5 Interpreting Ottoman Identity with the Historian Neşri

Murat Cem Mengüç

Sometime between 1487 and 1492, an Ottoman author named Mevlânâ Mehmed Neşri (ca. 1450–1520) composed a history book titled *Kitâbı Cihannüma* (The book of world observer).[1] *Cihannüma* became the first book of world history composed in Turkish that included a history of the Ottomans. As such, it represented the Ottoman past within an erudite context and as a text designed for popular readership. Considered the most influential narrative of Ottoman history among later Ottoman historians, the book seems to have appealed to later generations because of its more accurate chronology, use of otherwise neglected sources, and inclusion of popular accounts and hearsay, which had their roots in Turkic Anatolian traditions.

In *Cihannüma*, Neşri employed an unapologetic Turkic description of the Ottomans, which was not necessarily appreciated at the Ottoman court at the time. Upon its completion and presentation to Sultan Bayezid II, the book seems to have achieved no special favors for its author. In other words, the most influential Ottoman history for later generations may have been written outside the Ottoman court's influence and ideological preferences. This chapter discusses this issue and the relevance of *Cihannüma* to representations of Ottoman identity. It focuses on the historical context in which it was composed, discusses Neşri's Turkic sympathies, and analyzes a short passage from the book.

Very little is known about Neşri, and what is known suggests that he was not a major literary figure during his lifetime. Sources refer to him with the modest title of *müderris* (teacher), which suggests that he did not hold a high office. Although we do not know when he was born, we know that he was originally from Karaman, and by 1481 he was serving the Ottomans. Neşri did not associate himself with the Karamanid emirate, but exploring the implications of his Turkic Anatolian origins helps us understand the context in which he wrote *Cihannüma* and the book's content.

Even though the Ottomans shared, or claimed to have shared, an ethnolinguistic heritage with Turkic constituencies like the Karamanids, during the early years of Ottoman historiography this heritage was kept inexplicit, or at

least marginalized, especially within official Ottoman historiography. Along with other authors, Neşri was pivotal in changing this norm and helped crystallize a more Turkic self-description in Ottoman histories. This change took place during the late fifteenth century, when he was either an eyewitness of or became familiar with numerous conflicts between the Ottomans and the Turkic Anatolian emirates. These conflicts were turbulent periods of Ottoman history and influenced Ottoman self-perception.

Ottoman and Karamanid Confrontation and Changing Perceptions of the Ottomans

During the fifteenth century, the Ottomans and the Karamanids had at least three major military confrontations. The Karamanid emirate (1250–1487) was located in south-central Anatolia, with easy access to the Anatolian plateau and a number of passages from the Taurus Mountains to the Mediterranean coast. The Karamanid emirate's historical center was Karaman, not far from other economic and political hubs like Konya, Adana, and Antalya, all of which at one time or another were in the possession of the Karamanids. This region was a true crucible for the Turkic ethnolinguistic identity, both in its settled (*türk*) and nomadic (*türkmen*) forms. The Karamanid emirate survived at times as a dependent and at times as an independent state, recognized by the Byzantine (395–1453), Ottoman (1299–1922), and Mamluk (1250–1517) Empires. During the second half of the fifteenth century, when Neşri must have immigrated to the Ottoman domains, served the Ottomans, and wrote *Cihannüma*, the emirate was a buffer state between the Ottomans and the Mamluks, mainly under Mamluk protection.

The first Ottoman-Karamanid confrontation of the century took place during the Timurid invasion of Anatolia in 1401, long before Neşri's birth. Yet the history of this conflict was for the first time put into writing and analyzed by Neşri's generation. The second confrontation took place after the Crusade of Varna (1443–1445), when the Karamanids collaborated with the crusading powers to launch a coordinated attack on the Ottomans. By then Neşri must have been a young scholar, who experienced the actual and narrative legacy of the events. The third confrontation occurred when Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481) died, and a civil war ensued. The Karamanids were allied with Cem (1459–1495), who lost his bid for the Ottoman throne to his brother Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512). By 1487 the emirate had been annexed by the Ottomans mainly because of this third confrontation. During this period Neşri was in Ottoman service, and he started to compose *Cihannüma* the year the Karamanid emirate was annihilated.

