 1768-1774 Russian-Ottoman war is as always a good place to begin, for it supplied the necessary psychological shock to force elites to reflect seriously. The empire’s abysmal military showing and, perhaps more importantly, the loss of the Crimean peninsula spurred them to consider major changes, leading to a fevered burst of debate.

Dürri Mehmed Efendi’s 1774 *Nuhbetü'l-Emel* offers a cautious opinion on “ancient practice” and what must be done to right the empire. At his work’s core is a sense of disorder, particularly among the military forces, subjects, treasury, and servitors, which for him were the realm’s foundations.<sup>612</sup> Any solution had to restore these pillars. For example, Dürri was

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<sup>610</sup> Tuck, 498-500.

<sup>611</sup> Beydilli, “Islâhât Düşünceleri,” 28.

<sup>612</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 282b; Atik, 70.

concerned about the infiltration of unqualified outsiders into the army, which corrupted its effectiveness and raises expenses. He also urged that taxes be strictly canonical and not exacted from the indigent. Treasury officials should in turn spend this money properly and avoid venality, overseen by the sultan himself.<sup>613</sup> His solutions hence focused in large part on the restoration of justice, in the sense of balance.

*Nuhbetü'l-Emel* shows a high level of what Cornell Fleischer once called “kanun-consciousness.”<sup>614</sup> The term *kânûn* appears frequently throughout the work and makes it clear that to Dürri the past was the proper template for action. “The way is to follow ancient practice,” he says in one passage, “and, for the military corps, to serve sincerely and respect career paths and experts according to the model (*kânûn*) of the late Sultan Süleyman.”<sup>615</sup> But Dürri displayed flexibility in that he was willing to accept a modicum of historical change. Using an Ibn Khaldûnian framework, he recognized that the empire must adapt to the “nature of the age” and enact reforms during peacetime to preserve the realm, to restore its health by, as it were, “letting the bad blood.”<sup>616</sup>

Canikli Ali Paşa’s *Tedbîr-i Cedîd-i Nâdir* evinces perhaps even more of a conservative air in urging a return to *kânûn-ı kadîm*. “Today cannot be compared with yesteryear,” he fretted. “Before there were honorable commanders, effective officers, and other leaders; now there is a dearth of able men.”<sup>617</sup> Likewise, Ali felt that neither bravery nor adherence to *kânûn* prevailed. He idealized the past, notably the reigns of Süleyman and Mehmed II, arguing that the empire was more successful when rulers took an active role in war and as paragons of virtue and

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<sup>613</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 286a-287b; Atik, 71-72.

<sup>614</sup> Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 8, 102, 158.

<sup>615</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 287b. Further, 12b (*kânûn-şinâs olanlar*); 13a (*şer ‘ ü kânûn tabîk oluna*), 14a (*kânûn-ı kadîm üzere*).

<sup>616</sup> TOP nr. 1438, 3a-5b; Atik, 70-71.

<sup>617</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. nr. 104b, 16b; Özkaya, 144-145.

learning. He was particularly disturbed by what he saw in his own day as a breakdown in competence and the blurring of professional lines. The sultan should only appoint those who are qualified and must keep all in their proper station, he insisted. He therefore proposed purging “outsiders,” even those on the Janissary muster rolls.<sup>618</sup>

Canikli Ali wanted to restore proper order, *nizâm*, and singled out the neglect of *kânûn* as the main cause of Ottoman defeat:

During the war, the statesmen neither acted wisely nor achieved victory over the enemy; they did not respect earlier practice in policy or battle nor did they meet the enemy like-for-like. Indeed, their neglect of proper practice was the entire reason for our failure.<sup>619</sup>

Like Dürri Efendi, however, Ali granted that the Ottomans might take certain changes into account. Warfare, for one, had changed since Süleyman’s day. The empire’s enemies fought with cannons and muskets rather than swords and lances and, this being the case, he cited weaponry as a major reason for Ottoman defeat and advised new tactics and technology:

Those who are ignorant of war may claim that earlier battles were not like this. Yet the enemy does not fight as he once did but slowly adopts tactics, fighting not with lance or sword but cannon and mortar. This has occurred many times in warfare up to now, and many times have we matched the enemy. So I maintain that in this era we must use wiles against the enemy’s wiles, cannon against his cannon, and mortar against his mortar. Our recent trouble in battle has occurred because we have failed to act thus.<sup>620</sup>

Ali here outlines a principle known as *mukâbele bi’l-misl*, a “meeting like-for-like” or “reciprocation,” which became progressively important to Ottoman intellectual life in the

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<sup>618</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. nr. 104b, 28a-30b; Özkaya, 150-152, 156-164.

<sup>619</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. nr. 104b, 60b; Özkaya, 167.

<sup>620</sup> ÖN nr. H.O. nr. 104b, 65b-66a; Özkaya, 170.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Meaning to imitate and use an enemy's tactics and technology against them, reciprocation must be understood within the context of wider legal discussions of tradition (*sunna*, Trk. *sünnnet*), innovation (*bid'a*, Trk. *bid'at*), and what constituted acceptable change where deviation from norms might pose a threat to God's intentions for the Muslim community. According to jurists, *bid'a* was the opposite of *sunna*, practices for which there was no precedent in the Prophet's time. However, not all change was condemned and most upheld a basic distinction between "welcome" and "illicit" change. Reciprocation figured into this discussion because it raised key theoretical questions about reform: how can human reason be applied to political problems? Also, to what extent is innovation justified? Where does one draw the line between legitimate change and illicit, sinful innovation (*bid'a*)?<sup>621</sup> Many elites claimed there was leeway for military reform. Canikli Ali, for example, associated "reciprocation" with *kânûn-ı kadîm*, because for him the use of reason was valid and a constant element of the empire's past success. This opinion was not uncommon during the period, which sources often reinforce with scripture and the hadith, "War is a trickery (*al-ḥarbu khud'a*)."<sup>622</sup>

But not all agreed. To others, military reform verged on sinful innovation and unbelief. Fazlızâde Ali provides a clear (if extreme) example of this logic in his flat rejection of human reason (*'akl*) and the practically unlimited scope he gave to sinful innovation, *bid'a*, which were

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<sup>621</sup> On reciprocation see Uriel Heyd, "Ottoman 'Ulemâ," 74-77; Ahmet Özel, "İslam Hukuku ve Modern Devletler Hukukunda Mukabele Bilmisl / Misilleme / Karşılıklılık," *İslam Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5 (2005): 49-66; Şakul, 118-121. On innovations, EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Bid'a"; Ferguson, 98-101; İnalçık, "Adâletnâmeler," in *Osmanlı'da Devlet, Hukuk, Adâlet*, 80-81; and Öz, "Kânûn-ı Kadîm," 66.

<sup>622</sup> As Heyd says, "to learn from the infidel enemy would not constitute a religiously illicit innovation (*bid'at*) but would be an application of the legitimate maxim of *muḳâbele bi'l-misl* or reciprocation, that is fighting the enemy with his own weapons." "Ottoman 'Ulemâ," 74-75. But see also Hagen, "Legitimacy and World Order," 67, n. 49, which, invoking Weberian "traditional law," describes new laws as the reinstatement of *kânûn-ı kadîm*.

thought to arise from the carnal soul, a vain trust in reason, and man's own conceit. Fazlızâde argued that Muslims should model their behavior on the Prophet and his Companions alone. Moreover, using reason for anything other than affirming God's omnipotence – including a belief in worldly causes – was a grave sin. People who “meddled” with creation wrongly assumed that they could manipulate God, which to him was blasphemy and unbelief.<sup>623</sup> For Fazlızâde and his ilk, the proper answer to the empire's ills was not “reciprocation” but a return to the unadulterated example of the early community.<sup>624</sup>

Still other eighteenth century Ottomans moved in the opposite direction, toward a broader application of reason in political reform. İbrahim Müteferrika, for example, seems to have dispensed with the concept of *kânûn-ı kadîm*. To him the art of war had changed completely. Old ways and institutions were obsolete and the only way to restore the empire was to emulate Christian powers and meet them like-for-like. As Muslims, he claimed that the Ottomans had a superior bravery and natural advantage. Christians being cowards with no recourse but reason, and lacking a valid religious law, he called on his peers to inform themselves of the enemy's

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<sup>623</sup> Kurz, 98-100, 183-196.

<sup>624</sup> Naff, “Linkage of History and Reform,” 127-129; Kurz, 98-99, quoting Fazlızâde: “Not to act according to the Sunna of the Messenger and in the way of the chosen Companions, and also to perform things that are not permissible according to Sharia – that is, to perform actions which have neither emerged from the noble Messenger nor from the Companions and the followers nor from the authoritative founders and expounder of the Islamic law, thinking, ‘[These are] ritual duties,’ in particular, to perform innovations that have been brought forth by the erring groups – all this is a tremendous transgression and a great shamefulness. Therefore it is necessary not to do that which the Lord of the Sharia – upon him be prayer and peace! – did not do, whatever it may be, be it related to the ritual duties or to the transactions between men or to the traditions or to the clothing or to eating or to drinking, be it in relation to oneself or to another, be it with regard to the affairs of the world or to the affairs of the hereafter. And it is necessary to do everything he did. And in no way must one turn away from the Companions of the Messenger.”

“new military order” and methods, for if they studied the new warfare, adding their innate bravery to reason, the enemy would be overcome.<sup>625</sup>

These sentiments – a widened scope for reason and muted emphasis on the past and *kânûn* in favor of *mukâbele bi'l-misl* – reappeared in some later works, including an anonymous tract, perhaps written by Müteferrika, and after the 1768-1774 war in Ahmed Resmî's iconoclastic *Hulâsatü'l-İtibâr*.<sup>626</sup> Still, the prevailing discourse was one of restoration. The elite generally looked to a nebulous Golden Age for models, so that, Vâsîf tells us, in 1777 Darendeli Mehmed Paşa was groomed for the grand vezirate in the hope he would prove a “long-lost Köprülü” – a leader who would reestablish order, perpetuate *kânûn*, and put the empire to rights. Abdülhamid agreed to the plan and promoted him.<sup>627</sup>

How did Vâsîf conceptualize reform at this period? The historian's account of Halil Hamid Paşa offers no small insight into his early career, as he spent much ink in praise of the vezir's reforms. “It is clear to those who study history,” he opens his first volume, again championing Ottoman exceptionalism,

that while [our sovereigns] are subject to some of the sovereign afflictions that are among the greatest particular qualities of Islamic dynasties, they have always immediately after been successful in putting the situation to rights [*nizâm-ı esbâb-ı hâle muvaffak*] and, indeed, have become even more powerful and mighty than before [*belki sâbıkından evfer ü akvâ kudret ü miknete mâlik olageldikleri...*]<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> *Usulü'l-Hikem*, 146-148, 151-152, 164-165; in *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 4: 1894-1899.

