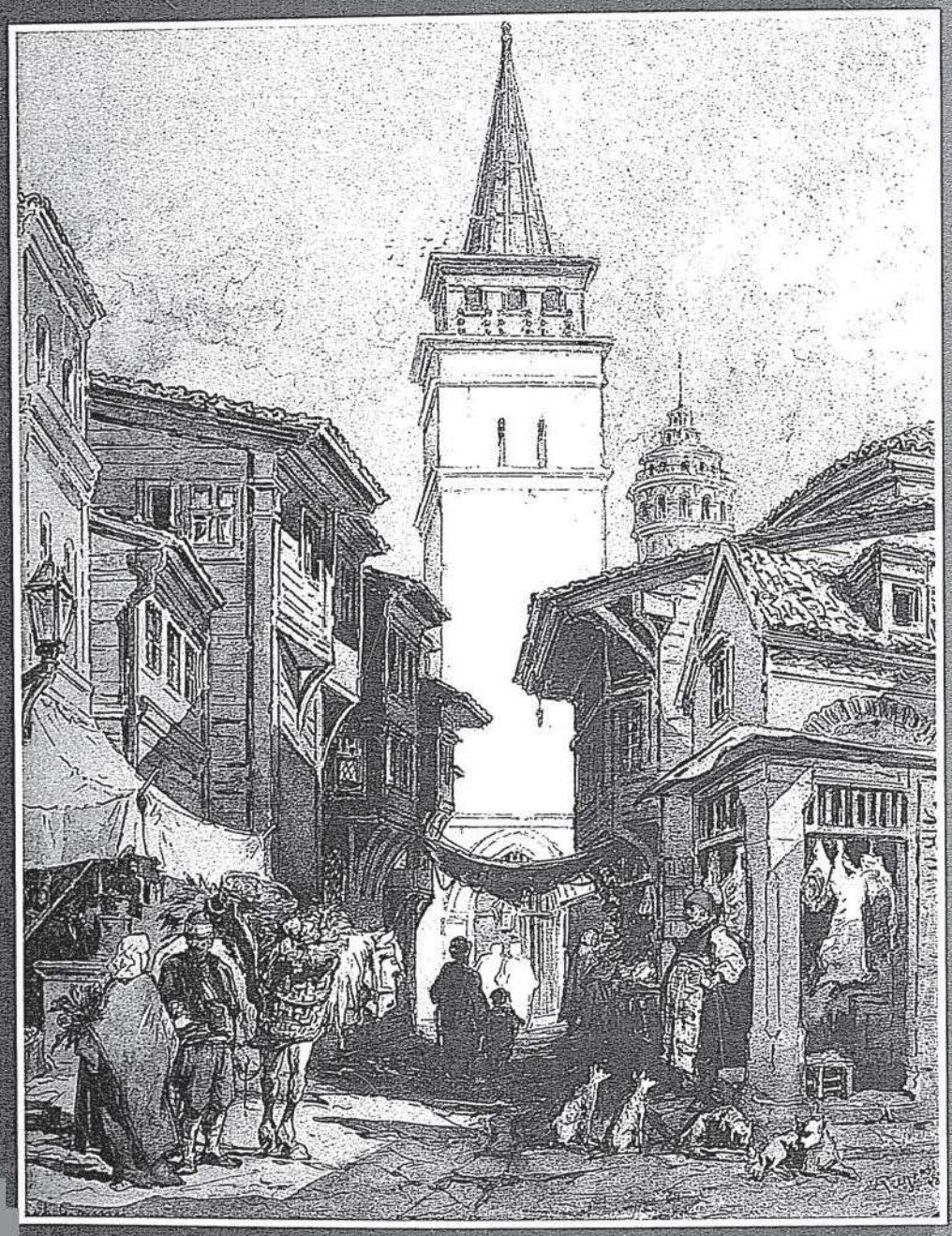
ISTANBUL AS SEEN FROM A DISTANCE

Centre and Provinces in the Ottoman Empire



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SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL

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Arab Attitudes towards the Ottoman Sultanate, 1516-1798

BRUCE MASTERS

Istanbul loomed in the minds of the Arab intellectual elite in the first few centuries after the Ottoman conquest not so much as an actual physical place but rather as a synecdoche for the political power invested in it as the seat of the sultanate. Islambul, the name of the city used in most of the surviving sources from the period, evoked the city's legitimacy in the geographical imagination of those writing as the capital of the *Dar al-Islam*. Officials and soldiers dispatched from the capital were recorded as *rijal al-bab* (men of the gate) in the local court records of the Arab cities in an abbreviated invocation of the sultan's authority as being vested in a physical place, namely his palace. We have very few actual travel accounts of the city written in Arabic,[1] and Arabic-speaking authors recorded events that occurred in the city generally only insofar as they concerned the sultans. The sultans may have been physically distant from the lives of their Arabic subjects, but that did not mean they were absent from the concerns of at least the literate classes among them. For the latter in particular, it was obvious that Istanbul was the seat of power. It was from there that the governors and chief judges who governed in the cities of the Arab provinces were sent, and it was to Istanbul that appeals for justice against actions taken by those same officials were sent. In the Arab geographical imagination, the city could not be separated from the institution of the sultanate.

The Ottoman sultans were not universally successful in gaining control of the Arab lands and resistance proved especially strong in Morocco, which remained independent, and in Yemen, from where the Ottoman forces were ejected in the early 17th century and did not return until the late 19th century. These two areas proved to be the exceptions, however. Elsewhere, local elites accepted the transfer of power to a sultan reigning in Istanbul with little overt opposition. Once established, the Ottoman regime in the Arab lands acquired an aura of permanence. As a result, resistance to the House of Osman's claim to legitimacy was rare in the cities of Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, and dissatisfied elements of the military accounted for most of the civil unrest that occurred in the first centuries of Ottoman rule. The same could not always be said of the countryside, where the sultan's writ was often tenuous.

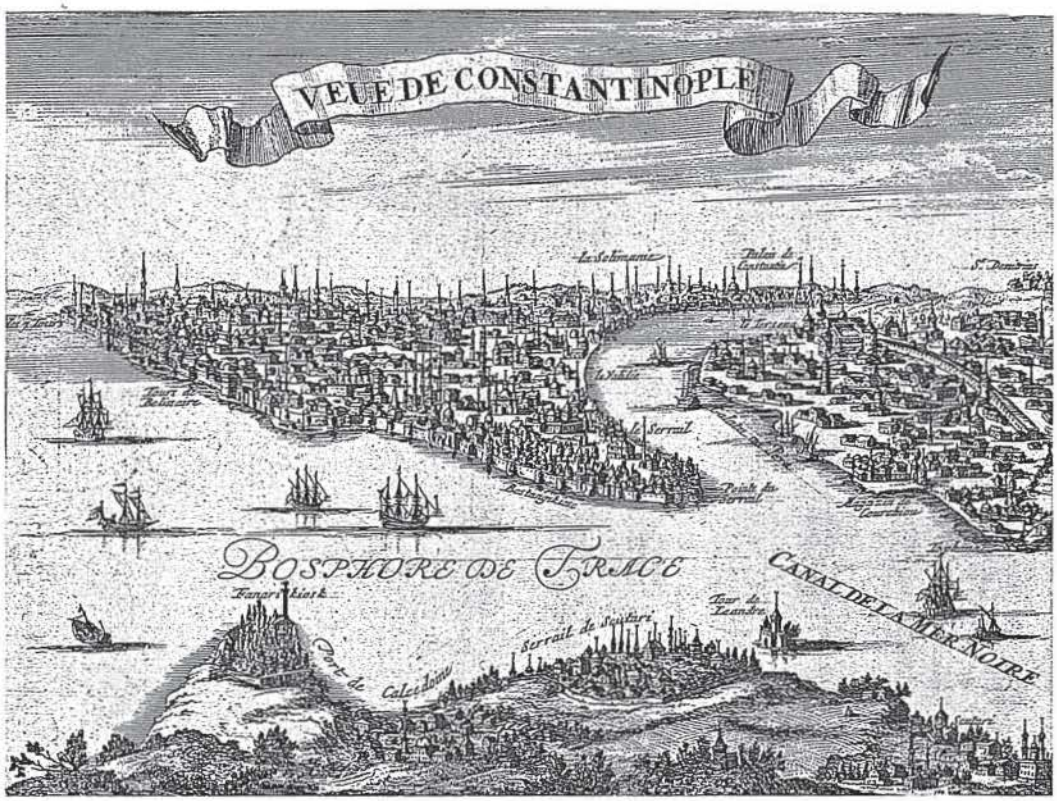
1 Two such extant accounts are those of Ibrahim al-Khiyari al-Madani, *Tuhfat al-udaba' wa salwat al-ghuraba'*, 3 vols. (Baghdad: Wazarat al-Thaqafa wa al-Iclam, 1979) and Qutb al-Din al-Nahrawali, see Richard Blackburn, trans. and ed., *Journey to the Sublime Porte: The Arabic Memoir of a Sharifian Agent's Diplomatic Mission to the Ottoman Imperial Court in the Era of Suleyman the Magnificent* (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2005).