The first conflict had dramatic consequences for Ottoman self-perception and identity. Neşri and a number of his contemporaries claimed that the Timurid conflict was initiated by the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402), who seized

many Turkic emirates, among them Karaman, and shuffled the governorships of their lands, which upset the local lords. A group of Turkic leaders, including Karamanids, found an ally in Timur (r. 1370–1405), who first tried to solve the disputes peacefully but found himself engaged in an unpleasant verbal confrontation initiated by Bayezid.[2] Timur mobilized his army and beat Bayezid at the Ankara Battle (July 20, 1402), taking him prisoner as a war trophy. When Bayezid died during his captivity, a civil war ensued. Known as Fetret Devri and lasting from 1402 to 1413, the civil war threatened Ottoman sovereignty while the Turkic emirates like Karaman secured their autonomy for the following decades.

During the civil war, five brothers fought for the throne, ending when the Ottoman court was consolidated in 1412 under the sole survivor, Mehmed I (r. 1412–1421). The war made it clear that the legitimacy and continuation of the Ottomans, although in existence one hundred years, still depended on the cooperation of opportunistic allies, who abandoned Ottoman leadership when it suited their interests. This changed the Ottoman court's self-perception and made them reflect on history. After the Timurid invasion and during the civil war, Ottomans for the first time started to show an interest in writing and acquiring history books about themselves. The previously oral literature about Ottoman origins was transformed into writing. An erudite poem chronicling the founding fathers, written and presented as a gift to Mehmed I by Ahmedi (b. 1330?), became the first known historical narrative about the Ottomans.[3] It appears that during this era the Ottomans needed such books more than ever, not to show their allies or enemies but perhaps to convince themselves that the Ottoman project was historically significant.

During the following sultan's reign, Murad II (r. 1421–1444, 1446–1451), the state was more stabilized, while conflicts with the Turkic lords continued. Murad II's legitimacy was challenged by his half-brother Mustafa (1393–1422), who was assisted by the Byzantines. Later, he was the target of the Crusade of Varna. Both conflicts occurred in tandem with coordinated attacks by the Karamanid ruler Sultan İbrahim (d. 1464). Murad II would be remembered as a ruler who used both diplomatic and military means to achieve success, fend off danger, and expand the empire's sphere of influence. Historians like Neşri agreed that economic growth made the Ottoman court a safe haven for Muslim scholars, and many learned men flocked to the empire.

The growing cultural confidence was also evident from the Ottoman court's reinvention of itself and its employment of authors to compose and translate history books. However, to historians' knowledge, the Ottoman court neither commissioned nor received Ottoman histories during this period, except one, Yazıcıoğlu's *Selçukname* (1422–1423). *Selçukname* only marginally referred to Ottoman genealogy and claimed Ottomans were related to the Seljuks of Anatolia. Because Murad II left behind a rich personal library, absence of an Ottoman

history from his collection remains problematic. In any event, whether the Ottomans were focused on building their state rather than narrating it or whether accidents deprived us from what they then had, one thing remains certain: by the mid-fifteenth century, the origins of the Ottomans and therefore their identity was not yet a fixed narrative.

Murad II was married to the Orthodox Serbian princess Mara Brankovic (1416–1483) and was assisted by Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha (served 1439–1453), both of whom had personal, political, and economic ties with Constantinople's aristocracy. Having failed twice to force his father into retirement, Mehmed II had to prove himself. One specific motivation for attempting the conquest was personal, to humiliate Çandarlı Halil Pasha, his childhood mentor. Çandarlı Halil Pasha stood against Murad II's early retirement and initiated a successful Janissary riot to bring him back to the throne. Later, he was also against the siege of Constantinople. No wonder he was executed shortly after the conquest under Mehmed II's orders.