<sup>626</sup> Unat, “Bir Islahat Takriri,” 107-121. Unat suggests the authorial connection, 107, n. 3. A *Summary of Admonitions*, 24b, 35a-35b.

<sup>627</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 49b.

<sup>628</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 5b.



The disorder caused by the 1768-1774 war required the attention of the empire's leaders, he says, but, through their stupidity and neglect, nothing was done. The sultan thus appointed Halil Hamid Paşa "for the sake of the order of the realm [*hifzen li-nizâmi devletihi*]" and the latter set to work.<sup>629</sup>

Vâsîf's preface extols the Grand Vezir at length and especially his reorganization of the military. Halil Paşa sought to recover lapsed land grants, we are informed. He raised salaries through rational economies without burdening the treasury, brought market prices under control, extirpated venality, "closing the door of bribery" so that ministers did not even accept gifts from fear of punishment, and reimposed sartorial laws the neglect of which had caused a great many "abominations." He also introduced a 2,000-man light artillery corps and new cannons to "meet the enemy like-for-like, as it is among the secondary causes of victory for every state to acquire weapons to match those of its enemy."<sup>630</sup> Finally, Vâsîf lauds Halil Paşa for reestablishing the empire's martial vigor, which had fallen into desuetude. "The empire is ever accustomed to gaza and jihad," he writes, "and if ever there is a momentary halt in them, as may be, it is among our excellent practices to prepare for action, abandon inactivity, and train in the military sciences." The Grand Vezir hence issued orders to cultivate these sciences, to drill, and to prepare for a possible campaign. In light of these efforts, the historian calls his patron the "*sâhib-i mia*" of prophetic wisdom and quotes a famous hadith, "The Lord God will send to this community at the turn of each century someone who will restore religion."<sup>631</sup>

The title "*sâhib-i mia*" deserves closer comment, for it evokes a very old discourse on reform. According to Landau-Tasseron, the tradition of a centennial reformer, "one who

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid, 5b-6b.

<sup>630</sup> "Her devlet hasmının edevâtına mukâbil edevât tedârük etmek esbâb-ı zâhiriyye-i zafer ve galebeden olduğuna binâen mukâbeleten li'l-hasm..." Ibid, 7a-7b.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid, 8a-8b.

restores” or more commonly *mujaddid* (Trk. *müceddid*), dates to the early centuries of the Islamic community as an honorific title and may have had eschatological dimensions.<sup>632</sup> What is more important here is that it expresses a certain understanding of reform. Etymologically, *mujaddid* derives from the Arabic root J-D-D and can encompass both innovation and renovation, which are “diametrically opposed concepts in Islamic terms.” Landau-Tasseron demonstrates that over time the term acquired the sole meaning of renovation or revival. The *mujaddid* was supposed to stop religious decay – to eliminate sinful innovations or *bid’a* and restore “those ideas and practices which had been held by the Prophet and which were abandoned after his death.”<sup>633</sup> As the *sâhib-i mia*, then, Halil Paşa was supposed to be a very particular type of reformer.

Vâsıf’s utilization of this discourse should not surprise us. There are indications that many Ottomans of the time shared eschatological expectations of a restorer or even savior (*mahdi*) who would renew the empire and repair its dominance. Halil Paşa proved a logical choice, if only because his term as Grand Vezir coincided with the turn of the thirteenth hijri century (1197-1199), and Ottoman thinkers and poets of the next decades would proclaim Selim III and Mahmud II *müceddid* and *mahdi*, as well.<sup>634</sup> The historian’s association of Halil Paşa with the *müceddid* indicates, at least rhetorically, a claim that the vezir was poised to restore the empire to its proper practices and pure religion (*dîn ü devlet*).

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<sup>632</sup> Ella Landau-Tasseron, “The Cyclical Reform: a Study of the Mujaddid Tradition,” *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79-117.

<sup>633</sup> Landau-Tasseron, 79-84, 107-113. See also Seyfettin Erşahin, “Westernization, Mahmud II, and the Islamic Virtue Tradition,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (n.d.) 23: 46-47; Heyd, 76.

<sup>634</sup> Çelik, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd’in Niteliği,” 569; Cem Dilçin, “Şeyh Galip’in Şiirlerinde III. Selim ve Nizam-ı Cedit,” *Türkoloji Dergisi* 11 (1993): 209-219; Erşahin, 46-47; Gawrych, 107-108; Heyd, “Ottoman ‘Ulemâ,” 76. Ali Yayıcıoğlu, “The Provincial Challenge: Regionalism, Crisis, and Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire (1792-1812) (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008), 310-311.

While not discounting the rational reorganization of the military, then, Vâsîf clearly presumed a universal order and the need to reenforce social boundaries and *kânûn-ı kadîm*. We see this further in his support of sartorial laws, intended to distinguish the realm's estates, and his belief that a breakdown in these laws caused “abominations.” Just so, Vâsîf held that infiltration of “outsiders (*nâ-ehil / bîgâne*)” had corrupted the military corps and provincial timar cavalry. In its sacred duty of jihad, he said, the empire required cavalry and supported them with crown land. Yet outsiders, subjects of non-military background, had usurped many of these grants and were unable to serve – the timars had to be returned to their functions according to *kânûn-ı kadîm*, he insisted.<sup>635</sup>

The moral dimension of these views emerges more clearly when Vâsîf places piety, rational reform, and worldly success side-by-side. He endorsed the public reading of religious texts, for example, or what he calls “spiritual provisions (*rûhânî tedâriükât*),” because, as he has it, “secondary causes (*esbâb-ı zâhiriyye*)” are realized through God’s aid alone. These were “moral causes” to complement the latter: since the empire’s large scale military reforms depended on divine favor, moral causes will secure God’s approbation and victory.<sup>636</sup> Another illustration of the combination of the worldly and spiritual, of rational and moral reform, comes in the historian’s comments on a transfer of men into the Grand Vezir’s new light artillery corps. We read that inwardly these soldiers were pious and “measured the time of purgatory till the last judgment.” Outwardly, however, they were like Ḥayy ibn Yaqzân, Ibn Ṭufayl’s autodidact who,

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<sup>635</sup> MEHÂSİN 6, 67b-68b. Also *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 177, 191-193.

<sup>636</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 42b-44a. This would tend to corroborate a shifting emphasis to the morality of society as a whole. See note 608 above.

as an allegory for the human intellect, ascended through higher and higher levels of contemplation to discover ultimate truth.<sup>637</sup> Piety and reason worked in tandem.

Another important source for Vâsîf's early views on political reform is his 1784 *risâle*, treated in Chapter Two. Although the concerns are familiar, his conclusions here are perplexingly different, as he appears to reject the mechanism behind Halil Paşa's reforms, *mukâbele bi'l-misl*. Vâsîf starts this tract by contrasting European and Ottoman soldiers. He denies that European means are appropriate to the Ottomans, and categorically rejects the conscription of peasants or orphans, insofar, he says, as Muslim soldiers cannot be compelled to fight but depend for success on unity and devotion.<sup>638</sup> This sort of conscription, incidentally, violated the social principle of *hadd*, allowing in much-feared "outsiders." Yet Vâsîf also denies that circumstances had materially changed since the empire's Golden Age. "When Ottoman armies were winning," he muses, "the enemy's weapons were no different. If the weapons they use today are known, their organization follows the rules of war. When our soldiers attack them, all their organization, strategy, and means of intimidation should come to naught." Rather than tactics or technology, he blames the empire's failures on leadership and divine trial.<sup>639</sup> The essay is thus quite different from the rest of his first volume, more reminiscent of Fazlîzâde Ali's repudiation of innovation and reason.

One must be cautious in reading too much into the 1784 *risâle*'s static vision of warfare, as it contradicts the historian's other statements. As seen, Vâsîf elsewhere advocates

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<sup>637</sup> *Mehâsin* (İlgürel), 173-174. Sajoo writes that "intuition and reason are reconciled with Revelation" in Ḥayy ibn Yaqzân. *A Companion to Muslim Ethics*, 22. Also Davidson, 146-149.

<sup>638</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 130a-130b.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid*, 131a-131b.

“reciprocation,” and to him the enemy's arms and tactics were a key consideration.<sup>640</sup> He was likewise willing to admit changes in historical conditions at this period, most notably mocking Canikli Ali for giving too much credit to soldiers and commanders, or, as he says, “arrogating to the military a station and bounds at variance with the temper of the age [*efrâd-ı ‘askeriyyeye mizâc-ı vakte muğâyîr merâtib ve hudûd ta’yîn*].”<sup>641</sup> Most striking, though, is that Vâsif ends the essay by wholly brushing off these reservations and extolling Halil Paşa's reform program.<sup>642</sup> Although it is possible he is for some reason interpreting *kânûn* in a very strict way but still giving limited scope to *mukâbele bi'l-misl*, it is also possible he is foisting on readers an argument less representative of his own attitudes than of those held at court. In this way the essay may intimate opposition to Halil Paşa's faction from vested interests, a danger which led in the following year to the vezir's dismissal, murder, and denunciation as “a traitor to faith and country.”<sup>643</sup>

### ***Nizâm-ı Cedîd: Reform under Selim III***

Up to this point we have spoken of reform almost wholly in terms of military tactics and technology. This changed with the reign of Selim III, who directed a period of intense restructuring known to posterity as the “New Order” or *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*, and which differed from earlier efforts in an important way – namely, an expansion of reform into the economy, administration, financial bureaucracy, and, some suggest, social engineering. With the “New Order” one also sees a shift in the tone of debate, at once more unyielding and combative, as its

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<sup>640</sup> For example, MEHÂSİN 1, 7b; MEHÂSİN 4, 131a.

<sup>641</sup> MEHÂSİN 1, 214a.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, 131b-132b.