Ottoman military power waned in the 18th century and local strong men exercised virtual autonomy in most of the Fertile Crescent, though, significantly, none asserted independence. Rather, they remained nominally the "sultan's loyal servants". The hope of a revived Mamluk sultanate did challenge a continuing Ottoman presence in Cairo in the middle of the 18th century. Even there, however, the local Muslim intellectual elite did not question the Ottoman sultan's ultimate political stewardship over them: Mamluk bluster did not undermine Istanbul's claim to authority. The veneer of the *Pax Ottomana* finally cracked at the turn of the 19th century when Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Egypt in 1798 and desert warriors, led by the clan of ibn Sa'ud, sacked Karbala in 1802 and later occupied Mecca and Medina. Before that dramatic diminution of Ottoman authority, however, the ideology that legitimated the House of Osman in the eyes of the Sunni Arab elite for almost three centuries rested not on their acceptance of that dynasty's claim to the universal caliphate, as advanced by some of the religious scholars in Istanbul. Rather acquiescence in, if not necessarily enthusiasm for, Ottoman rule by Arab scholars lay in their understanding of the institution of the sultanate and its place in the political ordering of their world as they understood it.

Although Sunni Arab scholars considered the institution of the sultanate to be necessary, they did not automatically grant the House of Osman exclusive rights to that office. That was most apparent in the initial ambivalence towards the dynasty expressed by Arab authors after the conquest of Damascus in 1516 and of Cairo in the following year. Over time, however, Arab scholars bestowed upon the rulers in Istanbul their unquestioned loyalty. That acceptance was based on more than simple inertia, as the Ottoman elite sought to broaden the sultan's appeal to his Arab subjects by employing several strategies. One of the more unusual of these, in retrospect, was the cultivation of the memory of a local Damascene luminary, Muhiy al-Din ibn al-'Arabi. Patronage of his cult by Ottoman governors in Damascus helped to legitimate their rule for some of those they ruled. That strategy provided an ideological link between the sultan and many of his Sunni Arab subjects until ibn al-'Arabi's legacy itself came under attack from some quarters in the Sunni intellectual establishment. Coincidently, perhaps, many of those who were the most vehement in their denunciation of ibn al-'Arabi in the Arab lands were also those who no longer unquestioningly accepted the legitimacy of the House of Osman.

The Sultanate in Theory

The failure of the Ottoman sultans to establish long-lasting hegemony over Yemen or to achieve military success in Morocco lay in part in the question of the dynasty's legitimacy to rule. In both places, the sultans faced the claims of dynasties to a lineage older and nobler than theirs. Of course, physical distance from the Ottoman capital was also a factor, as a campaign in either would have required greater naval resources than the Ottomans possessed. Nevertheless, it was difficult for the sultans in Istanbul to claim their family tree was superior, and hence their legitimacy greater, when they were dealing with rival dynasties that claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Bothered by the Ottoman house's lack of a noble pedigree, Mar'i al-Ramli, writing in Cairo in the early



The historical peninsula. 19th century engraving.

17th century, sought to create a proper Arab lineage for Osman Gazi, although he named no specific Arab ancestor as progenitor of the family tree.[2]

Al-Ramli's attempt seems to have had few echoes among his contemporaries. Writing at roughly the same time, Muhammad al-Bakri al-Siddiqi (d. 1661) cited the 16th-century chronicler ibn Ayas as having written that Osman Gazi was of the lineage of the Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (d. 656). Without commenting on the dubious historical argument that ibn Ayas had employed to bolster his assertion, al-Bakri al-Siddiqi went on to delineate Osman Gazi's Central Asian ancestry following the genealogy favoured in Ottoman Turkish histories.[3] Clearly, al-Bakri al-Siddiqi did not think Osman Gazi was of Arab origin. Nor did it matter to him that he was not. Rather, the legitimacy of Ottoman rule over the Arab lands rested on the Muslim legal scholars' more general understanding of the institution of the sultanate. It was the office of the sultanate that legitimated the Ottoman family's lineage for Arab Muslim scholars, rather than the other way around. That understanding was a product of the evolution of Muslim political theory that had occurred over several centuries before the arrival of the Ottoman army.

From the 11th century onwards, Sunni Muslim legal scholars wrestled with the political reality that the universal caliph, whom Islamic political theory had

2 Michael Winter, "A Seventeenth-Century Arabic Panagyric of the Ottoman Dynasty," *Asian and African Studies* 2 (1979): 130-56.

3 Muhammad ibn Abi Surur al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, *al-Manah al-rahmaniyya fi al-dawla al-'uthmaniyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Basha'ir, 1995), 9-16.

established as the only legitimate head of the Muslim polity (the *umma*), was a figurehead at best as the *umma* fractured into competing states. In response to the ideological crisis, 'Ali al-Mawardi (d. 1058) developed a theory of the sultanate that offered a compromise between the idealised state and what actually existed. Scholars who came after him also devoted attention to the question and ultimately adopted Mawardi's model, adding further refinements.[4] The scholarly consensus, as it emerged over a century, assigned the rulers of these breakaway states the newly coined title of "sultan" and affirmed that their rule was in accordance with Muslim law.

The scholars thus acknowledged the political reality of the fragmentation of the Muslim world. They, however, upheld the legitimacy of multiple sultans only as long as those sultans, in turn, recognised the caliph's theoretical right to supersede them should a strong caliph emerge. As a sign of that fealty to the higher office, coins in a sultan's realm would bear the caliph's name, and blessings during the Friday prayers would begin with the caliph's name being mentioned before that of the ruling sultan. Furthermore, the sultan or sultans were obliged to protect Muslim lives and property and govern according to Islamic law. An additional prerequisite for legitimacy, the waging of war against infidels, appeared in some later treatises. The religious scholars, faced with the reality of rule by non-Arabs, allowed that the sultans' right to rule was not dependent on their descent from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh, a continuing prerequisite in their view for those seeking the title of caliph. Righteousness, backed by military might, had replaced lineage as the key to legitimation.