During Mehmed II's reign, the question of Ottoman identity was thrown into a new limbo. According to Byzantine sources, Mehmed II did not consider himself a Turk and was not concerned with representing himself as one.[4] While Ottoman sources describe him as a practicing Muslim and modern Turkish historiography argues that he was a Turkic Muslim hero motivated by religious zeal, these remain romantic notions. In terms of Ottoman identity and self-perception, Mehmed II's most important achievement was the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. This event suggests that he was a hot-headed young emperor rather than a skilled ruler. During previous epochs, the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires maintained political and economic ties, arranging numerous treaties and marriages between the two royal families and aristocracies, which limited serious confrontations. While all sieges of Constantinople were attacks on the Byzantine Empire's sovereignty, they were also somewhat symbolic and abandoned soon after the desired effect of imposing higher taxes and Ottoman authority was achieved.

The consequences of the Ottoman victory were beyond anyone's imagination and altered perception of the Ottomans by themselves and others. The invention and the adoption of new laws and rituals, new architectural and artistic expressions of sovereignty, and composition of literary narratives that constructed a new Ottoman identity after 1453 qualifies it as a new empire. The conquest also represented a new beginning for Ottoman historiography. Two well-known Ottoman histories were composed by Şükrullah Şıhabeddin bin Ahmed (1388–1464) and Enveri (fl. 1462) during the following decade.

Mehmed II's later reign was marked with deep animosities between the Ottomans and their Turkic neighbors. Between 1464 and 1478, the Ottomans clashed with the Aqqoyunlu confederation under Uzun Hasan (1423–1478). The

Aqqoyunlu confederation expanded to the northeast of the Karamanids, as far as Iran, and drew its power from the *türk* and *türkmen* populations. The Ottomans imposed forced settlement and migration policies on these communities to tax and repopulate the newly conquered territories. These policies disillusioned the Turkic constituencies and many began to support Uzun Hasan, who also found allies among the Christian adversaries of the Ottomans. Meanwhile, this long-lasting confrontation transformed Anatolia into a region of rivalries, convincing the Ottomans of the necessity of subduing it, to monopolize its economic and political potential. They asserted their authority also to fend off the Mamluk influence in the area, which undermined their security. In other words, from the 1460s onward, the Ottomans tried to eliminate the Turkic Anatolian lords, an effort not limited to the destruction of Uzun Hasan or confined to Mehmed II's reign.

Neşri and Ottoman Historiography

Neşri was an adult when Uzun Hasan and Mehmed II died. He was alive when the Mamluk Empire ended and the Safavid dynasty emerged. The Safavids considered themselves heirs to Uzun Hasan and guardians of the *türkmen* struggling against the Ottomans. While their history falls outside the scope of this chapter, their emergence was related to the transformation of eastern Anatolia under Ottoman pressure. In other words, the animosities between the Ottomans and their Turkic neighbors, which gave shape to an Ottoman identity, would last beyond Neşri's lifetime and the scope of his *Cihannüma*.

Similarly, a well-grounded discussion of early Ottoman historiography became possible only after the conquest of Constantinople and with the works of Şükrullah and Enveri. The complexity of the Ottoman court's relationship with its Turkic origins is nowhere more evident than in a comparison of the two texts. Şükrullah's *Behçetüttevarih* and Enveri's *Düsturname*, although written in the same context and for the same patron, contain opposing narratives. While Şükrullah's is a eulogist chronicle focusing on the Ottoman rulers and their deeds and was composed in Persian, Enveri's narrative is a history of the Ottomans from the Turkic Anatolian point of view, composed in colloquial Turkish, at a time when many believed that the Arabic and Persian languages were better literary tools than Turkish.[5] Also, Şükrullah's work has its roots in the same sources as the Ahmedi narrative, whereas Enveri's sources were unknown to the other Ottoman historians. Neşri later used a Turkish translation of Şükrullah's work, but like every other Ottoman historian, he avoided Enveri's history. The *Düsturname*'s survival into the present indicates its worth, and thus its dismissal by Neşri and everyone else was most probably not a coincidence.

