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Research Proposal

May 13, 2024

**Tentative Title:**

**Sufism in the City's Courts: An AI-Assisted Study in Early Modern Istanbul**

This research project seeks to leverage the capabilities of GPT-4 for the analysis of Ottoman court records prepared and published by Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi, Center for Islamic Studies in Istanbul. By applying advanced AI techniques to historical documents, I aim to provide a long durée perspective on the legal and social dynamics of Ottoman Istanbul. My primary focus is to examine the role of Sufis within the legal and social landscape of Istanbul, along with a broader examination of the societal dynamics between the mid-16th and late-18th centuries.

The main objectives of this research are threefold. Firstly, I aim to examine the extent and nature of Sufi participation in legal and social affairs in Ottoman Istanbul. By doing so, I intend to uncover the depth and nature of Sufi influence within the Ottoman legal system and its implications for the social fabric of the time. Additionally, the project also explores various societal aspects, including gender roles, religious practices, and social hierarchies. By integrating AI with traditional historical research methods, I also aim to develop a research model that opens new avenues for historical inquiry, particularly in the study of Ottoman history.

To achieve these objectives, I will deploy the GPT-4 AI model for Named Entity Recognition (NER) tasks. These tasks involve the systemic extraction and categorization of names, titles, and roles of people from over fifty thousand court register entries. This method will facilitate the creation of detailed profiles for individuals involved in legal proceedings, thereby enriching our historical dataset.

There are several key problems and questions I’d like to address in this study:

* How effectively can GPT-4 identify and categorize named entities within the complex linguistic framework of Ottoman Turkish? What are the potential challenges, and how might they impact the reliability of the extracted data? For example, to what extent can GPT-4 accurately determine religious affiliations, social statuses, and roles?
* What new insights can be gleaned about urban religiosity and societal interactions in the Ottoman capital through an AI-assisted analysis of court records? Key areas of focus will include the visibility of Sufis in various legal roles—such as plaintiffs or witnesses—and their interactions with different societal groups.
* What specific historical details can be extracted about individuals, their societal roles, and contexts? How can this information enhance our understanding of the period's legal and social frameworks? For instance, what can GPT-4 reveal about the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, the nature of their legal disputes, and the patterns of coexistence, conflict, and cooperation?

This research promises not only to deepen our understanding of Sufi influence in Ottoman society but also to demonstrate the potential of AI integration in historical studies. Through this innovative methodology, I aim to provide a nuanced analysis of Sufi roles in urban life while shedding light on broader societal dynamics such as gender roles, interfaith relations, and social class hierarchies.

Below is a practical illustration of the NER tasks applied to an individual court case:  
<https://www.kadisicilleri.org/ayrmetin.php?idno=101&MetinTmz=ada>

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **name** | **gender** | **religion\_ethnicity** | **social\_status\_job** | **role\_in\_case** | **titles** | **legal\_case\_type** |
| Rodini bt. Nikola Nasrâniye | Woman | Christian | N/A | Principal | [] | Property Disputes |
| İlya v. Lefter | Man | Christian | N/A | Witness | [] | Property Disputes |
| Margarit v. Mihail | Man | Christian | N/A | Witness | [] | Property Disputes |
| Panayot v. Anaştaş | Man | Christian | N/A | Witness | [] | Property Disputes |
| Polin v. Mavrodi | Man | Christian | N/A | Husband of Principal | [] | Property Disputes |
| Filohidos v. Varsami | Man | Christian | N/A | Current Property Holder | [] | Property Disputes |
| Mukayyidi b. Ağa | Man | Muslim | N/A | Witness | ['Ağa'] | Property Disputes |
| Hüseyin Usta | Man | Muslim | Artisan/Craftsperson | Witness | ['Usta'] | Property Disputes |
| Ahmed Efendi | Man | Muslim | Scholar/Ulama | Witness | ['Efendi'] | Property Disputes |
| Kayıkçı Hüseyin Beşe | Man | Muslim | N/A | Witness | ['Beşe'] | Property Disputes |
| Hüseyin Ağa | Man | Muslim | N/A | Witness | ['Ağa'] | Property Disputes |
| Panoli v. Rali | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |
| Aci Yamandi | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |
| Aci Yanaki | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |
| Aci Angeli | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |
| Anaştaş | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |
| Pirafil | Man | Christian | N/A | N/A | [] | Property Disputes |