<sup>643</sup> Berkes, 67, drawing on Uzunçarşılı, *Sadrazam Halil Hamid Paşa*,” 244: “hâin-i dîn ü devlet ve azlem-i ‘ibâd.” One of Abdülhamid's rescripts uses the same phrase, MEHÂSİN 1, 189a.

partisans tried to make reform the only legitimate discourse and brand their opponents as idiots, boors, miscreants, and other manner of low-level scum.<sup>644</sup>

While most scholars date the beginning of the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* to 1792, when the reforms began, the die was already firmly cast by 1791. Shortly after his accession, Selim convened a general council at the imperial palace's Revan pavilion and solicited some 22 or 23 proposals from attendees, which subsequent events allowed him to enact with impunity. At Maçin, Beydilli observes, army and Janissary officers had publically sworn that their forces were ineffective and bound themselves, perforce, to the coming program. The boycott gave the sultan and his allies incontrovertible evidence for the military's collapse and the need of reform, which they fully exploited as leverage against their opponents.<sup>645</sup>

The rest of the story is well-known. Over the ensuing decade, with the aid of a small camarilla of reformers, the so-called *atabegân-ı saltanat*, Selim introduced new regulations and regular drill, opened western-style military academies, established embassies in major European capitals, and founded a "New Order" corps to counterbalance the Janissaries funded by a separate exchequer. However, Selim failed to build consensus. Opposition increased particularly from the Janissaries and lower-ranking ulema, who were threatened by his military and financial initiatives, so that by 1805 the reforms faced heavy criticism veiled in religious rhetoric as

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<sup>644</sup> Akyıldız, 131-133; Beydilli, "İslâhât Düşünceleri," 25-30; Çelik, "Nizâm-ı Cedîd'in Niteliği," 565-568; DİA, s.v. "Nizâm-ı Cedîd"; Fatih Yeşil, "Nizâm-ı Cedîd," in *III. Selim: İki Asrın Dönemecinde İstanbul*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz (İstanbul, 2010), 103-121. Şakul claims reformers tried to turn the *nizâm-ı cedîd* into a "social movement." See 118-124, 149-150.

<sup>645</sup> Beydilli, "İslâhât Düşünceleri," 30; Çelik, "Nizâm-ı Cedîd'in Niteliği," 573-574; DİA, s.v. "Nizâm-ı Cedîd."

innovation, infidel, and unjust. Selim was deposed in 1807 during the Kabakçı Mustafa rebellion and later murdered along with many collaborators.<sup>646</sup>

What is of concern here, however, is not why the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* failed but what it meant to eighteenth century Ottomans, both supporters and opponents. The “New Order” indeed represented much that was new. Contemporary elites increasingly recognized the novelty of modern warfare and expanded “reciprocation” to new lengths to match their enemies. In the same vein, many placed less stock in *kânûn-ı kadîm*. There are even hints of a willingness to experiment with the “four pillars,” the constituent parts of world order itself. But the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* was not new in the fullest sense. Ottomans had yet to question the validity of the metaphysical order and reform remained wedded to the idea of restoration; this was not a new universal *nizâm* supplanting the old.

### ***The Meaning of Nizâm-ı Cedîd***

As an intellectual concept the Ottoman “New Order” has never been rigorously analyzed. This is unfortunate, because in certain ways our interpretation of the period’s attitudes toward reform depends on how we understand it.<sup>647</sup> The main obstacle in evaluating the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* is the term’s ambiguity. In Ottoman Turkish *nizâm* has any number of meanings; although its primary sense is “order,” it can refer more concretely to a system or method, hence a regime, military corps, or legal regulations. As said in Chapter Four, it is even problematic in the sense of “order” and can take on, alternately, metaphysical (*nizâm-ı ‘âlem*) or strictly worldly and political

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<sup>646</sup> The most accessible study of this period is Stanford Shaw’s *Between Old and New*. See further DİA, s.v. “Nizâm-ı Cedîd”; Üstün, 108-145; Yayıoğlu, 294-427; A. Yıldız, “Vaka-yı Selimiyye.” The term *atabegân-ı saltanat* is from *Târih-i Cevdet*, 8: 147.

<sup>647</sup> Görgün argues that the intellectual baggage of *nizâm* is crucial to understanding why the reformers of Selim’s era applied the term “new order” to the program, 187-188. Üstün does not explore the conceptual framework behind the reforms.

connotations (*nizâm-ı devlet / nizâm-ı mülk*).<sup>648</sup> Current scholarship mostly begs the question of its significance, though.

According to Beydilli, the phrase “new order” is attested in sources as early as the seventeenth century vezirate of Köprülü Fâzıl Mustafa Paşa (1689-1691), where it referred to standardization of the poll tax on non-Muslims. By Selim’s reign, the phrase had acquired the more specific sense of a set of comprehensive reforms which would address the modern needs of the bureaucracy and the army, establishing a “new order” to supplant the old. To Beydilli, the concept thus expresses an opposition to the established and traditional regime, *nizâm-ı kadîm*, though he does not venture what sort of order this was.<sup>649</sup>

Other scholars have argued more stridently that the “new order” heralded a new mentality and rupture with the past. Tezcan, for example, argues that the term *nizâm-ı cedîd* indicates a break with the “ancien régime (*nizâm-ı kadîm*)” and old ways, and that contemporary Ottomans realized as much. Referencing Ömer Fâik Efendi’s 1804 treatise *Nizâmü ’l-Atîk fî Bahri ’l-Amîk* (*The Old Order in the Abyss*), which he describes as a “eulogy” for the old order, he states that “Ottoman learned men of the early nineteenth century were themselves very aware of the novelty of the New Order.”<sup>650</sup> Çelik claims *nizâm-ı cedîd* can be read similarly. Not only was it a “making anew,” in his opinion, but a withdrawal from the universal claims of *nizâm-ı âlem* and

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<sup>648</sup> One might well start with a thorough etymological study. For example, older Arabic seems to lack the concreteness found in some Persian, Turkish, and modern Arabic definitions, focusing on an abstracted concept of order. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8: 3034. Cf. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Urbana, IL, 1994) 1147; F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (Springfield, VA, 2010), 1409-1410. If Meninski and Sâmî are representative of seventeenth and nineteenth century Ottoman usage, respectively, one sees a similar contrast between the abstract and the concrete, *Thesaurus Linguarum Orientalium Turcicae-Arabicae-Persicae* (İstanbul, 2000), 3: 5203; Sâmî, *Kâmûs-ı Türkî*, 1463.

<sup>649</sup> DİA, s.v. “Nizâm-ı Cedîd.” See also Enveri Ziya Karal, *Selim III’ün Hatt-ı Hümayunları: Nizam-ı Cedit, 1789-1807* (Ankara, 1946), 29-30.

<sup>650</sup> Tezcan, *The Second Empire*, 193-194.



a new order at odds with the old and “ancient practice” (*kânûn-ı kadîm; nizâm-ı kadîm*). In Çelik’s case, at least, it is clear that the new order was supposed to be a metaphysical one.<sup>651</sup>

It is well to discount one possibility out of hand – that *nizâm* refers strictly to a regular military corps, namely Selim’s new-style army. It is true, and cause for some confusion, that the new-style army was known popularly as *nizâm-ı cedîd* during Selim’s lifetime and thereafter.<sup>652</sup> To all appearances this was a neologism; *nizâm* in this sense was probably either a metonym for the reforms as a whole or the truncated version of a larger verbal phrase. In some cases the corps is called “the regular soldiery (*mu’allem ‘asker*),” which accords with Redhouse’s explanation that *nizâm* as military corps stands for the phrase “military formation (*nizâm-ı ‘askerî*).”<sup>653</sup> In any event, usage in sources makes it clear that *nizâm-ı cedîd* was, as Beydilli specifies, much more comprehensive in scope.

*Nizâm* can also signify a set of regulations or a legal code, especially in the form *nizâmnâme* and the plural *nizâmât*. This sense appears in dynastic chronicles and Vâsîf’s work, where it refers explicitly to the new codes promulgated by Selim to implement his reforms and as a synonym for *kânûn*.<sup>654</sup> For example, discussing the sultan’s new exchequer in his third volume, he uses *nizâm-ı cedîd* and *kânûn-ı cedîd* to refer specifically to the code (*nizâmnâme*) regulating the reform.<sup>655</sup> In another passage he mentions “regular soldiers drilling according to the new

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<sup>651</sup> Çelik, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd’in Niteliği,” 571-572.

<sup>652</sup> For an example, MAC, 33; Wilkinson, 222. This definition appears in nineteenth century dictionaries like James Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon* (İstanbul, 2001), 2088; and Sâmî, *Kâmûs-ı Türkî*, 1463.

<sup>653</sup> In which case the full phrase might be *nizâm-ı cedîd-i ‘askerî*. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon*, 2088. Cf. MEHÂSİN 3, 51a, 191b, 244b-245a; Barbier de Meynard, “Considérations sur l’histoire ottomane,” 72.

<sup>654</sup> As per Redhouse and Sâmî. Cf. Steingass, “*nizâmât*.” In later times, according to Heyd, *nizâm* was increasingly used as a synonym for *kânûn*. *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, 168.

<sup>655</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 76a.

regulations [*mu‘allem ‘asker kânûn-ı cedîd üzere icrâ-yı fûnûn-ı darb u harb*].”<sup>656</sup> This meaning – *nizâm* as a set of legal regulations – obtains elsewhere, as when he describes reforms “in accordance with the new regulations heretofore promulgated [*mukaddemce verilen nizâm-ı cedîd mûcibince*]” and “at present, according to the requirements of the new regulations [*elhâletühazihi muktezâ-yı nizâmât-ı cedîdeye nazaren...*].”<sup>657</sup> However, for Vâsîf *nizâm-ı cedîd* definitely had other, wider connotations. Hence we see him refer to Selim’s reforms in other situations as the “new organization (*tertîb-i cedîd*)” and “new order” the branches of which extended into administrative and other matters.<sup>658</sup>

That *nizâm* stood for order in the strictly worldly sense – the order of the dynasty or realm (*nizâm-ı devlet / nizâm-ı mülk*) – and eventually attached to the reform program itself is an idea worth close consideration. Textually this sense is found early on. Müteferrika seems to have used it in precisely this fashion, as a rational way of arranging the empire’s political and military affairs unrelated to or within the overarching metaphysical order. In *Usûlü’l-hikem*, he describes how Europeans, relying purely on human reason, had developed innovations in tactics, strategy, and weaponry that represented a “new military order (*nizâm-ı cedîd-i ceyşiyye*).” With these innovations the art of war had changed. Henceforth, any ruler who heeded this new art, great or small, would prevail; any ruler who neglected it would lose.<sup>659</sup> Vâsîf too referred to reform in

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid, 29a.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid, 74b, 76a.

<sup>658</sup> Respectively, MEHÂSİN 2, 21b, 154b-156b. Vâsîf describes a reform of provincial judgeships as part of the *nizâm-ı cedîd*: “bu esnâda râbıta-gîr-i karâr olan nizâm-ı cedîd feru‘âtından olduğuna binâen...”