Enveri represents the Ottomans as *türk* and *türkmen*, who were linked to the Seljuks through their maternal line. He also undermines the legitimacy of

the founding fathers by asserting that the Ottomans did not receive the leadership of Islamic religious imperialism at the Christian frontier from the Seljuks, and he puts far too much emphasis on the Turkic lords who assisted the Ottoman project. Neşri, although harboring sympathies toward the Turkic heritage, must have found such dismissal of the Ottoman dynasty too much. After all, he belonged to a new generation for whom the early Ottoman rulers were important and the mythologies that surrounded their legacies were believed to be true. This generation gap between Enveri and Neşri is most evident from how they located themselves in their histories. The only event Neşri mentions with clear references to his whereabouts is the night of Mehmed II's death (May 3, 1481). Similar references by Enveri are made to his accompanying Mahmud Pasha in 1462 and 1463, during two different expeditions.[6] The lives and the careers of the two are separated by at least two decades.

Neşri's references to Mehmed II's death also give readers the precise context in which he started to write his history. On that evening, Neşri states, he was in the Ottoman military barracks near Gebze, and he had to rush back to Üsküdar to safely pass to İstanbul, which he called Constantinople.[7] He then describes the Janissary riots that followed and how the grand vizier, Nişancı Mehmed Pasha (served 1477–1481), was executed on charges of conspiracy against Bayezid II, for trying to inform Cem to come and claim the throne. During the civil war the Karamanids supported Cem, until he lost his bid and became an exile in Egypt and then Europe. In 1487, when the Karamanid state was annihilated, he was a captive of the Knights of St. John in Rhodes.

From 1487 to 1492, Neşri composed several drafts of *Cihannüma*. At this point he was older and ambitious enough to take on the task of composing a universal history. As someone who had lived through, been educated during, and personally witnessed many turbulent events, he seems to have developed a clear understanding of history and its purpose. In the opening pages of his work, he composed a rare theoretical reflection on the importance of history books for education. He argued that there were three categories of knowledge: (1) knowledge of *tevhid* (God's unity), (2) knowledge of sharia (Islamic law), and (3) knowledge of history. Similarly, he wrote, "knowledgeable people are divided into three categories, prophets, rulers and religious leaders/scientists."[8] Among these people, he concluded, prophets no longer exist, and religious leaders and scientists equally depend on rulers as their proper audience. So, he argued, only rulers could master true knowledge of leadership and bring together *tevhid*, sharia, and history. Neşri concluded that he, as a learned man, was composing a history book for the education of Ottoman rulers.

Neşri's narrative choices contradict his argument that he was writing for Ottoman rulers. He was a pro-Turkic author who saw the Turkic heritage as a fundamental pillar of Ottoman identity. He was very explicit about this, but he must

have known that such views could be disadvantageous to him, along with his possible Karamanid origins. Also, *Cihannüma* contains numerous proofs that Neşri knew enough Arabic and Persian to compose something along the lines of Şükrullah's book to satisfy the preferences of the Ottoman court. In other words, writing in Turkish and writing a noneulogist Ottoman history was a bold choice.

At the time, Turkish as the lingua franca of Ottoman historiography was not a foregone conclusion. The language choice was directly related to the explicit Turkification of Ottoman identity during the late fifteenth century. For this reason, among others, Neşri included statements in the opening pages of *Cihannüma* regarding his language choice. Neşri argued that there were not enough histories written in simple Turkish. While this may be the case for world histories, it was an exaggeration as far as general Ottoman histories were concerned. During Neşri's time, the number of Ottoman histories composed in Turkish grew quickly and exceeded anything similar composed in another language. Meanwhile, the Ottoman court was skeptical of the literary value of Turkish. Some authors complained of discrimination for using it. Outside the court's sphere of influence, a tradition of histories in simple Turkish emerged that attracted readers and listeners. The oldest and most original representative of this tradition is *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*, a book whose authors are anonymous and which was published during Mehmed II's later reign.