Commentaries written by Arab scholars after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258 and the murder of the last reigning caliph diminished or ignored any role for the caliphate in the political life of Muslims. There remained, of course, a nominal caliph of the Abbasid line who resided in Cairo, and those holding that office served as the source of legitimation for the Mamluk sultans in much the same way as bishops crowned monarchs in the Latin west. Scholars writing outside the Mamluk territories did not, however, acknowledge his status, as they had that of his ancestors in Baghdad.[5]

An example of the evolution in the understanding of the caliphate by Arab scholars is found in the *Muqaddima* of 'Abd al-Rahman Abu-Zayd ibn Khaldun, written at the start of the 15th century. After establishing that the caliphate was the only just form of government, ibn Khaldun concluded that the office had only existed in the reign of the first four "Rightly Guided Caliphs" (632-61). He went on to explain that although those from among the non-Arabs (*A'jam)* might claim the title of caliph, it was historically the sole prerogative of the descendants of the Prophet's tribe, the Quraysh. Ibn Khaldun concluded that the caliphate was an institution whose historical moment had passed, with the implication that its revival was impossible.[6] However, he did not state that explicitly and it is not clear if all of his contemporaries would have conceded that point. With no reigning caliph, Arab scholars acquiesced in the theory of a just sultan

4 'Ali al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya wa al-wilaya al-diniyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, 1978).

5 Ann Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 103-29.

6 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 1: 11-12, 285, 394-402.

who would reign in accordance with Islamic law as the only legitimate form of Muslim government.[7]

Abandoning that rationalisation of the sultanate in the absence of the caliphate, Ottoman Sultan Mehmed I (1413-21) explicitly claimed the title "Shadow of God in the Two Worlds, Caliph of God of the Two Earths". This was in line with the understanding that had emerged in Hanafi legal tradition outside the Arab lands in the post-Mongol centuries, which held that any Muslim ruler could legitimately lay claim to the title of caliph. Ebu's-Su'ud Efendi, Sultan Süleyman's legal advisor, further elaborated on that understanding by promoting the theory that the House of Osman had not only a just claim to the title of caliph, but an exclusive one. As caliph, the Ottoman sultan could, furthermore, rightly claim universal sovereignty over Muslims everywhere.[8]

It must be noted that the House of Osman also claimed to be the rightful heir of that other regional Mediterranean model of universal governance, the Roman/Byzantine empire. A possible context for its claim to the caliphate was that it was the political authority of the caliphs that the sultans were asserting, rather than any religious functions of the office. For example, unlike their predecessors in the Abbasid dynasty, no Ottoman sultan ever led the annual *hajj,* which was one of the religious duties of the caliphate as delineated by earlier Muslim scholars. Rather, they designated proxies to fulfil that religious obligation for them. The possible distinction between political and religious functions of the office of caliphate, however, remained implicit rather than explicit in subsequent Ottoman discussions of the sultanate/caliphate.

In contrast, Arab writers before the late 19th century rarely, if ever, conceded the title of caliph to the Ottoman sultans.[9] For them the caliphate was imbued with religious authority and was non-transferable to anyone not of the Prophet's tribe. The Prophet Muhammad had said, "The leaders of the prayer are from the Quraysh" and claims by someone not of Quraysh descent to the title seemed to Arab commentators to be unviable. Rather, they acknowledged that, in one author's formulation, the Ottoman sultans had inherited the "royalty and the glory of the caliphate" if not the actual office itself.[10] The late 18th-century Egyptian historian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti employed a slightly different strategy when he wrote that the early Ottoman sultans, and especially Süleyman (1520-66), followed the precedent set by the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs" (*Rashidun*) in their handling of the affairs of the *umma*, through their good governance and in raising up Islam over the "unbelievers".[11] In short, the Ottoman sultans, if not entitled to the title of caliph, were as admirable and worthy of their subjects' allegiance as those early paragons of Muslim political virtue.

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7 Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Damanhuri, *al-Nafa' al-ghazir fi salah al-sultan wa al-wazir* (Alexandria: Mu'assasat Shabab al-Jamca, 1992).

8 Colin Inber, *Ebu's-su'ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 103-6.

9 Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992), 29-32; Otfried Weintritt, "Concepts of History as Reflected in Arabic Historiographical Writing in Ottoman Syria and Egypt (1517-1700)," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 188-95.

10 Winter, "A Seventeenth-Century Arabic Panagyric," 155-6.

11 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti. *'Aja'ib al-athar fi al-tarajim wa al-akhbar*, 7 vols. (Cairo: Lajnat Bayan al-'Arabi, 1958-67), 1: 66.

Without a caliph, the Arabic-speaking Sunni religious establishment acquiesced in rule by sultans of non-Arab origin as long as they continued to enhance and protect the faith, "to command right and forbid wrong" in the common legalistic formulation of that obligation. In his history of the Ottoman dynasty, al-Bakri al-Siddiqi stressed each and every sultan's commitment to wage the just war against heretics and infidels as well as the sultan's role as benefactor of Muslim charities. In contrast, he highlighted the lack of piety among the Mamluks, as well as their alliance with the "heretical" Shia in Iran, as a justification for their eventual overthrow. In his view, God had worked out His plan on the battlefield of Marj Dabiq in 1516 through the actions of His servant, Sultan Selim Khan. Defence of the faith, piety and good deeds were all that was seemingly necessary to constitute a ruler deserving the loyalty of the "people of the Sunna". By al-Bakri al-Siddiqi's time, there was no cause to question what had become a transparent reality.

The Sultanate in Practice

After the initial shock of conquest in 1516, Muslim scholars accepted the legitimacy of the House of Osman to rule and their loyalty to the sultanate provided the strongest bond of cohesion between Arabic-speaking Muslims and their Ottoman rulers. There was simply no viable alternative for Muslim Arabs to the Ottoman sultanate until Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab challenged the legitimacy of the Ottoman house's claim to be the "Servitor of the Two Holy Places". Society in the early modern age was hierarchical, and for the Sunni intellectual elite in urban centres such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Medina the sultan was at the summit of that hierarchy. They further believed that their society would not continue to function without someone serving as sultan: the alternative would be anarchy. It was not forgotten, however, that the reigning sultan did not necessarily have to come from the House of Osman.

That principle underpins the account of Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Tulun (d. 1546) of the events before and immediately following the conquest of his native city of Damascus by Sultan Selim in 1516. In his entry for the year 922 A.H./1516-17, ibn Tulun started by stating that Mutawakkil was the caliph and that the sultan of Egypt and Damascus was Qansuh al-Ghawri. He then listed the governor of Damascus and the names of the *qadi*s representing the four Sunni legal schools.[12] When he did have occasion to mention Sultan Selim, ibn Tulun identified him simply as being the "king of Rum (Anatolia)" (*malik al-Rum*) and not its sultan. His entry for the following year began with the same caliph but then continued, "The sultan of Egypt and its dependencies is Tuman Bay while the Sultan of Damascus and Rum is the victorious king Salim Khan bin 'Uthman".[13] The start of the entry for the year following, 924 A.H., noted that Caliph Mutawakkil had left Cairo for Istanbul and that Selim was "Sultan of Egypt, Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*) and Rum".[14]

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12 Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Tulun, *Mufakahat al-khillani fi al-zaman tarikh Misr wa Sham,* 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Misriyya al-'amma li-l-ta'lif wa al-anba' wa al-nashr, 1964), 2: 3.