<sup>659</sup> *Usûlü’l-hikem*, 146-148, 151-152. Reichsmuth notes the importance of *nizâm* in this work, and speculates, incorrectly, that Müteferrika was the first to use the term *nizâm-ı cedîd*. “Islamic Reformist Discourse in the Tulip Period (1718-1730): Ibrahim Müteferrika and His Arguments for Printing,” in *Learning and Education in the Ottoman World* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1999), 157-161.

these terms and at least one modern scholar suggests that necessity forced eighteenth century reformers to think increasingly of a centralized state rather than in universal terms.<sup>660</sup>

The exact meaning of the “New Order” is a problem that exceeds the scope of this study. Recognizing novelty as well as continuity, Fatih Yeşil probably comes closest to a satisfactory definition of the term as “a state of orderliness or new laws/regulations that would ensure the order of civil life, which is subject to reconstruction.”<sup>661</sup> Yet it suffices that *nizâm-ı cedîd* does not, to all appearances, signal a rupture between past and present and old and new in the sense of a new universal moral order. As argued in Chapter Four, Vâsîf and his colleagues clung fast to that concept. They continued to analyze the empire’s troubles within the traditional ethico-political framework and conceptualized reform above all as an act of restoration. However, in Selim’s reign the edifice of world order began to show definite signs of wear. Amid the period’s upheavals and quarrels, we can perceive strain and the first fissures.

### ***Reform and its Discontents***

Under Selim III the elite’s metaphysical assumptions remained largely unshaken. The men of the “New Order” agreed that the empire had lost its ability to adapt to the age but respected the traditional shape of reform, continuing to think defeat due more to a divergence from past practices than European innovation. Only gradually did their solutions expand from the military into financial, administrative, and social spheres.<sup>662</sup> The sultan himself symbolized the desired revival, furthermore. Named after a world conqueror, his namesake Selim I, we know that at

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<sup>660</sup> Görgün, 187-188.

<sup>661</sup> Yeşil, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd,” 103. However, he is not clear about whether the new order was a rational, political reordering or a new metaphysical order. See for example idem, *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, 139, 163.

<sup>662</sup> Beydilli, “İslâhât Düşünceleri,” 30; DİA, s.v. “Nizâm-ı Cedîd.”

least some saw in Selim a restorer, the *sâhib-i mia*, or perhaps the *mahdi* or Muslim savior.<sup>663</sup>

Still, among elites there was great diversity of opinion. The reality of reform was complex, and it is more productive to understand their views along a spectrum rather than simply as “reformer” and “conservative,” or even “supporter” and “opponent.”

The proposals submitted to Selim after the 1789 Revan council are a good place to begin, because even at this stage they reveal uncertainty among Selim’s allies about how to proceed. Although the authors repeated much of what İbrahim Müteferrika had advised in creating a new European-style corps to counterbalance the Janissaries, who refused to accept modern drill, they could not agree to a general approach.<sup>664</sup>

Much of their uncertainty surrounded “ancient practice,” *kânûn-ı kadîm*, and its value as a model for political reform. Vâsîf’s friend and colleague Tatarcık Abdullah Mollâ, for example, took a cautious tack in his proposals and favored appealing to the old corps through the language of “ancient practice.” The Europeans have technical advantage in warfare, he argues, as opposed to the Janissaries whose disorder arises from their disregard of old ways. He recommends that they be pressed to accept modern drill and encouraged that in doing so they would respect proprieties, and regain their old superiority.<sup>665</sup> The implication appears to be that Abdullah reckoned *kânûn-ı kadîm* a part of reciprocity. To him “ancient practice” was valuable, at least so long as it could serve Selim’s policies.

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<sup>663</sup> See note 635 above.

<sup>664</sup> On the council and its contributors, DİA, s.v. “Nizâm-ı Cedîd.” Üstün treats these reformers too categorically. They do not, on close inspection, seem to have had a “conscious and clearly articulated agenda for positive change” (149), but disagreed over minor and major points. Cf. Yaycıoğlu, 310-311.

<sup>665</sup> Öz, “Kânûn-ı Kadîm,” 75. Cf. original text in Enver Ziya Karal, ed., “Nizâm-ı Cedîd’e Dâir Lâyhalar,” *Tarih Vesikaları* 1 (1941-42): 417-420.

Still other proposals argued for ancient practice only when it met the needs of the day. If not, it could be partially or entirely replaced. According to Mustafa Râsih Efendi, the former *rikâb kethüdâsı* and later ambassador to Russia, the Janissaries ought to be returned to *kânûn-ı kadîm* through their chain of command. However, he qualifies that “those approaches that are ancient practice and still applicable now ought to be strengthened. Other regulations may have worked when first instituted, but they must, due to changes over time, be reformed to suit today’s needs.”<sup>666</sup> Mustafa Reşid Efendi extended Râsih’s argument to its logical conclusion to assert that ancient practice was wholly obsolete. He writes that over time the realm’s institutions had “decayed (*inhilâl-pezîr*),” and a new approach was needed to fix them. “In view of the current troubles we must reform *kânûn* anew,” he concludes. “The empire requires a new order [*nizâm-ı cedîd*].”<sup>667</sup> Incidentally, this passage corroborates the theory that *nizâm-ı cedîd* meant not just regulations or a specific reform program but the rational rearrangement of the empire’s worldly affairs.

Reform tracts from the late 1790s and early 1800s reflect a similar diversity of opinion among statesmen and thinkers. Beydilli and Şakul divide these into three groups: those that publicize, those that defend, and those that criticize the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*. As earlier, this literature focused on what had gone wrong and how to effect a restoration, above all in terms of ancient practice and the legitimate scope given to “reciprocation” and reason.

As an example of a work of publicization, Mahmud Râif Efendi’s 1798 *Tableau des nouveaux règlements de l’empire Ottoman* parroted the government’s official line and presented the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* in glowing terms. Selim’s circle appears to have intended this work to introduce his reforms to European audiences and had it translated into French, illustrated,

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<sup>666</sup> Öz, “Kânûn-ı Kadîm,” 75. Cf. Karal, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd,” 2 (1942-43): 107-108.

<sup>667</sup> Öz, “Kânûn-ı Kadîm,” 76. Cf. Karal, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd,” 2 (1942-43): 104-105.

printed, and distributed to foreign envoys. In it, Râif Efendi makes a stark textual and pictorial contrast between the old (*kadîm*) and new (*cedîd*). Above all, he claims, the reforms remedied a decay in Ottoman institutions that was caused by neglect of Süleyman I's statutes or *kânûnnâme*. He also expresses a belief in the importance of a foreign language, French, and that modern sciences could only be acquired outside of the empire.<sup>668</sup>

Küçük Seyyid Mustafa Efendi's *Diatribes de l'ingénieur Séid Moustapha* provides a similar perspective. Like Râif's *Tableau*, the sultan's coterie translated *Diatribes* into French and disseminated it to European envoys as a defense of the reforms. According to Şakul, Seyyid Mustafa's most important contribution to reformist discourse during the period was the importance he attached to *mukâbele bi'l-misl*. While there are questions over the tract's authorship, indeed Seyyid Mustafa's very existence, the author, like Râif, laments popular attitudes toward the positive sciences and their use in modern warfare. To be sure, he argues, Ottoman weakness and European superiority stem from this attitude. The Ottomans suffer defeat because they do not benefit from European know-how and fail to observe reciprocity, which has been distorted by "la classe des idiots et superstitieux" and turned from a worldly into a religious issue. For Seyyid Mustafa knowledge and reason are universal. What is more, scientific dominance can migrate, and he therefore locates the basic dynamism of civilizations in reciprocity, which becomes something closer to a historical law than the transfer of technology. The empire's problem was not, then, a matter of recreating old institutions but of

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<sup>668</sup> Beydilli, "İslâhât Düşünceleri," 34-35; Şakul, 125-127. Cf. text in Kemal Beydilli and İlhan Şahin, eds., *Mahmud Râif Efendi ve Nizâm-ı Cedîd'e Dâir Eseri* (Ankara, 2001), 121-245. The original Turkish title was *Nümûne-i Menâzım-ı Cedîd-i Selîm Hânî*.

restoring the precept of *mukâbele bi'l-misl*, over and above the objections of wrongheaded boors who interpreted reform as sinful innovation (*bid'a*).<sup>669</sup>

Among publicists of reform, we may also mention the name of Ebubekir Râtib Efendi (d. 1799). A chancery scribe and ambassador to Vienna, Râtib Efendi was heavily influenced abroad by contemporary European political theory, and attempted to convey these ideas in a large embassy report (*sefâretnâme*). The centrality of order – *nizâm* – in this tract is quite striking. To Râtib, “*nizâm*” and the “new order” of European regimes, which his master Selim III was attempting to imitate, meant above all a political or administrative order that might be rationally controlled. He too was aware that Christian kings lacked a revealed law and depended on reason, and at times refers to *nizâm* as rational law (*kânûn*) that will secure order. However, Râtib also argues that the Ottoman “new order” was in fact a restoration of the old. Dating the realm’s decline to the late sixteenth century, he indicates, in a tacit assertion of reciprocation, that European regimes had merely borrowed from originally Ottoman practices.<sup>670</sup> Fatih Yeşil has pointed out that Râtib’s understanding of order is closely related to contemporary debates over the boundaries of human agency (*irâde-i cüziyye*), mentioned in Chapter Two, and which during Selim’s reign were being pushed into realms like finance and social organization.<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Beydilli, “İslâhât Düşünceleri,” 34-35; Şakul, 127-131. See text in *Diatribes de l’ingénieur Séid Moustapha sur l’état actuel de l’art militaire, du génie et des sciences à Constantinople* (Paris, 1810); Kemal Beydilli, “İlk Mühendislerimizden Seyyid Mustafa ve Nizâm-ı Cedîd’e Dair Risâlesi,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12 (1987): 387-479. Hammer-Purgstall once claimed that Seyyid Mustafa never existed and that the tract was written by the dragoman Yakovaki Argyropolous at the behest of the *reisülküttâb*, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (Oxford, 2002), 60, n. 43.

<sup>670</sup> Yeşil, *Ebubekir Râtib Efendi*, esp. 229-240.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-234. Yeşil’s main goal is to trace, through Râtib, the introduction of a modern episteme into the empire – an intellectual rather than institutional way of viewing modernity. Râtib was not unchanged by his travels, and evinces an interesting blend of continuity and novelty, in one telling passage blending traditional Ottoman views of statecraft with European cameralism (229-230).

Reformers also published polemical defenses of Selim’s program, propaganda like Ubeydullah Kuşmanî’s *Zebîre-i Kuşmânî* and Vâsîf’s *Muhassenât* that mocked opponents, exploited fears of Russia and earlier defeats, and co-opted the language of scriptural Islam to refute arguments that the reforms offended religion. Kuşmânî, for one, had pointed words for the Janissaries. Like Seyyid Mustafa, he too viewed reciprocation as a historical process and continuous transfer of knowledge. Şakul posits that Kuşmânî was a Nakşbendi-Müceddidî sufi, a politically active order that supported religious renewal, and other Sufi contemporaries like Galib Dede advocated reciprocation in this way, as a religious principle, by reason that the divine plan encompassed all creation – not just Muslims – and so supplied endless sources of knowledge. A person might borrow equally from Pharaoh as from Moses. To do otherwise was unbelief, as it rejected the divine plan.<sup>672</sup> In *Muhassenât*, as we shall see, Vâsîf also belittled his opponents and invoked *mukâbele bi’l-misl* as a universal principle.