Neşri and some other authors followed the *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* tradition when they composed more personalized works. In fact, almost all Ottoman historians who wrote toward the turn of the century, such as Nişancı, Al'Konevi, Aşıkpaşazade, Kemal, and Oruç, wrote in this popular tradition. So many histories like this were produced that modern scholars label the period the first golden age of Ottoman historiography, and they argue these histories were a palace-orchestrated ideological project. While there is no question that Ottoman historiography reached a new peak and the old narratives about the Ottomans were being altered, we must remember that most of these books, especially the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*, emerged outside the palace's patronage and represented an alternative point of view.

Neşri's work fits with those of a smaller group of writers, including Aşıkpaşazade (b. 1400; died after 1484) and Oruç (d. ca. 1503). What brought these men and their histories together was how they constructed their work in a direct dialogue with *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*. For example, Aşıkpaşazade titled his work *Kitabı Tevarih-i Ali Osman* and Oruç, *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*. The anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* had originated from earlier, oral sources, rooted in an Anatolian tradition. Numerous copies of it existed and still exist in slightly varying forms. Their sheer numbers and anonymity allow us to consider them as not only one book but also a general tradition. This tradition represents a popular worldview because the book refers to the *raviler* (tellers) as its main source. It is

a chronologically arranged collection of historical stories of factual and fictional material, including genealogies, myths, folklore, and hearsay regarding the Ottomans. That it was designed to be read in public gatherings and delved into controversial subjects may be a reason for its anonymity.

Yet another reason for anonymity may have been the criticism it contains regarding the Ottoman rulers: their unjust policies, their bad habits, and Ottoman courtiers' sexual perversions, to name a few. Moreover, the book rejects the notion that the Ottomans received the leadership of Islamic imperialism at the Christian frontier from the Seljuks, which was a pillar of Ottoman ideology as far as the palace was concerned.

Thus, the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* tradition represented a bottom-up vision of Ottoman identity in the form of controversial popular literature that took shape outside the erudite confines of the Ottoman court. It viewed the Ottomans as part of the larger Turkic constituency and explicitly stated it to be so. Aşıkpaşazade, Oruç, and Neşri composed colloquial Turkish histories with similar viewpoints and intended their books to also be read aloud in collective gatherings of common-Turkish speakers, daring to represent the Ottoman court as an unjust institution and corrupted by self-admiring courtiers.[9] They also voiced the complaints of the Turkic communities and the grievances of the masses. They did so sometimes in recognition and sometimes in opposition to the *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* tradition. This way, they not only legitimized them as sources of historical information but also marginalized, if not fully abandoning, the official Ottoman history. As the blueprint for later generations of historians, their popular and collective historiography of the Ottomans, initiated by anonymous readers and writers, was adopted by the Turkish-speaking members of the Ottoman educated elite and recognized as the legitimate Ottoman history.

During this process of internalizing the anonymous tradition, the Turkic origins of the Ottoman dynasty was also explicitly emphasized. For example, the anonymous histories devised genealogies to argue that the Ottomans were *türk*s. Although an Ottoman genealogy was mentioned first by Yazıcıoğlu and later by Şükrullah, a detailed version became available for the first time with the anonymous histories. Aşıkpaşazade generated his own version of this genealogy out of the anonymous histories, and Neşri also tapped into the same sources to compose a more coherent version.[10] Besides these genealogies, the most explicit Turkification of the Ottomans was the use of the terms *türk* and *türkmen* in reference to them. The official historiography carefully avoided these two words in referring to the dynasty. The earliest histories that employed them in direct references to the Ottomans were Enveri's *Düsturname* and the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*. Aşıkpaşazade and Oruç later used them in the same manner, and Neşri went a step further and tried to clarify the meaning of the term *türkmen* by constructing an etymological argument.

Neşri broke the word *türkmen* into two, *türk* and *iman* (faith), and stated that *türkmen* were the original *türk*s who converted to Islam. This interpretation expanded the common definitions of *türk* and *türkmen*.[11] According to Neşri, *türkmen* came out of the original melting pot of Islam and the Turkic heritage. The *türk* was a city-dwelling or settled Turkish-speaking Muslim whose origin was as a *türkmen*, a Turkish-speaking Muslim nomad. The nomadic stage, which preceded the settled one, had a higher historical status. It is significant that Neşri wanted to clarify this for his audience, at a time when the Ottomans oppressed and uprooted Anatolian *türkmen* en masse.