13 Ibid., 2: 41.

14 Ibid., 2: 78.

Significantly, neither in his chronicle nor in that of ibn Ayas, his contemporary in Cairo, is there any mention of the (apocryphal) story that would become popular in later Ottoman Turkish histories of the dynasty in which the last of the Abbasid caliphs passed his cloak of office to Selim.[15] If that event had occurred, it would have been an acknowledgment of the House of Osman's claim to the caliphate. In contrast to the Ottoman version of what happened in Cairo in 1517, the Egyptian cleric Ahmad al-Damanhuri (d. 1779) summarised the end of the caliphate as follows:

> Prophecy ended with Muhammad, God bless him and grant him peace, and the caliphate ended with Muta'sim bi-llahi al-'Abbasi whom the Tatars killed in Baghdad in 656. But the "fictive Caliphate" (*al-khilafa al-suriyya*) was transferred to Cairo and it continued until the time of Sultan al-Ashraf al-Ghawri. After him, Sultan Selim offered a profession of loyalty (*bay'a*) to al-Mutawakkil 'ala Allah and took him to Constantinople (*al-Qustantiniyya*). When Sultan Selim died, al-Mutawakkil returned to Cairo and remained as caliph until he died in 950 (1543-44) in the time of Daud Paşa. With his death the "fictive Caliphate" of the Abbasids passed from the world and nothing remains except the sultanate and the wazirate.[16]

Despite the transfer of the last caliph to Istanbul, it did not take long for a challenger to the Ottoman sultan's claim to rule in Damascus to emerge. Janbirdi al-Ghazali, whom Selim had appointed as governor in Damascus, rose in rebellion against his son Sultan Süleyman in 1520. Cautious not to pick sides, ibn Tulun recorded that al-Ghazali assumed the title of *Sultan al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* (Sultan of the Two Holy Places, namely Mecca and Medina) and the sermon during the Friday prayers at the Ummayad mosque was said in his name.[17] It is significant that al-Ghazali chose to associate himself with the holy cities, rather than simply taking the title *Sultan al-Sham* (Sultan of Damascus) used by his Mamluk predecessors. Later Arab historians recorded that Selim had first been given the title *Sultan al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* by the *khatib* of the Umayyad mosque in Aleppo, or alternatively that of the Azhar mosque in Cairo, although none of the contemporary Arab chroniclers of the conquest recorded that piece of information.[18]

Irrespective of the truth of that episode, Janbirdi sought to reclaim that exalted title from the Ottomans and clearly hoped it would provide him with an Islamic pedigree that would trump any claim to legitimacy advanced by Süleyman. It did not seem to matter to ibn Tulun that al-Ghazali's men did not actually control the two holy cities, which were under the control of troops commanded by Kha'ir Beg, governor of Cairo, who had remained loyal to his Ottoman masters. Thereafter, ibn Tulun referred to al-Ghazali as "the Sultan" while Süleyman reverted to being simply "*malik al-Rum*". Once the Ottoman forces retook the city, ibn Tulun again conferred the title of sultan on Süleyman. He recorded the transition from one sovereign to the next without editorial com-

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15 Mustafa Nuri Paşa, *Nerayic iil-Vukuat*, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1979), 1: 123.

16 al-Damanhuri, *al-Nafa' al-ghazir*, 44-6.

17 Shams al-Din ibn Tulun, *I'lam al-wara' bi-man wulliya na'iban min al-Atrak bi-Dimashq al-Sham al-kubra* (Damascus: al-Matba'a al-Jarida al-Rasmiyya, 1964), 236.

18 Muhammad Raghib al-Tabbakh, *I'lam al-nubala bi-ta'rikh Halab al-shaba*, 3 vols. (Aleppo: Dar al-Qalam al- 'Arabi, 1977), 3: 141; Muhammad al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, *al-Tuhfa al-bahiyya fi tamalluk Al al-'Uthman fi al-diyar al-Misriyya* (Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub wa al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya, 2005), 81.

ment and we must assume that ibn Tulun considered all three rulers – Mamluk, Ottoman and post-Mamluk Mamluk – equally legitimate.

In contrast to ibn Tulun's ambivalence regarding Sultan Selim's legitimacy to rule in Damascus, his contemporary Muhammad ibn Ayas in Cairo spared no ink in condemning the behaviour of Sultan Selim and his men. They were, from the sultan down to his janissaries, impious Muslims who did not fast during Ramadan or implement the holy law, preferring to rule instead through the sultan's arbitrary decrees. Furthermore, according to ibn Ayas, Selim was a liar, cruel and despotic, and a drunkard who sexually abused women and boys. Michael Winter suggests that ibn Ayas's Mamluk origins might have coloured his view of the new rulers, but there seems to be little doubt that the Ottoman conquest of Cairo and the overthrow of the Mamluk regime was a shock to the city's civilian elite.[19] However, as the memory of the conquest faded, Egyptian scholars acceded to Ottoman suzerainty and even praised the conquest that ibn Ayas had condemned. Although later Arab chroniclers would criticise individual Ottoman governors and judges, no author after ibn Ayas would extend his ire, or his blame, to the sultan himself or his lineage.[20] The House of Osman by its success had become legitimate and above reproach.

Selim was the first and last Ottoman sultan to visit Damascus, but there is no indication in the works that have survived from the three centuries following the conquest that the physical absence of the sultan affected the dynasty's legitimacy in the eyes of the city's inhabitants. Sharaf al-Din Musa al-Ansari (d. c.1594) and Muhammad ibn Kannan (d. 1740), writing more than a century apart, dutifully recorded at the start of each year's entry the same hierarchy established by ibn Tulun.[21] Firstly, they recorded the sultan's name and then the names of the governor in the city and the chief Hanafi judge. Authors in the Mamluk era had employed the same practice in their chronicles. The continuation of the practice suggests a hierarchy of power that was self-evident to the authors.

The chroniclers duly noted the succession of sultans as well as the births of their sons. When that succession was not peaceful, as in 1730, concerns could creep into the narrative. Recording the imprisonment of Sultan Ahmed III after his resignation in favour of his nephew Mahmud I, Ibn Kannan in Damascus took comfort from the peaceful transfer, as opposed to the more violent practice common to the era when caliphs still nominally ruled.

> In the time of the caliphs if a sultan was deposed, they weren't satisfied with simply imprisoning him but they removed his eyes and dressed him in the ragged, rough clothes of a commoner, leaving him to beg from the people. But as for the sons of 'Uthman, it's much better. [The sultan] is imprisoned with ample sustenance until he dies, or is poisoned.[22]

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19 Michael Winter, "Attitudes toward the Ottomans in Egyptian Historiography during Ottoman Rule," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Brill: Leiden, 2001), 195-210.

20 James Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late-Mamluk and Ottoman Danmascus (ca. 1500-1800)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (2003): 215-36.

21 Sharaf al-Din Musa al-Ansari, *Nuzhat al-khatir wa bahjat al-nathir*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1991); Muhammad ibn Kannan, *Yawmiyyat Shamiyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Tiba'a, 1994).

22 Ibn Kannan, *Yawmiyyat*, 414.

Despite the ominous alternative ending for the sultan's life, the author clearly longed for a legal and non-violent transfer of power, even though he misrepresented the history of the Ottoman dynasty, which did include cases of regicide.