These treatises and polemics raise an important question. Who were the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*’s opponents, Seyyid Mustafa’s “idiots” and Vâsîf’s “blockheads”? What were their arguments? We should take care not to dismiss them as straw men or to presume out of hand they were a “small minority of extremists,” as some scholars do.<sup>673</sup> In fact, we can say a certain amount about their ostensible reservations and why they resisted reform.

Some Ottomans clearly opposed the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* viscerally and outright. Tuck observes a twofold trend in attitudes toward reform in the late eighteenth century. As we have seen, the period’s continuing crises led certain elites to give greater latitude to *mukâbele bi’l-*

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<sup>672</sup> Beydilli, “İslâhât Düşünceleri,” 35-37; Şakul, 135-140; A. Yıldız, 11-21. Yıldız has published this work along with another by Ebubekir Efendi as *Asiler ve Gaziler: Kabakçı Mustafa Risalesi* (İstanbul, 2007).

<sup>673</sup> Çelik, “Nizâm-ı Cedî’in Niteliği,” 579-580. While Üstün is right to criticize the view that opposition to reform was the result of inherent cultural conservatism (ex. 78-86), there was, at the same time, a very real and heated debate over reform’s religious legitimacy.



*misl*, while at the same time, and perhaps in reaction, contemporary ulema hardened their stance on innovation. Reform to them undermined the faith, and veered into heresy, unbelief, and treason.<sup>674</sup> Such people not unexpectedly objected to the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* in religious rhetoric and, as indicated in the reform tracts themselves, charged that Selim’s initiatives were sinful innovation, *bid’a*. We should note that such served to disqualify Selim as a *müceddid*, who, it was thought, protected tradition against innovation. It is also of interest that after the sultan’s 1807 deposition, a number of high-profile scholars signed an affidavit (*hüccet-i şer’iyye*) denouncing the reforms as “unprecedented illegal innovations and reprehensible infidel imitations.”<sup>675</sup>

Vâsîf reveals the presence of such arguments, which are mostly absent from the written record, when he occasionally refers to opponents who charged Selim with innovation, or who tried to dissuade him through “frigid asceticism and perverse fanaticism.”<sup>676</sup> A partial copy of his *Muhassenât* also suggests that, if this sort of religious rhetoric initially came from disaffected ulema, it was aped by members of the military. In this copy marginalia left by a reader supply Janissary rebuttals, which, though crudely, use the same rhetoric of “innovation” and insinuate the new-style army and its European drill injured the faith. “Infidels work through trickery,” says the imagined soldier. “This is effective, but we are Muslims and trickery does not become a

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<sup>674</sup> Tuck, 484-487. This argument is expressed in the phrase *man tashabbaha bi-qawmin fa-huwa minhum*: “He who imitates another people becomes one of them.” Heyd, “Ottoman ‘Ulemâ,” 70-77.

<sup>675</sup> *Târih-i Âsım*, 2: 46-49; Heyd, “Ottoman ‘Ulemâ,” 69; A. Yıldız, 457-472, with intriguing comments on whether this affidavit justified military force in politics in order to oppose “innovations.” Another anonymous tract charged that Selim’s intention was not to reform Islam but “convert” it, *ibid*, 181-183.

<sup>676</sup> “Zühd-i bârid ve ta‘assub-ı fâsid ile...” MEHÂSİN 2, 110b, 133b, 154b.

Muslim.”<sup>677</sup> Another fascinating note not only avows that hand-to-hand combat is the only proper way to fight but that newer technology has, in fact, caused Ottoman defeats: “Fooling with weapons is infidel business and to a Muslim infidel business is unbelief... They are the reason for our defeat, you see.”<sup>678</sup> Whether these men really had religious qualms with Selim’s reforms we cannot know, but it is significant that Vâsîf and his reader dismiss their concern as baseless and insincere. The *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* threatened their livelihood and they likely feared a loss of pay. Or, as the imagined Janissary has it: “the zeal of Islam is good but is powerless without a ‘zeal for coin.’”<sup>679</sup>

A very different sort of critic emerges in the “New Order” literature from the center of power – reformers, some of them in government. Critics-cum-reformers generally sympathized with Selim but questioned the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*’s trajectory, especially its focus on worldly goals. Ömer Fâik Efendi was one of this number. A lower-level scribe, Fâik tells us that he attended a 10 June 1804 meeting organized by *sırkâtibi* Ahmed Fâiz Efendi, another of Vâsîf’s colleagues, which appears to have been a “seminar” to push the reform program on the palace bureaucracy. In response to his persistent questions, Ahmed Fâiz ordered Fâik to put his thoughts on paper in what eventually became the tract *Nizâmü’l-Atîk fî Bahri’l-Amîk*. Yet Fâik dared not publish the tract, feeling it deviated from sanctioned views and might endanger him.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> ““Askerimizin bunda cevâbı budur ki küffre tâifesi işini hîle ile görür ki üste çıkar lâkin biz Müslümânız, Müslümâna hîle yakışmaz derler.” BOA.HAT 48106-A, ninth note.

<sup>678</sup> “Ve kimi dahi cevâbında cenk alâtiyla oynamak gâvûr işidir, Müslümâna göre gâvûr işi küfürdür derler. Yâ tüfenk ve...top ve humbarayı Müslümânlar isti‘mâl edeyorlar dendidke ah işte nusret olmadığına sebep bunlardır...” BOA.HAT 48106-A, eleventh note.

<sup>679</sup> “Bu bâbda cevâbları gayret-i dîniyye güzel lâkin gayret-i akçeviyye olmadıkça gayret-i dîniyye kavî olmaz...” BOA.HAT 48106-A, twelfth note. Cf. MAC, 57-65. On resistance to the reforms from Janissaries and others, Üstün, 146-192; Yayıcıoğlu, 304-317.

<sup>680</sup> Ahmet Sarıkaya, ed., “Ömer Fâ’ik Efendi, *Nizâmü’l-Atîk*” (senior thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1979), 3-5. On Fâik and the work, Beydilli, *İslâhât Düşünceleri*, 37-42; Şakul, 145-148; A. Yıldız, 183-184.

*Nizâmü'l-Atîk* addresses thirty-two separate issues, twenty-three devoted to outward order and nine to moral issues. Fâik believed that the empire needed military as well as all-purpose reform. However, he was disturbed by what he saw as wrongheaded foreign and domestic policies in addition to the luxury, conspicuous consumption, and caprice of Selim's camarilla.<sup>681</sup> Above all, he was convinced that the reforms, as they stood, did not sufficiently address causes that would secure God's aid, and his main criticism of the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* was that it valued only reason and neglected the spirituality of the "old order." Fâik drew attention to so-called "spiritual measures (*tedbîrât-ı ma'neviyye*)," including the public reading of religious texts, improving the quality of religious education, and governing justly according to holy law, arguing that the realm would prosper and defeat its enemies with these reforms. *Nizâmü'l-Atîk* in this way replicates common views of Ottoman exceptionalism and raises a subject that was quite sensitive to the program's opponents.<sup>682</sup> Fâik himself, while uneasy, did not reject the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*, though. The work is not a "eulogy of the Old Order," as Tezcan alleges, but a guarded critique of the new.<sup>683</sup>

Mehmed Emîn Behîç Efendi, who wrote the tract *Sevânihü'l-Levâiyih* in 1803, was another *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* discontent. Originally from Rusçuk, Behîç served in various bureaucratic posts and was executed in 1809 as a result of his alignment with Âlemdar Mustafa Paşa, the author of an 1807 counter-coup and Mahmud II's first Grand Vezir. Behîç too granted that the realm required thorough reform and that the Ottomans were supremely capable of achieving this. In this way, he contrasted them with Europeans, who were markedly inferior, and the Russians,

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<sup>681</sup> Şakul, 146-148.

<sup>682</sup> For contents see Sarıkaya, 40-41; Beydilli, "Islâhât Düşünceleri," 37-39; A. Yıldız, 183-184. Fâik's "moral reforms" parallel Vâsîf's *rûhânî tedârikât*, MEHÂSİN 1, 42b. He also notes *sûrî ve ma'nevî tedbîr* in MEHÂSİN 4, 202b.

<sup>683</sup> Tezcan, *The Second Empire*, 194, n. 8.

whom he called “stupid brutes incapable of learning the simplest matter in ten years, even should they be clobbered on the head.” If they, the Russians, had succeeded, the empire certainly could. Behîç also impressed that the basis of the “New Order” and reform was holy law, and therefore stood against the Janissaries, who likened the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* to becoming infidel. However, he was not fully satisfied with the reforms and joined Fâik Efendi in criticizing what he saw as the debased state of religious life and education.<sup>684</sup>

### ***Ahmed Vâsîf on the “New Order”***

Vâsîf sided in debates on the “New Order” with men like Tatarcık Abdullah, Reşid, Râif, and Fâiz Efendi – with Selim’s circle, of which he was a part – and defended the reforms at length in his work. Indeed, he is one of our most extensive sources for the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*. But Vâsîf was no party hack. His work analyzed Ottoman “decline” and offered solutions that, if not wholly original, took tentative steps away from an immutable world-picture. Vâsîf still envisioned reform as a moral and material restoration of the empire’s exceptionalism. However, he increasingly recognized the novelty of his era, and elevated “reciprocation” to the foundation of worldly reform: a universal, rational, historical, and even legal precept that must guide the empire to a new political and military order and which, when combined with the dynasty’s innate virtues, would reestablish Ottoman dominance.

The 1787-1792 Russian-Austrian-Ottoman war was a point of departure in Vâsîf’s views on reform. Henceforth, as Selim’s principal mouthpiece he began to concede that a new science of war had emerged in Europe, based on mathematical precision, and that the empire’s traditional

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<sup>684</sup> Ali Osman Çınar, ed., “Es-Seyyid Mehmed Emîn Behîç’in Sevânihü’l-Levâyih’i ve Değerlendirmesi” (master’s thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 1992). Also Beydilli, “İslâhât Düşünceleri,” 42-53; Şakul, 141-145; A. Yıldız, 183-184.

methods were obsolete. An extended digression in his second volume introduces these changes. After the Ottoman rout at Remnik, Vâsîf says the empire's soldiers were no match for Austria's and Russia's new-style levies, who were trained, obedient, and versed in the "science of warfare, which is to say, the new organization (*tertib-i cedîd*) that is part of the mathematical sciences."<sup>685</sup> Vâsîf reminds readers that warfare is "the attempt of various armies to dominate each other, to inflict injury, and to invent various means to achieve this end," with the goal of victory. War may be aggressive or defensive, and its modes vary due to differences between the combatants, time and place, topography, and arms.<sup>686</sup> The point was that warfare had changed; the dynasty needed to change with it.