Interpreting Neşri's Narrative

This brings us to an anecdote from Neşri's *Cihannüma*, which must be understood in terms of the above-mentioned choices Neşri made and the historical context in which he composed his work. I chose this anecdote not only because it supports the arguments presented here but also because it raises new questions. Its interpretation will be left open. It is short but obviously very significant. It makes direct references to three distinct identities; Ottoman, *türk*, and *türkmen*. It is titled as *lâtife* (hearsay), so it represents an oral tradition. It is not cited anywhere else, thus it is most likely an anecdote Neşri gathered personally. He inserts this anecdote as a cynical statement, if not an outright criticism, of Mehmed II's handling of the conflict with Uzun Hasan. It describes a scene immediately after the Ottomans have defeated an Aqqoyunlu coalition and Uzun Hasan has escaped the scene. It is wrapped in a bundle of truth and factual references, which is a powerful technique Neşri uses to breathe a sense of truth into hearsay. Most likely the event never occurred. Most strikingly, after telling it, Neşri remains silent, giving no explanation or interpretation. He creates the impression that readers and listeners are familiar with his meaning and free to draw their own conclusions. Of course, the contextual arrangement sets very obvious limits on its interpretation; there is nothing good about this story. If anything, it condemns the Ottomans.

> *Hikâyet* [story]: It is told that, because Uzun Hasan ran away, many of his lords were caught. One of them was Ömer Bey, who was the leader of the Çekerli people. And they were two brothers who were both from the line of Commandant Timur. And [the other] one was Titrek Hasan, a son of Kara Yülük's daughter who had gone to Acem [Persia] from Rûm [western Anatolia], and had gotten close to Uzun Hasan. Perhaps it was he who wanted revenge from Hünkâr [Mehmed II] and often persuaded Uzun Hasan to attack Anatolia. They [Ottomans] gathered some 3,000 prisoners from them. None other than God will know the number of the prisoners who perished.
>
> *Lâtife* [hearsay]: Just then Hünkâr saw an *azab* [Anatolian foot soldier] who was standing among the corpses with a knife in his hand. Hünkâr asked, "What are you doing there with the knife in your hand?" Azab answered, "My

stately Sultan, Türkmen have earrings on their ears. I am collecting those." Hünkâr smiled and said, "Let that be known." Afterward they sent the prisoners to İstanbul. Except, Hünkâr executed the son of Titrek Beyoğlu.

El kıssa [the conclusion]: Upon winning the war, Hünkâr did not pursue any more animosity. At that point it was in his power that if he continued, he could have taken over the entire Acem and eliminated Uzun Hasan. But they took the old tradition into account and they did not [go any further]. Later, because Hünkâr returned to Rûm, on his way he went to Karahisar in Kemah, and attacked it. With Hünkâr's powerful presence, [Karahisar] was conquered. From there Hünkâr with his state came to İstanbul again and entered the city. He immediately sacked Mahmud Paşa. In the psalm year of 878, as Mahmud Paşa took residence in Hasköy, near Edirne, untimely news of Sultan Mustafa's death arrived, in the [same] psalm year. For this reason Mahmud Paşa came to Sultan Mehmed's presence in İstanbul. Right then Sultan Mehmed was offended; ordering his arrest and imprisonment, he sent Mahmud Paşa to eternity.[12]