The close identification of the House of Osman with the Sunni cause is a literary trope that runs consistently through the Arab narratives. This is most apparent in the works by Sunni scholars in Mosul and Baghdad,[23] but also had echoes in the works of authors further removed from the battlefields in Iraq. Two biographical dictionaries that have survived from Aleppo, written by Radi al-Din Muhammad ibn Hanbali (d. 1563) and Abu al-Wafa al-'Urdi (d. 1661), contain lengthy biographies of Ottoman grand viziers and chief judges (*Şeyhülislam*) of the empire who visited the city on their way to campaigns against the Safavids in Iran. Typical of these is a biography written by al-'Urdi for Grand Vizier Hafız Ahmed Paşa, who lost Baghdad to the Safavids in 1624. After recounting how "our soldiers" (*'askaruna*), that is the Ottomans, lost the city, he detailed the "martyrdom" of Sunni religious scholars in Baghdad, including the city's chief Hanafi judge and mufti, following the capture of the city by Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). According to the author, the shah ordered the men to curse the first three caliphs, and when they refused, he had them beheaded. After providing what was for him an atrocity story, al-'Urdi then exposed to the reader some of the "wrong" beliefs (*ghalat*) held by the Shia. He completed the entry with a prayer that the sultan would preserve the "people of the Sunna" from error.[24]

A century later, the Damascene chronicler Muhammad ibn Kannan recorded in the year 1143/1730-31:

> It was heard that Sultan Ahmed bin Osman set out to attack the Shi'ite country of the Persians and that he departed Islambul and that he passed through Aleppo on his way to the campaign at the start of spring. Later he was in some Anatolian provinces. May God grant victory to the Sultan of the Muslims and to all of the people of the Sunna.[25]

The attitude towards the Shia had clearly hardened over the course of more than a century of wars waged to decide who would rule Iraq. Earlier in the struggle, Arab authors had shown greater ambivalence. Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn al-Himsi recorded in Sha'aban 928 (June-July 1522) that pilgrims from Iraq were arrested in Damascus, then tortured and executed on suspicion that they were spies for the "Sultan of the East, Isma'il Shah al-Sufi". He added that no one knew why this terrible act was done, other than that it was on the order of Sultan Süleyman. He then added, "May God fight the order and the one who carried it out and judge them for this heinous act". Tellingly, Ibn al-Himsi did not blame Süleyman as the issuer of that order, only the order itself. In the entry for the next year, he praised that same sultan for the capture of Rhodes and noted that the whole city of Damascus celebrated the victory over the "pirate infidels".[26] The

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23 Yasin ibn Khayr-Allah al-'Umari. *Zubdat al-athar al-jaliyya fi al-hawadith al-ardiyya* (Najaf: Matba'at al-Adab, 1974); Percy Kemp, "History and Historiography in Jalili Mosul," *Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1983): 345-76; Dina Rizq Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul 1540-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 160-71.

24 Abu al-Wafa'al-'Urdi, *Ma'adan al-dhahab fi al-a'yan al-musharrafa bihim Halab* (Aleppo: Dar al-Mallah, 1987), 146-9.

25 Ibn Kannan, *Yawmiyyat*, 409.

sultan was held responsible for acts that ennobled the people of Islam and duly praised for them, but not for those that did not.

If the enemy in the east were Shia "heretics", then in the west that role fell to Christian "infidels". As an indication that the outcomes on distant battlefields were on the minds of the authors, many of the Arab Muslim chroniclers routinely recorded Ottoman victories and defeats in the Balkans. This stands in contrast to the assertion by Michael Winter that Arab chroniclers rarely evinced an interest in the empire's fortunes in the Balkans.[27] Ibn Kannan, towards the end of his chronicle, provides an example in his entry for 1152 (1739-40). Having recounted the fall of Belgrade to the Ottomans and then separately the removal by Sultan Mahmud I of janissaries who had been terrorising the population of Damascus, ibn Kannan linked the two actions:

> An imperial decree arrived from his imperial majesty (hadrat al-Hunkar) al-Sultan Mahmud, may God help him to victory in this world and the next. He is the most righteous of kings from among those whom God aids to victory, for he has taken Bi'r al-Aghrad [Belgrade, literally, "the well of the objectives"] from the sect of the Unbelievers as well as more than a hundred castles and fortresses. He has freed Damascus from the vilest of tyrants and those who are the least in their degree of religion and faith. For he is like Antar and the equal of Nimrod deserving of praise; may God allot our lord sultan with the best portion, amen.[28]

It is telling that the author compared the Ottoman sultan to two heroes of the Arab narrative tradition, suggesting a link of chivalry, if not actual lineage, between Sultan Mahmud and the Arab heroes of the pre-Islamic past.

Ibrahim al-Khiyari of Medina (d. 1672), who was a visitor at the sultan's court in 1669 when news of the final conquest of Crete by the Ottomans arrived, lavished praise on Sultan Mehmed IV for that victory and composed a poem to honour the day.[29] The scholar Mar'i al-Ramli praised the Ottoman sultans for keeping his world equally safe from Christian Corsairs and Bedouin raiders.[30] The latter were also a constant terror for the chronicler Muhammad ibn al-Khanqah al-Makki (d. 1722), writing in the inland Syrian town of Homs. Whenever he mentioned the various nomadic peoples (Bedouin, Kurds, Turkmens) who raided his city, he added his prayer that the sultan might obliterate them.[31] He, like his contemporary ibn Kannan in Damascus, also occasionally prayed for the sultan's victories in Europe, but he clearly had more immediate threats on his mind. Battles won or lost were matters of concern to Muslim scholars across the sultan's Arabic-speaking provinces, and the sultans who commanded Muslim armies against infidels and heretics deserved the authors' prayers.

Although Ibn Tulun's loyalty to the sultan was seemingly mercurial, as generations of Muslims became accustomed to the House of Osman as their right-

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26 Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn al-Himsi, *Hawadith al-zaman wa wafiyyat al-shuyukh wa al-aqran*, 3 vols. (Sidon: al-Makataba al-'Asriyya, 1999), 3: 43, 49.

27 Michael Winter, "Historiography in Arabic during the Ottoman period," in *Arabic literature in the post-classical period*, ed. Roger Allen and D.S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 187-8.

28 Ibn Kannan, *Yawmiyyat*, 511.

29 al-Khiyari, *Tuhfat al-ubada'*, 1: 317, 324-5.

30 Winter, "A Seventeenth-Century Arabic Panagyric," 142-3.

31 Muhammad al-Makki. *Ta'rikh Hims* (Damascus: Institute Français de Damas, 1987), 16, 27, 43, 86, 175-6.

ful sovereigns, their loyalty to the ruling dynasty intensified. In contrast to ibn Tulun's ambivalence over the Ottoman conquest of Damascus, a century and a half later al-Khiyari wrote praise poems in memory of Sultan Selim I and to celebrate that very conquest.[32] The question remains, however, whether the loyalty to the sultan professed by Muslim Arab authors was simply perfunctory. Ibn Tulun's easy shift from Mamluk to Ottoman sultan suggests that as long as the rulers were Sunni they would be equally legitimate in the eyes of the authors. Even ibn Kannan, who was extremely attentive to the affairs of the sultanate, could only offer the phrase, "May God stop the fighting", rather than his usual "May God grant the sultan victory", in recording a battle between the Ottomans and the forces of Nadir Shah, whom the author believed to be a Sunni Afghan.[33]

Loyalty to the Ottoman sultanate was not absolute, nor did it come without conditions. For the Sunni urban elite of the Arabic-speaking lands, loyalty to the sultan was strong as long as he defended the sharia, "commanded right and forbade wrong" and upheld the unity of the empire against "heretics and infidels". Such absolute, if conditional, loyalty to the sovereign was not unusual in the early modern world. Inductees into the Orange Order in Ireland in 1796 pledged "to the utmost of my power [to] support and defend the present King George III, his heirs and successors so long as he may support the Protestant Ascendancy, the Constitution and the laws of these kingdoms".[34] If the House of Osman provided sultans who would watch over the lands of the Muslims and keep them from harm, then the Arab authors represented here would rejoice in the sultan's victories and fret over his defeats. Alternative candidates for the sultanate besides the scions of the House of Osman were possible, but by the 18th century most in the Arab lands would be hard pressed to say who they were.