Vâsîf's position is striking when compared to his earlier work. Now, unlike in his 1784 essay, he conceded that war was changeable and that Europeans had developed a better approach. Contemporary warfare is not what it was in the past, he argues, and it is outwardly impossible to defeat an enemy without equal or superior organization, which varies from era to era. The Prophet, for example, fought in his time with a sword, and though he might have crushed his opponents with a prayer, he instead used patience and even strategy according to the phrase, "War is a trickery (*al-ḥarbu khud'a*)." Vâsîf urges the Ottomans to act like the Prophet. How had they not seen the Russians coming? The Russians scouted the imperial army's movements from forty hours away. The rout could have been avoided if they had acted similarly – through the worldly causes described in Chapter Two – "and it is fit to reason that if one group can make predictions, so can another." The enemy was meanwhile so well-disciplined in battle that the Ottoman force stood no chance. "May God the Primary Cause grant good foreordination to the strategy that the Sublime State is making to reorganize," Vâsîf prays. "May He ordain its

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<sup>685</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 26b.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid, 27b-29b.

completion while the opportunity is in hand, grant us the ability to take revenge on the enemy, and fill the hearts of all believers with the joy of illimitable victory.”<sup>687</sup>

The underlying mechanisms in this passage are human reason and reciprocation. In the 1790s, Vâsîf expressed the empire’s plight, its supposed “decline,” in terms of *mukâbele bi’l-misl*, which he felt the dynasty had failed to apply to warfare. While the states of Christian Europe moved ahead, the Ottomans had to their peril neglected mathematics, geography, and other sciences. However, reciprocation was universally valid. The empire only needed to look to its enemies for models.<sup>688</sup>

Vâsîf’s third volume contains several passages on the “new science of warfare,” which taken together explain how the infidel gained their military advantage and interpret Ottoman “decline” as a failure to keep current through *mukâbele bi’l-misl*.<sup>689</sup> The first passage falls early in his third volume, on the new-style army. The Europeans, writes Vâsîf, were long powerless against Muslim arms and worked tirelessly to invent a new style of warfare (*bir tavr-ı nev-icâd*). With satanic inspiration and ancient Greek and Byzantine principles, they adapted their battle order, siege warfare, and tactics to the rules of geometry and learned how to attack and defend in tight but adaptable formations. Following these principles the Christians were unbeatable. Vâsîf

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid, 26b-27b.

<sup>688</sup> For example, Vâsîf lamented the neglect of these sciences in the preface to *Atlas-ı Cedîd Tercümesi* (İstanbul, 1803/04), 1, a work based on “modern” principles of European geography.

<sup>689</sup> On the whole this argument was not unique. See Heyd: “Learning from the infidels should not give rise to any feeling of inferiority among the Muslims. They should keep in mind that the progress of Christian Europe in military science was but the reaction of the frightened West to the superiority of Ottoman arms and Muslim heroism over many centuries... The Muslims would only take back what originally had been borrowed from them. “Ottoman ‘Ulemâ,” 75.

says that, thoroughly fostering the derivative sciences, they began to defeat untrained and disordered armies.<sup>690</sup>

One important innovation the Europeans borrowed from the Greeks in Vâsîf's account is gunpowder. Humans use reason to produce tools to obtain food, clothing, and weapons, he writes. As Galen details in his work on the human limbs,<sup>691</sup> they create weapons in lieu of natural limbs, like spears for claws or daggers and swords for teeth. Gunpowder, invented by a “perverse philosopher” in Alexandria in the year 660/61 and transferred to the Byzantines, offered possibilities for arms that effectively neutralized natural human bravery (*nüfûs-ı beşeriyyede merkûz cevher-i merdânegî ve şecâ'atın ednâ sebeb ile izmihlâlina 'illet oldılar*) and disadvantaged dynasties without them. The Europeans researched these to achieve victory at a distance (*bilâ-takarrüb bir nev' galebe esbâbını fikr ü tahayyül*), because they are natural cowards and could not withstand the Muslims, who are known for firmness and bravery. They then developed related crafts and learned to mitigate personal courage through the shock and awe and range of their weapons. Gunpowder spread to every dynasty and the empire; for a time the Ottomans were able to repel them, but they did not perfect the art.<sup>692</sup>

The empire, then, faced a daunting foe. Its military could not match their new methods – neither the power of their firearms nor tactics – and scattered at the first volley. Moreover, the historian claims that sultans up to Selim III had not tried to solve this problem. Weakness infected the soldiery, the greatest of the four pillars, and they could no longer protect the realm. Vâsîf therefore lavishes praises on Selim for adopting the new warfare, for reorganizing the cannoneer corps, rebuilding the arsenal, acquiring foreign experts, and founding the new-style

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<sup>690</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 5a-5b.

<sup>691</sup> He cites the Arabic translation of *De usu partium corporis humani*.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid, 38a-40b.

force. He also contends that the new methods complement Muslims' innate bravery, the "zeal of Islam," and produced such recent victories as the one over the French at Acre. He prays that the enemy's new methods of warfare may be successfully used against them, and that Selim's efforts to renew the foundations of the faith and law continue.<sup>693</sup>

A second, similar passage in the third volume repeats and elaborates these views. Introducing the Ottoman campaign in Egypt, Vâsîf proposes that the empire's present malaise is not limited to Muslim dominions but that the French revolution has spread near and far in the habitable world and affected all nations.<sup>694</sup> Moreover, if Ottoman soldiers were drilled and obedient, their natural bravery and zeal for Islam would overwhelm the enemy, who has an invalid religion and is naturally cowardly. Until the year 1591, he argues, the hijri millennium, Muslims had defeated the infidel absolutely. But afterward the empire's forces became accustomed to indolence and battle accorded with the phrase, "War is unpredictable." The empire's dread power weakened while the Christians developed a new order (*bir tarz-ı cedîd*) and organization (*tertîb*) that led them to total victory, derived from the mathematical sciences and ratiocination. They produced firearms, became proficient in defense, and began to best the empire's forces in field battles and sieges.<sup>695</sup>

Vâsîf insists that the Ottomans should have tried to match the enemy on equal terms (*müsâvât ile tekâbü*l), if they could not surpass their organization. However, no one gave this matter any attention, and the Ottomans were by forced by sophistry into a battle order that had long since become obsolete (*takâdüm-i 'ahd ile tarzdan çıkmış sûret-i muhârebe*). Their forces

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid, 5b-6a..

<sup>694</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 213a-215b; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 1a-3a. Cf. MAC, 35.

<sup>695</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 215b-216a; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 3a-3b.



could not withstand the enemy's more disciplined levies and serious defeats ensued.<sup>696</sup> Yet the historian reiterates that the empire will endure until Judgment Day. To restore the empire God granted Selim III the throne absolutely, and he has since his accession spent his time with rational economies and sovereign strategies (*tasarrufât-ı 'akliyye, tedbîrât-i mülkiyye*). For twenty or thirty years, Vâsîf writes, the state was diseased and the order of the world (*nizâm-ı âlem*) unhinged by growing chaos. Yet since the sultan's accession, he has unflaggingly endeavored to reorganize the realm's resources and repulse its enemies. This, Vâsîf says, is a "perfect power caused by divine support."<sup>697</sup>

These views deserve closer scrutiny. For one, there is nothing especially innovative about them. Ottomans ranging from Naîmâ and Dürri Efendi to Fazlîzâde Ali and Mehmed Saçaklızâde projected the empire's "decline" back to approximately the thousandth hijri year, for instance, albeit for different reasons. Whereas the former held the millennium to mark a transition into Ibn Khaldûn's "age of stasis," Fazlîzâde associated the date with the infiltration of Persian texts into the empire – heretical philosophical texts, to be precise. He and Saçaklızâde argued that Ottoman weakness was the result of sheer impiety.<sup>698</sup>

If we can say anything about Vâsîf's views on military reform during this period, it is that they are heavily indebted to İbrahim Müteferrika. In *Usûlü'l-hikem*, Müteferrika built an argument for reform around the concept of reciprocation, his aim being, he said, to investigate Ottoman weakness and explain Christian rulers' new weapons and military principles. For him these rulers' power stemmed from their development of a new warfare based on reason, mathematics, and geography. Müteferrika argued that war had changed, that old methods were

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<sup>696</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 216a; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 3b.

<sup>697</sup> MEHÂSİN 3, 216a-217a; MEHÂSİN (EGYPT), 3b-4b.

<sup>698</sup> See *Târih-i Na'îmâ*, 1: 21-30, 44; Thomas, 77-78; TOP nr. 1438, 284b-285b; Atik, 71. Cf. Kurz, 51-54, 199-200; el-Rouayheb, 203-205.

obsolete, indeed dangerous, and that the dynasty ought to inform itself of the enemy's "new military order" as well as cultivate sciences and work through worldly causes. For ultimately, he claimed, Christians lack Muslims' innate bravery and must rely on reason alone. This works to Ottoman advantage, and if they combine the new military arts with natural courage the enemy will be brought to his knees.<sup>699</sup> *Mukâbele bi'l-misl*; the importance of worldly causes; Ottoman neglect of geography and mathematics; and the combination of innate Muslim bravery with rational reform – all elements of Vâsîf's views were present decades earlier in Mütferrika's work.

No passage better illustrates the connection between these two intellectuals than the "Frankish king" from Vâsîf's fifth volume. In this section, a didactic addendum, we read that books on the mathematical science of war advise against dismissing a commander because of one or two defeats. Vâsîf relates that in times of old the Franks fought the Goths and that their commander was routed on seven occasions in seven years, losing many men and supplies. The king's men discussed his ill fortune and each year called for his dismissal. However, the king was foresighted, a prudent and philosophical man; he ignored them and reconfirmed the commander, who in the eighth year crushed the enemy, broke their power with a total victory, and forced them to make peace. The king then addressed his people. He declared that each year his commander had learned the enemy's strategies and acquired the means (*esbâb*) of overcoming them in the future. Now, with victory, they had triumphed. The historian concludes that the Frankish king's behavior was politic, and ends with an axiom: "The believer's persevering quest is wisdom, which he seizeth wherever he findeth."<sup>700</sup> The passage, which

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<sup>699</sup> *Usûlü'l-hikem*, 128-148, 151-152, 160-162, 170-172, 191.

<sup>700</sup> MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 187. See Lane for this axiom, s.v. "D-L-L," and meaning "that the believer ceases not to seek wisdom like as a man seeks his stray."

comes almost ad verbum from Müteferrika,<sup>701</sup> is unabashed in its activism and promotion of reciprocity.