Before trying to interpret the anecdote, we must take notice of the events that precede and follow the middle section, the *lâtife*. In the *hikâyet* section, Uzun Hasan and his accomplices Ömer Bey and Titrek Hasan Beyoğlu are mentioned. These are familiar characters to Neşri's readers. Ömer Bey was vizier of Uzun Hasan, who along with Uzun Hasan's cousin Yusufça Mirza was sent to attack the Ottoman provinces in Tokat and Kayseri. Titrek Hasan is a more local character; he is not mentioned by other historians of the period, which reflects Neşri's peculiar knowledge of the region and its affairs. It also offers him an ideal link to draw historical parallels with the days of the Timurid invasion. His readers were well aware that during Bayezid I's reign, small local lords complained and convinced Timur to attack the Ottomans for having treated the region unjustly. Some seven decades later, it is now Uzun Hasan who thinks he can repeat Timur's assault on the Ottomans. Neşri follows this with a general statement about war and its brutality, stating that only God knew how many had perished. In short we have a historical and depressing opening. Readers and listeners are encouraged to think about past events and imagine a battlefield full of corpses resulting from a desire to settle old rivalries, a desire not necessarily held by the main characters but secondary lords and governors like Titrek Hasan Beyoğlu. The battlefield Neşri is referring to is the famous Otluk Beli. The battle itself took place on August 12, 1473, and it was the last time the Ottomans and the Aqqoyunlu armies confronted each other. Ottoman victory did not end Uzun Hasan's reign but did permanently destroy his ambitions. It is reported that Mehmed II spent three days in the area after this victory. Neşri inserts his *lâtifa* into this context.

After the *lâtifa* ends, Neşri continues with a quick chronology of the events following the victory. First he writes that Mehmed II decided to not execute Titrek Hasan Beyoğlu. Then he moves to his conclusion, *el kıssa*, where we read

the sultan decided to observe "the old tradition" and no longer pursue Uzun Hasan. Of course, he adds, he could have if he wanted to. This is followed by Mustafa's death, Mehmed II's favorite son and most likely heir to the Ottoman throne after him. Neşri's readers and listeners all know that Mustafa was the most instrumental commander during the Otluk Beli campaign and in the defeat of the Aqqoyunlu Uzun Hasan. Then Neşri adds Mahmud Pasha's execution, and Neşri's audience also knew that Mahmud Pasha's execution constituted a tragic event. According to the sources, Mahmud Pasha had a lasting dispute with Mustafa over his wife. Mahmud Pasha was forced to divorce his love so that Mustafa could acquire her for his own harem. It was said Mustafa even forced himself on her at one point. If this was not enough, when Mustafa was no longer fond of her, he divorced her and Mahmud Pasha was forced to take her back. After the Otluk Beli battle ended and Mehmed II's entourage returned to Constantinople, Mahmud Pasha circulated a rumor that he persuaded the sultan not to go after Uzun Hasan, although the Ottomans could have destroyed him. After Mustafa's funeral, Mahmud Pasha was accused of not having paid proper respect to the deceased. Another rumor circulated that it was Mahmud Pasha who poisoned Mustafa. Nevertheless, instead of tarnishing his reputation, these events made Mahmud Pasha even more famous. The story of his life and punishment was combined with another story about another Mahmud Pasha, from the reign of Murad II, and it achieved the status of a legend.

In short, our *lâtifa* stands at the center of very tumultuous events, many important people, their tragic lives, and a landmark war and its corpses and the executions that followed. And it does so with questionable necessity and authority. Its truth is doubtful, and Neşri did not care to explain the story to his readers and listeners. The *lâtifa* involves three characters: Mehmed II, who represents the Ottoman; the *azab*, who represents the settled *türk* (Turkish-speaking Muslim); and corpses, who are named as the *türkmen*. It describes the aftermath of Otluk Beli battle as (most likely) a large field filled with corpses. The Ottoman, whether sitting on his horse or walking among the dead, is somewhat elevated. The *türk* is most likely on his knees or at least leaning down, since he is robbing earrings from the *türkmen*. *Türkmen* are spread on the ground, lifeless and bloody. There is no question who is best, who is better off, and who is dead. It is obvious who has won, collaborated, and lost. It is also clear whose relationship to absolute power is personal (Mehmed II), circumstantial (*türk*), or tragic (*türkmen*).

But the most disturbing thing is how the Ottoman and the *türk* have a casual conversation about the treatment of the *türkmen* corpses—or shall we say, about the treatment of the corpses of their fellow Muslims who also happened to speak their language? Upon realizing that the *türk* is mingling with the dead, the Ottoman asks what he is doing. The *türk* tells the Ottoman he is pillaging the earrings of the dead. The Ottoman is remorseless; he smiles and says, "Let that be known."