If the Muslim Arab authors identified with the successes and defeats of the House of Osman, two Christian Arab authors from the 18th century present a more complex picture. Yusuf Dimitri 'Abbud (d. 1805), in chronicling events in his native Aleppo in the last quarter of that century, made frequent references to events in Istanbul, including accounts of huge blocks of ice floating in the Bosporus or of that city's frequent devastating fires.[35] This was a reflection of fact that he was a Melkite Catholic merchant and that many of his community, including relatives, frequently travelled to Istanbul on business or were resident there. That awareness of the wider empire extended to the sultan as his sovereign. 'Abbud followed any mention of a sultan's name in his chronicle with pious expressions that were similar to those invoked by Muslim authors. For example, following the news of the enthronement of Sultan Abdulhamid I in 1774, 'Abbud adds, "May God make his days brilliant, full of security and joy".[36] Jewish sources from the same period suggest a similar identification with the dynasty by the authors.[37]

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32 al-Khiyari, *Tuhfat al-udaba'*, 2: 140-1.

33 Ibn Kannan, *Yawmiyyat*, 382.

34 Marcus Tanner, *Ireland's Holy Wars: The Struggle for a Nation's Soul 1500-2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 192.

35 Yusuf Dimitri 'Abbud, *al-Murtad fi ta'rikh Halab wa Baghdad*, ed. Fawwaz Mahmud al-Fawwaz, MA thesis, University of Damascus, 1978, 36, 38.

36 Ibid.,13.

37 Matt Goldish, *Jewish Questions: Responsa on Sephardic Life in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 144.

The inclusion of such pious phrases after the sultans' names by both Muslim and non-Muslim authors may have been simply ritualistic in the way that pious phrases are used by Arabic-speakers to cover any number of daily occurrences. The absence of such pieties after other Ottoman officials' names in the chronicles, however, seems to indicate an acknowledgment that the House of Osman sat at the head of a natural political hierarchy that for most of his subjects was ordained by God, to be respected if not enthusiastically endorsed. Governors, in contrast, could be lambasted for their cruelty, their avarice, their impiety or a combination of the three.

Respect for the dynasty was, however, not universal among non-Muslim authors. Fr. Mikha'il Burayk (d.1782) in Damascus had little regard for the House of Osman. He recorded the death of sultans and their enthronement without adding any pious phrases. Burayk's sympathies are, however, apparent in his report of the Russian occupation of Beirut in 1773, where he noted that they had erected a large cross over the city, thereby "raising their stature and exalting their reputation".[38] He also reported a prophecy that promised the overthrow of the House of Osman by some unnamed Christian hero in 1762, to be followed by the second coming of Christ in 1783.[39] Elsewhere, when describing Philemon the Patriarch of Antioch who was a Phanariot Greek from Istanbul, Burayk asserted that he was a *rajul 'Uthmanli*. This is one of the earliest references I have found for the application of the appellation "Ottoman" to someone who was not of the royal house or serving it. Burayk then went on to discuss the patriarch's poor table manners and faulty understanding of Orthodox traditions.[40] Clearly, Fr. Burayk did not think being an Ottoman was a good thing.

The difference in the degree of respect shown the sultan in the works of the two Christians authors reflects their differing worldviews. The integration of 'Abbud's Melkite Catholic community into a larger Ottoman commercial world created a cosmopolitan outlook that led him to be interested in the state of affairs outside his native Aleppo. His was a community that prospered under Ottoman rule and the author was seemingly willing to acknowledge that fact, even if he frequently commented on corrupt Ottoman officials in Aleppo. 'Abbud's political worldview was not unlike that of his Muslim contemporaries: local government officials were corrupt and tyrannical, but the sultanate itself was beyond reproach. The righteousness of a royal hierarchy in his worldview explains 'Abbud's derisory description of the French Revolution as regicide by the mob and his labelling of Napoleon Bonaparte as a "heretic" acting against God's natural order first in France and later in Egypt, where he challenged the sultan's authority.[41]

Esteem for the sultan as maintainer of the status quo for Christians is present in the history written by the Maronite Patriarch Istifan Duwayhi (d. 1704) as well. Educated in Rome, Duwayhi's worldview, like that of 'Abbud, recognised that the sultans protected his community and that the alternative would probably be worse.[42] In contrast, the parochial attitudes of Fr. Burayk reflected a society

38 Mikha'il Burayk, *Tarikh al-Sham, 1720-1782* (Harissa, Lebanon: no publisher, 1930), 100.
39 Ibid., 57-8.
40 Ibid., 82-5.
41 'Abbud, *al-Murtadd*, 176-81.
42 Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 41-3.

where for him the differences between Christians and Muslims were stark. The memory of centuries of Christian subjugation by Muslim rulers coloured his historical imagination and he bore no goodwill towards any of them, with the notable exception of the 'Azm governors of his city whom he praised for their liberal attitudes towards the Christians, asserting that they were the only governors since the conquest of Damascus by the Muslims to treat the Christians of the city fairly.[43]

The Cult of Ibn al-'Arabi

Beyond the defence of Sunni Muslim from their enemies, the Ottoman sultans succeeded in creating another link to some of their Muslim Arab subjects through the promotion of the cult of Ibn al-'Arabi. One of the most distinctive features of the intellectual life of the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the centuries following the conquest was the centrality of the writings of the mystic Ibn al-'Arabi in much of the discourse. Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi was born in Spain, but settled in Damascus in later life. He died there in 1240 and was buried in the Salihiyya quarter, which was outside the city's walls on the slopes of Jabal Qasyun, which rises to the northwest of the city.

It is not readily apparent why the cult would resonate for some in the Ottoman centuries. Many scholars of Islam considered Ibn al-'Arabi to have been the most brilliant of the Sufi theosophists, but his writings are also extremely dense on account of the subtlety of his arguments as well as his intentionally obscure language. He was unquestionably controversial, as his writings were said to advance the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*, or the unity of being, although he never used that phrase in his voluminous writings. Greatly simplified, Ibn al-'Arabi proposed the existence of one reality, God, from which emanates the consciousness that all sentient beings share. Each individual is both separate from, but also part of, that larger consciousness, even if most are unaware of that reality. The quest for knowledge of one's existential nature can lead an individual back to the source of all consciousness that is God: in the process, both God and the seeker become aware of each other as the indistinguishable self.

Furthermore, the distinctions among religions wither away as one seeks what was for Ibn al-'Arabi the transcendent truth. God's consciousness, in the view of the Shaykh, as he was called by those who followed his teachings, cannot be circumscribed by one religion's rituals. Rather the rituals of all religions provide the foundation upon which the seeker of truth might begin to approach Her. For Ibn al-'Arabi, if God had a gendered nature, then it must be feminine in Her role as Creator.[44] Ibn al-'Arabi's Muslim critics argued that his vision of the universe promoted monism and collapsed the distinction between God and His creations. Furthermore, many Muslim scholars felt that Ibn al-'Arabi's religious relativism diminished the importance of the sharia and denied Islam's unique truth. As such, many Muslims, both then and now, have found Ibn al-'Arabi's writings to be heretical.

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43 Burayk, *Tarikh*, 62.