Vâsîf's activism, however, was not restricted to the military. It extended to such other fields of endeavor as economics and commerce, whose workings he considered "worthy of attention."<sup>702</sup> Vâsîf was a mercantilist who espoused state intervention and showed great interest in manipulating the empire's currency and balance of trade with foreign powers. For example, apart from supporting "traditional" revenue tools like debasement and prosecuting coin-cutters, the historian, who had worked extensively in the financial bureaucracy, advised using foreign bullion to mint currency. This, he said, would bring two main benefits: income to the treasury and the discomfiture of other powers.<sup>703</sup> But as a mercantilist Vâsîf focused above all on the empire's bullion. He recognized that European commercial dominance would siphon off specie and wished to compete with them, both by developing industry to keep metals in domestic circulation and by enlarging the Ottoman merchant marine, forcing wealthy statesmen to purchase ships and trading concerns. The latter, we should point out, involving the ruling class in commercial activity, violated basic rules of Ottoman political theory.<sup>704</sup>

The "new science of warfare" and rational reform continued to preoccupy the historian in the years leading to his death, and figure prominently in 1804's *Muhasenât*. This work must be classified as propaganda. Evidently commissioned by Selim III, it attempts to silence and disparage opponents of the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*, while Vâsîf, the consummate rhetorician, dresses up

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<sup>701</sup> *Usûlü'l-hikem*, 177-178.

<sup>702</sup> "Esbâb-ı mu'âmelât umûr-ı i'tibârîyyeden olmağla..." MEHÂSİN 2, 160b.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid*, 161a-162b.

<sup>704</sup> MEHÂSİN 2, 162a-162b, 165a-166a; MEHÂSİN 4, 276b-279a. Also Metin Kunt, "Derviş Mehmed Paşa, Vezir and Entrepreneur: a Study in Ottoman Political-Economic Theory and Practice," *Turcica* 9 (1977): 197-214.

his abusive arguments in the familiar garb of a world order sustained through the principle of reciprocity.

*Muhassehat*'s preface gives readers all the essential information. Vâsîf declares that God creates sovereigns as the "mundane cause (*sebeb-i 'adî*)" of worldly tranquility and order. This tranquility must be vigilantly preserved by "repelling hostile violence," for God ordained that the earth should be ruled by many monarchs instead of one. Since humans are naturally avaricious and opportunistic, then, states that care more than their neighbors to uphold order (*nizâm*) flourish and "those States which from carelessness did not take proper precautions to guard against the violence of strangers, have remained without either honour or reputation, and dependent upon others."<sup>705</sup> The essay's purpose is essentially to vindicate this argument. For some while, Vâsîf complains, a mutinous rabble has taken to abusing the government. These types, who undermine both the realm and order of the world, he wishes to silence.<sup>706</sup>

Vâsîf quickly establishes reciprocity as the basis for the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*, and in particular Selim's new-style army. In response to Russian threats against Istanbul, he says, the sultan's ministers urged defensive measures and the establishment of a new corps of trained soldiers. They met immediate opposition from the Janissaries, but according to the historian it was a necessary step, because the Janissaries, engaged in all manner of trade, refused regular discipline:

Whatever confidence we may place in our own strength, yet, God forbid that so cunning an enemy should find us in an unguarded posture; particularly since we are instructed by the example of so many States, that owed their loss of reputation and ruin to the want of care in observing the machinations of their enemies, and in neglecting to provide in

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<sup>705</sup> MAC, 29-30; Wilkinson, 216-217.

<sup>706</sup> MAC, 32; Wilkinson, 220-221.

proper time efficient troops and military stores. From this source their calamities have arisen...<sup>707</sup>

The new-style army was to provide the realm the necessary protection from grasping enemies. Vâsîf hopes that, after the *nizâm* soldiers' recent successes in Egypt, and when the forces become numerous enough, the empire's enemies will cease their demands and that the trained troops will restore *dîn ü devlet* and cause the empire to subsist till judgment day, bringing victory over all their enemies.<sup>708</sup>

Like his chronicle, Vâsîf's *Mehassenât* also depicts reciprocation as a key mechanism in the empire's history – but with a twist. As earlier, he claims that the empire's decline began late in the sixteenth century, when Christian states reacted to Ottoman dominance by inventing new gunpowder weapons and a system of warfare with professional soldiers, regular drill, and formations. The new warfare negated the Ottomans' innate bravery and made the infidels formidable. "Since the invention of this new system of tactics," he writes, "the Ottomans have been most frequently worsted, because they found it impossible to make use of their sabres among the infidels as they wished to do..."<sup>709</sup>

The twist lies in the fact that *Mehassenât* depicts the new warfare as a reaction to earlier Ottoman innovations. Süleyman, Vâsîf alleges, had faced defeats of his own against the Christians, and to match them he created a successful force of regular infantry, the Janissaries, of which the era's rabble bitterly complained. But with the new warfare the Janissaries ceased to be

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<sup>707</sup> MAC, 39-40; Wilkinson, 232.

<sup>708</sup> MAC, 37-44; Wilkinson, 227-238.

<sup>709</sup> MAC, 47-49; Wilkinson, 242-244.

an elite unit. Mahmud I tried to understand the infidel's success and commissioned Mütferrika's *Usûlü'l-hikem*, but the work went unread and reform unfulfilled until Selim's accession.<sup>710</sup>

Of course, Vâsîf must have known very well that his account was wrong and that the Janissaries were an earlier foundation. However, it is a cunning rhetorical stroke.<sup>711</sup> He does two things by making Süleyman the founder of the Janissaries. Firstly, he links one of the most potent symbols of the Ottoman "Golden Age" and its storied ruler to the principle of reciprocation. *Mukâbele bi'l-misl*, he is saying, was a main ingredient in the dynasty's past success and trouble followed only when they ceased to observe it. Vâsîf secondly makes the opposition appear absurd. If they, the Janissaries, were an innovation, a trained body of troops once submitted to drill, how can they now object to the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* and refuse discipline?

In the remainder of the essay, Vâsîf presumes that victory in battle goes to the best trained and prepared. The new army's "advantages" over the old depend on its ability to match the Christians like-for-like, something the old corps' disorder, indiscipline, and obstinacy make impossible: "Should it happen that the enemy is as skilful and well-trained as themselves, and employs against them the same discipline," he explains,

Then of the two parties, that will be victorious whose chiefs are enabled, by the favour of Divine Providence, to put in practice with superior address, the new science and stratagems of war which they have learned, because the apostle of the Most High, our great prophet (on whom be the blessings and peace of God!) himself condescended to use military stratagems [*al-ḥarbu khud'a*] – which is to say, "war is a trickery."<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> MAC, 45-46, 49-50; Wilkinson, 240-242, 244-246.

<sup>711</sup> On this and other historical inconsistencies, Aksan, "Ottoman Political Writing," 39-40; Erdem, "Wise Old Man," 166-168; Şakul, 134-135; Üstün, 152-153.

<sup>712</sup> MAC, 66-74; Wilkinson, 266-274. I have emended Wilkinson's translation.

Vâsîf charges that his opponents had brought the empire to ruin, refusing to cooperate and effectively causing defeats to Russia and the loss of the Crimea. According to his logic, reciprocation is how the dynasty wards off external enemies, sustains itself, and upholds the universal order. Indeed, the historian argues that to act against reform, and so reciprocation, is a betrayal of the empire and faith (*dîn ü devlet*):

As the superiority which the practice of military exercise gives to the infidels in war is clearly evident, as well as the deficiency of the people of Islam in several points connected with military science, is not the obstinacy with which you oppose the introduction of this exercise, purely a treason against our religion and empire?<sup>713</sup>

For Selim’s circle, then, opposition to the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* was not just perverse; it was heretical and criminal.

Two final aspects of Ahmed Vâsîf’s thought on reform in this period warrant attention, since as they are novel to the 1790s and early 1800s. This does not mean he was unique in any special way. Very likely others shared his opinions. Instead, it suggests that intellectuals allied to Selim III increasingly pushed their arguments in favor of rational reform into untrodden territory. If the “new warfare” had gone beyond the pale,<sup>714</sup> so too must solutions.

As seen above, in Selim’s reign Vâsîf began to depict *mukâbele bi’l-misl* as something more than a rational precept: reciprocation, he contended, is obligatory, a duty to faith and country. His terminology in this regard was quite specific. In his fourth volume, the historian records the sultan’s reform of the imperial fleet, saying that the infidel had developed dangerous new naval technologies and that “it is a duty obligatory on each individual (*farz-ı ‘ayn*) for the

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<sup>713</sup> MAC, 50-54; Wilkinson, 246-251.

<sup>714</sup> For example: “evzâ’-ı harbiyye-i kadîmenin be-esbâbihâ etvarı lağv olunub elyevm cenk başka heyete ve esbâbı ahir sûrete girüb...” MEHÂSİN 5, 2: 102, 314.

dynasty to respond in kind to the naval affairs which the infidels have arranged in this era, and to organize the causes of contention by meeting them.” He made similar claims in *Muhassenât*.<sup>715</sup> Reciprocation was therefore, for him, an individual religious obligation (*farz-ı ‘ayn*). This is a legal term signifying an act incumbent on all believers rather than one incumbent on only a part of the community (*farz-ı kifâye*). Jihad, for example, was deemed a collective obligation except in dire emergencies, as in an invasion, when all individuals became liable. Vâsîf’s claim likewise implies a set of truly exceptional circumstances – namely, that the danger posed by not acting reciprocally endangered the empire’s very existence.<sup>716</sup>

The second aspect is perhaps more striking. Vâsîf’s thought during this period displays an increasing willingness to experiment, to alter elements of the traditional order for the sake of rational reform. The “four pillars” remained central to the Ottoman world-picture through the early nineteenth century and Ottomans, the historian and his contemporaries alike, continued to refer to them and their importance in the primordial order. Vâsîf personally defended their integrity on a number of occasions.<sup>717</sup> By Selim’s reign, however, he was prepared to tinker.

In a digression from his second volume, Vâsîf pauses to comment on European social systems. From a young age, he says, Europeans occupy children with a trade according to their ability. No one in their countries is unemployed but rather beggars are nonexistent, obliged to support themselves. Indeed, he adds that this approach conforms with Islamic thought on the “four pillars” and that some philosophers reckon it is impermissible to leave any outside these

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<sup>715</sup> “Müşrikînün bu asırda nizâm verdikleri umûr-ı bahriyyelerine mukâbele ve bi’l-muvâzene tertîb-i esbâb-ı mücâdele Devlet-i ‘Aliyye’ye farz-ı ‘ayn mesâbesinde olub.” MEHÂSİN 4, 309b. “İlâc-ı vâki‘a pîş ez-vukû‘ bâyed-kerd mefhûmunca yangın bacayı sarmadan çaresine bakılmak lâzım olduğu gibi bunun dahi bir çaresi bulunmak cümle ümerâ-yı saltanat üzerlerine farz-ı ‘ayn addolunmakla...” MAC, 41.