Could he not know this is disrespectful? Could he not know that, according to Islamic law, stealing from fellow Muslims is forbidden during a battle, unless for protection, even if they are on the enemy side and even if they are dead? Does he not see that the *azab* is taking the earrings most certainly for himself? Could it be that he, the lawgiver of the *türk*, before the battle designated the blood and the property of the *türkmen* as halal? If so, why? Could he not pay the *türk* for his service, or did he consider this a jihad? And what does he mean by the closing line, which is supposed to hammer home the *lâtife*'s moral; let what be known? Why does he smile? What is there to smile about? Is he happy? Is he cynical? Is he taken by the irony of the situation, that he has now become the killer of his own kind? Similarly, we can ask why Neşri, a member of the Ottoman ulema, who believed the *türkmen* were the first *türk*s to embrace Islam and the ancestors of the Ottomans, quotes for us such an anecdote, at a time when the Ottomans were uprooting them?

In my opinion, the presentation of the anecdote, or its contextualization, was well calculated. Neşri could have easily inserted this passage somewhere else, but he made us read it exactly then and there. Uzun Hasan was let go, and the Ottomans were good people who kept the old customs, he wrote. Then he added a *lâtifa* that showed how the Ottomans broke customs. If destroying Uzun Hasan was wrong, Titrek Hasan Beyoğlu should have been let go as well. Then he mixed in the images of the *türkmen* corpses that were disrespected and robbed. And if the readers and listeners were not yet convinced that Ottoman power can be brutal, he reminded them of the case of Mahmud Pasha. Neşri was trying to say that a man can be dishonored, a man can be killed, and even his corpse may be disrespected; this was the nature of Ottoman power. It is clear that if not Mehmed II, at least Neşri knew how to enjoy irony.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Kafadar, Cemal. *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1996. This is an essential work on the emergence of early Ottoman identity and historical consciousness.

Kastritsis, Dimitris J. *The Sons of Bayezid*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007. This is the most informative single volume on the civil war, or Fetret Devri (1402–1413), which determined the later nature of the Ottoman state and identity.

Lowry, Heath. *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. New York: State University Press, 2003. This is an essential work on the emergence of early Ottoman identity and historical consciousness.

Ménage, V. L. *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: The Sources and Development of the Text*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964. This is the earliest study of Neşri and *Cihannüma*.

Woods, John. *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999. This is the most authoritative work on the Aqqoyunlu Empire and Uzun Hasan.

Notes

1. All translations in this chapter are mine. I transliterated Ottoman Turkish words into modern Turkish orthography and use no diacritical marks except when words are quoted from a specific edition, in which case I follow the transcription system used there.
2. Some of these historians were Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Arabshah, Kemal, Oruç bin Adil, and the anonymous *Tevarih-i Ali Osman* authors. See Kemal, *Selâtîn-nâme*, 105–106; Oruç bin Adil, *Die Frühosmanischen Jahrbücher des Urudsch*, 36; Giese, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 43; Öztürk, *Osmanlı Kroniği*, fol. 26.a; Neşri, *Kitâb-i cihan-nümâ*, 340–347; Neşri, *Ğihānnümā*, 1:94–95; Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 173.
3. Sılay, "Ahmedī's History of the Ottoman Dynasty."
4. Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, 11.
5. Enveri, *Fatih Devri Kaynaklarından Düstûrnâme-i Enverî*; Şükrullah, *Behçetüttevarih*.
6. Enveri, *Düsturname-i Enveri*, 101; Enveri, *Fatih Devri Kaynaklarından Düstûrnâme-i Enverî*, fol. 135.b.
7. Neşri, *Ğihānnümā*, 1:219.
8. Ibid., 1:1.
9. Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*.
10. Neşri, *Kitâb-i cihan-nümâ*, 55–57.
11. Ibid., 17.
12. Ibid., 819–821.