44 William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Given the controversy surrounding him and the complexity of his vision, it is somewhat surprising that Ibn al-'Arabi would become a figure with cult status in the Ottoman period. Nonetheless, from their entry into the Arab lands, the Ottoman sultans served as the patrons and promoters of the cult of the Shaykh. Ibn Tulun wrote that one of the first things Sultan Selim did after conquering Damascus was to attend Friday prayers in the Umayyad mosque, the city's "cathedral mosque" and the reputed burial place of John the Baptist's head. That respect was to be expected from a ruler who proclaimed that he was the upholder of Islam. Soon after this, however, he surprised the ulama of the city by visiting the tomb of Ibn al-'Arabi, where he offered prayers over the derelict grave site, a clear indication that the saint had fallen into obscurity in the centuries following his death.

According to the Ottoman traveller and raconteur Evliya Çelebi, writing over a century and half after the event, Selim was troubled at that time over whether to pursue his Mamluk enemies to Cairo and hesitated to act. In this period of personal trial, Ibn al-'Arabi came to Selim in a dream and promised him Cairo if Selim would restore the saint's grave.[45] Although it makes a good story, there was an important political reason Selim might have wanted to honour the saint. Accompanying Sultan Selim to Damascus was the Ottoman legal scholar and chief judge of the empire (*Şeyhülislam*) Kemalpaşazade Ahmed (d. 1534), or ibn Kamal in the Arabic sources. Kemalpaşazade followed in a tradition of Ottoman scholarship that viewed Ibn al-'Arabi's writings as a potential bridge between the Ottoman dynasty's role as upholders of Sunni Islam and the various popular movements present in Anatolia that were tinged with Shia millenarianism.

The court scholars sought the absorption of the religious dissidents into the body politic of the empire by promoting the sultan as the "perfect man" (*al-insan al-kamil*) of the Sufi tradition. In many Sufis' understanding of the cosmos, there has to be such an individual who acts as the fulcrum between the perceived mundane physical world and the transcendent reality of God. The Prophet Muhammad fulfilled this role in his lifetime, but those who shared this belief held there must one such individual in every generation. Ibn al-'Arabi wrote that with the Prophet's death and the end of Prophecy, the mantle of "perfect man" had rested on the shoulders of God's saints (*awliya*), of whom Ibn al-'Arabi claimed to be the last.

Without saints, many Muslim scholars in the Sufi tradition felt that there had to be some line of descent, either spiritual or physical, that would provide the individuals who would fulfil the necessary function as the "perfect man". In promoting the sultan as that individual, Ottoman scholars based their claim on the works of Ibn al-'Arabi. In doing so, they sought to elevate the House of Osman as an alternative to the Shia imam, whom many in the empire believed was waiting to return to restore justice to the world at some future time, or was already present in the persona of Shah Ismail in Iran. By promoting the cult of Ibn al-'Arabi, Selim could present himself as the embodiment of that "perfect man". He could thus claim to be the promoter and protector of both the *zahir* (outer) and the *batin* (inner) traditions of Islam.[46] 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani,

45 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, vol. 9 (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1985), 206.

46 Tim Winter, "Ibn Kemal (d. 940/1534) on Ibn 'Arabi's Hagiography," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 137-57.

an influential Egyptian Sufi of the 17th century, seemingly conferred that role on the Ottoman sultans when he labelled Selim's son Süleyman as "*al-qutb al-zahir*", or the "visible axis of the universe", a clear reference to the "perfect man" tradition.[47]

Ibn Tulun did not provide the reason for Selim's actions in relation to the saint's tomb, but noted that he established a *waqf* for its maintenance and for the construction of a mosque over it. That mosque was completed while Selim was in Cairo and he prayed there as his last public act in Damascus before setting out to return to the capital. As evidence of the association between the House of Osman and the saint, Janbirdi al-Ghazali destroyed the dome of the newly constructed mosque as one of the first acts of rebellion against Süleyman in 1520. When Farhat Paşa restored Ottoman control in the city in that same year, he quickly moved to repair the dome. When Farhat died in 1522, he was buried in the grounds of the mosque, establishing a precedent for it to serve as the resting place of Ottoman governors who died in the city.[48]

From that point on, the mosque was known as the Salimiyya, not to be confused with the Sufi *tekke* in Damascus that bears that name today, whose construction was financed by Sultan Selim's grandson Selim II (1566-74). The original Salimiyya, known today simply as the Mosque of Ibn al-'Arabi, became a sacred space for Ottoman officials to perform public rituals. Ibn Tulun noted that following Selim's example, it was often the last place governors visited upon leaving the city for Istanbul for reposting. Although Süleyman would build a much grander mosque on the banks of the Barada River to serve as the starting point for the *hajj* out of the city, the mosque built by his father seems to have continued to hold a special place in the spiritual imagination of Ottoman officials and Muslim pilgrims alike. In recognition of this, Süleyman commissioned Sinan, the same architect who designed his larger mosque, to build opposite the mosque his father had built an *'imara* for the distribution of food to pilgrims who had come to visit the saint's tomb.[49]

The intellectual who was most closely associated with Ibn al-'Arabi in the Ottoman period was 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731). Al-Nabulusi was born in Damascus in 1641 in the al-Salihiyya quarter, not far from the mosque of Ibn al-'Arabi. He was a prolific scholar whose extant works number over 200. Most of these have not been studied by scholars and exist only in manuscript form, but their titles range from love poetry dedicated to beardless youths to a treatise on the proper care and propagation of olive trees.[50] They also include a history of the Ottoman dynasty. But al-Nabulusi's most famous works among his contemporaries were his treatises on the works of Ibn al-'Arabi. When Ibrahim al-Khiyari visited Damascus in 1669, al-Nabulusi was already an established scholar. As such, al-Khiyari sought him out both on his travels north and then again when he returned to Damascus on his way to Cairo and home.[51]

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47 Winter, "Attitudes toward the Ottomans," 200.

48 Ibn al-Himsi, *Hawadith al-zaman,* 3: 49.

49 Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 222-4.

50 Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus: 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, 1641-1731* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

51 al-Khiyari, 1:123-5; 2: 135.

The Damascene chronicler Muhammad ibn Kannan, who referred to al-Nabulusi as "mawlana" (our master), repeatedly identified al-Nabulusi as the most learned of his city's many learned men. That sentiment was echoed by Muhammad al-Makki, who recorded al-Nabulusi's visit to Hims and his reverential reception by the Sunni establishment there.[52] Ibn Kannan noted when al-Nabulusi gave public lectures on the saint's writings in the Salimiyya mosque and who among the city's prominent men attended. These frequently included the Ottoman governor and chief judge in the city. When al-Nabulusi died in 1731, there was a large public funeral, which the Ottoman governor and chief judge attended. Two years later, his body was entombed in the Salimiyya mosque near the mausoleum of Ibn al-'Arabi.

The cult of Ibn al-'Arabi was not universally embraced by the Ottoman ulama, however. One of the earliest critics was Mehmed of Birgi (d. 1573). An Anatolian scholar, Birgili Mehmed denounced many Sufi practices as both innovations and impious. Birgili Mehmed, however, did not condemn mysticism outright, only its more unrestrained forms. In particular, he found fault with the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi, whom he said promoted the heretical idea of the "unity of being". One of Birgili Mehmed's students, Kadızade Mehmed (d. 1635), created a stir in Istanbul by demanding that the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV ban coffee and tobacco, prohibit music and dance and remove the study of mathematics and the natural sciences from the state-sponsored madrasas.[53] During the reign of Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-87), the Kadizadeliler, as the movement came to be known, was in the ascendancy and one of its most prominent promoters, Vanî Mehmed Efendi, served as the spiritual advisor to the sultan. Among the other abuses of what he considered to be "true" Islam, Vanî Mehmed condemned the popularity among the learned of the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi.