<sup>716</sup> EI<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Farđ.” Kâtib Çelebi gives definitions of both categories in *Kashf al-zunûn*, 1: 46. On legal obligation and jihad, Bonner, 106-108, 114-116, 140.

<sup>717</sup> See Chapter Four.



groups, else they must be killed according to the sense of “Keeping each group to its own occupation orders the realm and vice versa.”<sup>718</sup>

Moreover, continues the historian, when European men reach adolescence they are sent to schools called “academies (*akademyâ*),” where they study mathematics and geography and can survey the whole earth without leaving their country. But it does not suffice to know merely the names of the seas and rivers, roads and realms, and fortresses and lands. In order to have firsthand experience, Europeans also travel and campaign, and having gained this knowledge in theory and practice muster troops, build fortresses, and increase their state's income of their own accord. In this manner, infidels, known for their innate stupidity, acquire useful trades through compulsion and training. Vâsîf writes that it is cause for regret that Muslims have no care or desire to acquire like crafts, so beneficial to *dîn ü devlet*:

God willing, henceforth through this means mathematical sciences and industrial methods will be spread throughout our realm and according to the sense of “The believer’s persevering quest is wisdom, which he seizeth wherever he findeth.” Thus we expect dexterous and trained Muslims will take cognizance of all European crafts and produce a great many choice matters.<sup>719</sup>

While Vâsîf’s 1784 essay excoriated conscription and “outsiders” in other groups, what he proposes in this passage is quite the opposite. It is, in fact, nothing short of social engineering. In Mardin’s words, Vâsîf is advising the “dragooning” of subjects – orphans, beggars, and whomever else – into military academies for compulsory training.<sup>720</sup> The scheme’s ostensible intellectual guise stretches our credulity. The source of these subjects is immaterial, as is any

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<sup>718</sup> MEHÂSÎN 2, 169a-169b. Cf. with Râtîb Efendi’s similar observations on the Viennese. *Ebubekir Râtîb Efendi*, 142-144.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid*, 169b-170a.

<sup>720</sup> Mardin, “Mind of the Turkish Reformer,” 32.

danger of undesirable mixing in social estates. Vâsîf is pushing the notion of an immutable universal order supported by rigid social hierarchies to the breaking point, and intimates the Ottomans might freely diverge from it, like the Europeans, in order to produce trained experts. In this passage the edifice of *nizâm-ı âlem* seems on the brink of collapse; the strain is nearly audible.

## EPILOGUE

### Vâsîf and Ottoman Intellectual History

The Ottoman elite's debates over reform, pursued here largely through Vâsîf's manuscript folia, leave us in a commanding position to look back and survey the empire's intellectual trends at the turn of the nineteenth century. It has been my contention throughout this study that the late eighteenth century was a period of considerable intellectual and moral crisis. Far from apathy, however, this crisis stimulated ferment within the Ottoman ranks over issues ranging from theodicy, predestination, and human agency to the limitations of warfare and moral and political reform.

First we must say a word about continuity. If I have focused on continuity in eighteenth century intellectual life at the expense of the new, the novel, it has been with the assumption that Ottomans did not, as it were, throw out the baby with the bath water to meet the century's challenges. The late eighteenth century was not a period of radical reexamination of old institutions and beliefs. Quite the contrary, the realm's statesmen and thinkers, while pragmatic, brought tested conceptual frameworks to bear on their problems, and many of these, like the belief in an immutable world order and dynastic exceptionalism, appear to have been deeply ingrained and slow to change. Still, it is precisely by maintaining a cognizance of these persistent trends that we can highlight elements of change. The conservatism of Ottoman reactions allows us to better perceive innovations when they did indeed occur.

Early nineteenth century Ottomans clung fast to the pretense that their empire was unique, immune to the inexorable march of history and its patterns, and in these pages we have seen countless examples to this effect. However, the tenor of these assertions was increasingly strained. Ottomans like Vâsîf sensed that reality did not match their expectations and, as though they could not withstand the psychological blow, they tried valiantly but vainly to save exceptionalism from collapse by depicting the empire's ills in terms of divine trial (*istidrâc*) and as essays in theodicy. At the same time, Vâsîf and like minds insisted that subjects could not remain idle. They reaffirmed the dynasty's unique character, but tempered it with the caveat that continued success was part of a divine grand bargain: exceptionalism, they claimed, demanded action as well as moral responsibility.

This concern with causality, human agency, and initiative is an important and heretofore unwritten chapter in Ottoman intellectual history, with wide implications. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it created potent arguments for political reform and even hinted at a secularized, humanized concept of history. Vâsîf and his peers were responding in their arguments, or preempting, discordant voices, fatalists who for various reasons rejected human agency. Some of these may well have had legitimate religious scruples. Others more likely exploited the rhetoric of fatalism to rebut threats to their material interests, particularly those posed by reformers of Vâsîf's ilk. The presence of this discourse is not in question, but rather why and how. It permeates the sources and deserves much fuller study.

We can clearly see how agency influenced other facets of Ottoman intellectual life in the contemporary debate over peace and peacemaking, treated at length in Chapter Three. The gradual abandonment of prescriptive, legalistic defenses of peace not only represented a departure from the empire's martial ideology but also an expanded role for human agency in the

conduct of war. If warfare were “unpredictable in its outcome,” as Vâsîf came to argue in the 1790s and after, it meant that Ottomans could not simply rely on victory as a predetermined, preordained result. Rather, they had to exert prudence, care, and reason, and as often as not forgo force. While such an approach had always been part of Ottoman praxis, and was, besides, firmly in their interest, it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, after much lag, that ideology finally caught up with action. For the first time Ottomans began to assert the virtues of peace – or, put slightly differently, of containing warfare – rather than treating it as a necessary evil.

The early nineteenth century likewise saw the first major fissures in that hoary bastion of Ottoman sociopolitical stability, “world order (*nizâm-ı ‘âlem*).” As said in Chapters Four and Five, “world order” remained without fail the primary framework that thinkers and statesmen used to describe society and discuss political thought. Reform, meanwhile, was understood as nothing more or less than the restoration of this order’s internal balance. Ottoman reformers of the period did not envision a radical revolution or even more modest structural change, for, indeed, to them the primary characteristic of world order was that it was, in theory, unchanging and unchangeable. Selim III and his camarilla therefore presented the “New Order” reforms not as a new universal order but as a restoration of the old – a renovation, through human reason, of a purely political order functioning within *nizâm-ı ‘âlem*.

Perhaps the greatest debate involving reform, one which was still ongoing at the turn of the century, was the extent to which human reason could be taken. As we have seen, Selim’s supporters asserted the legitimacy of rational reform by pressing concepts like “reciprocation (*mukâbele bi’l-misl*),” “ancient practice (*kânûn-ı kadîm*),” “individual obligation (*farz-ı ‘ayn*),” and others to new ends and to new limits, even to the point of contravening rules of Ottoman

political thought. They were, perhaps without fully appreciating it, undermining the basic supports of “world order.” Yet reformers like Vâsîf did not carry the argument, at least not totally. We have it on good grounds that many rejected the “New Order” as sinful innovation (*bid‘a*), a religiously charged term that, along with fatalism, could be and was usefully manipulated by vulnerable interest groups. This is not to say the contest was wholly cynical, though. Clearly many Ottomans, including reformist sympathizers, were skeptical about the rationalist direction of Selim’s “New Order” and felt that it neglected spiritual, nonmaterial concerns. The presence of such a policy disagreement among the reformers themselves must be seen as important, an indication that Selim had, in the end, failed to build necessary consensus even within his own government.

These are some of the major intellectual trends outlined in this dissertation, but what larger observations do they raise? What, if anything, can they tell us more generally about late eighteenth century Ottoman society? For one, they point to a surprisingly dynamic milieu. Vâsîf and his peers responded to the direst challenges of the period mostly on the strength of their own resources – that is, by adapting, reinterpreting, and reshaping the accumulated capital of some thousand years of Islamic culture. We have seen in all chapters how concepts – legal, philosophical, ethical, and otherwise – were progressively reconsidered, altered, and redeployed to make room, just to cite two examples, for widened human agency and increased control over war. We have also observed how Ottomans were willing to tinker in certain circumstances, to bend and sometimes even break seemingly fundamental precepts.

This was certainly not dogmatism. Indeed, the weight that Vâsîf and his partisans laid on human action and reason, or what Mardin once called “activism,” was eminently pragmatic and needs further careful study. It would be all too easy to read into their arguments an incipient

humanism, secularization, or modernity. The late eighteenth century is no doubt promising as a terminus post quem for the development of Ottoman modernity, doubly so in that, as we have seen, it was during this period that certain storied conceptual frameworks began to fracture and crumble. However, without an adequate intellectual history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for which this dissertation can hopefully serve as partial groundwork, we can hardly hope to make sweeping pronouncements. At most we might say that Vâsîf and his peers were neither here nor there, unwittingly on the brink of a seismic shift but not over it, both the last of the ancients and first of the moderns. Anything more must be left for future research.

Likewise should we avoid overrating the flexibility of eighteenth century Ottoman elites. If they were resourceful and dynamic, they were also badly divided. Throughout the eighteenth century Ottoman rulers governed by consensus, and past sultans had enacted limited reforms because they could not afford to alienate entrenched interests. Late eighteenth century reformers, particularly Selim III, understood this fact but failed to overcome the divisions and build agreement for their programs. Exactly why this was so is another question for the future. Clearly the debate was a bitter one, so bitter, in fact, that we are well able to trace the period's rich intellectual history. Our sources exist for the reason that opposition needed to be countered in writing, else why make the argument? Yet we almost completely lack the story of the opposition, and it is unclear whether it can ever be recovered apart from what we are told, probably in distorted fashion, by hostile interlocutors. Do these opponents have a rival intellectual history to be told? What prevented them from forming a viable coalition with Vâsîf and his colleagues? Given what the sources suggest about breakdown in traditional frameworks and other devices of legitimation, and the absence of ready replacements, is it possible that the Ottoman polity had at this date and in this guise simply become unworkable?

Ahmed Vâsîf serves an intellectual history of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because he was so personally invested in these and other events he recorded. The youth from Baghdad grew into mature adulthood on the war front, in Istanbul and abroad, and witnessed the empire's failures from an often dangerous firsthand vantage; he survived successive governments and sultans, reformers and reactionaries, and reached old age as the chief voice of the most ambitious reform program yet attempted in the empire's history. It should not come as a surprise that his work conveys the outlines of all these changes, nor that we must only take the trouble to learn his language, read his signposts, and become sensitive to the nuances of his discourse to see the stakes and positions involved, on his side and on the others. Vâsîf's history in this way offers a panorama of Ottoman intellectual life during his lifetime, a microcosm of his world.



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