In 1692, al-Nabulusi wrote a stinging treatise against an unnamed Turkish (*min al-Arwam*) scholar who had written a critique of Ibn al-'Arabi for having said that Christians and Jews might enter paradise. Al-Nabulusi's essay is loaded with vitriol and makes much of the Turkish origins of the scholar, with the implication that he had an imperfect knowledge of Arabic and was, therefore, unqualified to speak authoritatively about the sources.[54] It is widely presumed that the target of his wrath was Vanî Mehmed or one of his students. Ibrahim al-Khiyari also recorded a disagreement with Vanî Mehmed, although his did not reach the level of the polemic found in the treatise by al-Nabulusi. Al-Khiyari had an audience with Vanî Mehmed in Istanbul, during which he praised the Ottoman scholar for influencing the sultan to close down the taverns of the city. After composing a praise poem in Vanî Mehmed's honour, al-Khiyari added that he had taken issue, however, with the Ottoman scholar's hard stance on coffee-houses.[55]

That such a disagreement could exist between two scholars comes as no surprise, given the possible difference in interpretation of a shared legal tradition

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52 al-Makki, *Ta'rikh Hims*, 123-5,

53 Madeline Zilfi, "The Kadızadelils: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986): 251-69.

54 Michael Winter, "A Polemical Treatise by 'Abd al-Gani al-Nabulusi against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious Status of the *Dhimmis*," *Arabica* 35 (1988), 92-103.

55 al-Khiyari, *Tuhfat al-udaba'*, 1: 164; 2: 74-6.

by Arabs and Ottomans.[56] Highlighting that gap in interpretation of religious law, al-Khiyari had written an ode in praise of the Nawfura coffee-house in Damascus earlier in his travelogue. Unlike taverns, which with their drawn shutters were dens of iniquity and sexual licentiousness, he praised coffee-houses for their open, airy spaces where a cultivated man could rest, talk with friends in leisure or contemplate the world as it passed him by. Al-Khiyari did not record Vanî Mehmed's response to his defence of the coffee-house. He also did not mention whether he had broached the subject of Ibn al-'Arabi's writings in his discussions with the Ottoman scholar. Al-Khiyari had previously visited the mosque of Ibn al-'Arabi and he reported praying over the saint's grave as well as composing a poem in his honour, acts which Vanî Mehmed would have condemned as heresy.[57]

Despite the essay by al-Nabulusi, on which side of the heated divide over Ibn al-'Arabi's writings a scholar might align himself seems to have had very little to do with his mother tongue. The eminent Ottoman scholar, Katib Çelebi, also disagreed with the students of Vanî Mehmed and defended Ibn al-'Arabi.[58] Furthermore, not all Arab ulama had problems with the stricter interpretation of Islam advocated by the Kadızadeli movement. Muhammad al-Ustawani, a scion of a family well-known in Damascus for its piety and scholarship and a long-time resident of the imperial capital, was a leading advocate of its extreme positions until his death in 1661. He even had the righteous temerity to denounce the leading jurist of the empire, Yahya efendi, for having written poetry.[59] Many of al-Nabulusi's contemporaries in Damascus were also wary of his admiration of Ibn al-'Arabi. He was removed from his post as mufti of Damascus after only a few months in response to the opposition of some of the city's Sunni elite, who found his rulings to be unorthodox.

Whether Selim had consciously sought that outcome when he refurbished the saint's tomb, the cult of Ibn al-'Arabi helped to promote the dynasty's legitimacy in the Arab lands and establish a bond between sultan and subjects. Understanding the political importance of an appeal to local traditions in gaining legitimacy, his son Süleyman would promote the cult of the jurist Abu Hanifa and the Sufi saint, 'Abd al-Qadir Gilani in Baghdad as counterweights to the Shia shrines in a move to reclaim for the Sunnis the spiritual geography of that city. But for some Arab scholars, the cult of Ibn al-'Arabi provided a strong spiritual/ideological link between themselves and the Ottoman sultans. As an indicator of this, the authors who expressed the strongest support for the House of Osman also professed reverence for the Shaykh.

The Egyptian chronicler of the Ottoman dynasty, al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, acknowledged that link in his biography of Sultan Selim I in which he highlighted Selim's construction of a mosque over the tomb of Ibn al-'Arabi and the rev-

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56 Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "Relations between the Syrian *'Ulama* and the Ottoman State in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kate Fleet (Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente, 1999), 67-95.

57 al-Khiyari, *Tuhfat al-uḍaba'*, 1:135.

58 Halil Inalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 183-5.

59 Marc Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 70-1.

erence the sultan paid to the saint as proof of Selim's religiosity. Al-Bakri al-Siddiqi added that the impious Mamluk sultan, whom the Ottomans had overthrown, had paid no homage to the saint whatsoever. In the author's view of the dynasty's history, inner faith and political legitimacy were intertwined, and he had earlier credited the intercession by a host of saints and angels with Selim's victory at Marj Dabiq.[60] A century and half later in Mosul, Yasin al-'Umari took the news of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798 as a sign that the Ottoman Empire's end was near, but found some solace in the fact that the sad turn of events had been predicted by Ibn al-'Arabi.[61]

Conclusion

Many of the Arabic-speaking Muslim intellectuals of the cities of Syria, Egypt and Iraq viewed the Ottoman regime as their regime in the early modern period. There was no question in their public voice recorded for posterity that it was legitimate and I doubt whether any disapproval of the dynasty existed in private either. As in most cases only one copy of the works discussed here has survived, it is doubtful that the authors wrote with a wider public in mind, and so we can probably discount the possibility that they were seeking to curry favour with those in power. None of the works is dedicated to anyone, the usual sign that the author was seeking patronage. So why did they write? My personal guess is that they sought to impose some order on their universe by describing the most important events or personalities in their lives, either for posterity or for their own memory, a diary of sorts.

The authors' identification with the dynasty was more than a superficial one and they viewed its victories and defeats as personal gains or losses. Several took great interest in the intellectual developments in the capital: they did not view them as distant abstractions but rather as part of a larger conversation in two different languages but within one shared cultural outlook. I do not deny that Muslim Arab authors were proud of their position as heirs to an Islam their ancestors had articulated through the medium of the Arabic language. Indeed, all would have agreed with the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad that stated the language of paradise was Arabic.[62] But that pride did not prevent them from identifying with the vicissitudes of the Ottoman sultanate.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that that sense of connection did not fade in the modern period. Although Wahhabi ideas of Qur'anic literalism gained popularity in some Muslim intellectual circles in the 19th century, no major Arab scholar supported the Wahhabi call to overthrow the sultanate as illegitimate.[63] Neither, by the way, did most major Arab Muslim scholars recognise the legitimacy of the Ottoman sultans' claim to the caliphate. Even when they did so, it came with the recognition that the sons of the House of Osman could not technically be caliphs because of their non-Arab origins. Necessity, the apologists argued, required that all Muslims must nevertheless recognise the sultan's claim

60 al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, *al-Tuhfa al-bahiyya*, 57.

61 Khoury, *State and Provincial Society*, 164-6.

62 al-Khiyari, *Tuhfat al-udaba'*, 2:55.

63 Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Salafiyya and the Rise of the Khalidiyya in Baghdad in the early nineteenth century," *Die Welt des Islam* 43 (2003): 349-72.

to be caliph.[64] But even for those who did not, the Sunni Arab elite of the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries chose in the face of European imperial ambitions to take comfort, like their ancestors before them, in the House of Osman serving as their sultans and viewed their rule as legitimate.[65]

64 Ibrahim Muwaylihi, *Spies, Scandals, and Sultans: Istanbul in the Twilight of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Roger Allen (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 163-4.

65 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).