

Chapter 4

Legend and Historical Experience in Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Narratives of the Past

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Historical writing in the Ottoman Empire developed gradually over the course of the fifteenth century CE. This period roughly corresponds to the ninth century of the Islamic Hijri calendar (1397–1494) but also to the century preceding the year 7,000 of the creation of the world according to the Byzantine system of reckoning (1392–1491). These dates are significant for understanding Ottoman historical thinking during the period in question, since they were accompanied by apocalyptic expectations.¹ And in fact, the period witnessed the definitive establishment of the Ottoman Empire over what had once been Byzantine territory, a long and complex process involving social, political, religious, and ideological struggles. This process is reflected in the texts produced at the time, many of which deal with real or legendary events both recent and referring to a more distant past. Whether at the instigation of princes and sultans or for various other reasons, during the period in question, the literate elite produced narratives in poetry and prose based on oral accounts and legends, eyewitness testimony, and pre-existing texts. By the last decades of the fifteenth century, enough such texts were already in circulation that they were finally combined into comprehensive histories, in an effort to document and contextualise in world-historical terms the development of what had by then become a major empire.

The best known such compilations are those of Neşri and Aşıkpaşazade, as well as a body of interrelated texts that have come to be known as the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles*.² While

¹ See especially Stéphane Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1990); Benjamin Lellouch and Stéphane Yerasimos, eds., *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); Kaya Şahin, 'Constantinople and the End Time: The Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour', *Journal of Early Modern History* 14.4 (2010): 317–54.

² Faik Reşit Unat and Mehmed A. Köymen, eds., *Kitâb-ı Cihan-Nümâ: Neşrî Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1949); Franz Taeschner, ed. *Ğihānnumā, Die Altosmanische Chronik des Mevlānā Mehmed Neschrī* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1951–55); Friedrich Giese, ed., *Die altomanische Chronik des Aşıkpaşazāde* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1929); Friedrich Giese, ed. and tr., *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken* (Breslau: self-published, 1922–25).

such works generally purport to be histories, because of the wide variety and multi-layered nature of what is contained in them, they resist simple assessment based on the positivistic criteria still dear to many historians today. In this chapter, rather than struggle with the controversial question of how if at all the modern historian can best make use of such texts to reconstruct the past, I will focus instead on what they can tell us about how fifteenth-century Ottomans perceived their own past and that of the eastern Roman and Islamic world to which they were heir. In the pages that follow, alongside so-called ‘histories’ (*tārīḥ*, pl. *tevārīḥ*) I will also consider pseudo-historical narratives, specifically the *Book of Saltuk*, an epic hagiography about the legendary forerunner of the Islamisation of the Balkans, and the Turkish tales of the foundation of Constantinople preserved in the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles*. By juxtaposing this disparate but related material in historical context, I hope to shed light on the function and significance of such narratives for early Ottoman society.

Before examining this literature, however, it is important to consider some basic facts about how the Ottoman Empire came into being. For an awareness of the cultural tensions to which this process gave rise is essential for understanding fifteenth-century Ottoman narratives of the past.

Ottoman expansion and the significance of the conquest of Constantinople

The crucial century for the transformation of the Ottoman venture from a small raiding principality to an empire centred in Constantinople was the one preceding the conquest of the city (1354–1453). Before that, Ottoman activity was geographically limited and confined to the Asian side of the straits separating Asia from Europe. For a society interested in expansion, the main advantage of this location was its proximity to Byzantium. The Ottomans spent the first three decades of the fourteenth century consolidating their power in the interior of Bithynia, eventually attracting the attention of the rulers of Constantinople with the conquest of such important towns as Nicaea and Nicomedeia. Unable to confront the threat posed by the Muslim Turks who had reached their very doorstep, the Byzantines had little choice but to accept the loss of those towns and pay tribute for what territory they had

left across the sea from their capital. Then civil war broke out in Byzantium, providing the Ottomans with the opportunity to extend their conquests to the European side of the straits. As allies of one of the Byzantine factions, they crossed into Thrace and occupied first a minor castle, then the important port town of Gallipoli (1354). The marriage alliance between the Ottoman ruler Orhan and the Byzantine pretender John Kantakouzenos was essential for what was to follow, yet is completely absent from the Ottoman chronicle tradition, which prefers to present the crossing and subsequent conquests as a romantic adventure conceived by Orhan's son Süleyman, a man supposedly motivated by religious zeal to extend the domains of Islam into Europe.

The real situation was far more complicated, for behind this early Ottoman success lay not only the Byzantine alliance and civil war, but also the annexation of a neighbouring principality in Anatolia containing experienced raiders who had already taken part in operations in the Balkans.³ As in Bithynia, the Ottomans and their new fighters were able to take advantage of a decentralised situation—in this case, one brought about by the Byzantine civil war and the collapse of the Serbian empire following the death of its Tsar Stefan Dušan (d. 1355). Within two decades of crossing into Thrace, they were able to defeat a Serbian coalition (Maritsa, 1371) and force many local rulers including the Byzantines into vassalage. In the decades that followed, the Ottomans continued and intensified their expansion into the Christian Balkans, which was matched by symmetrical growth in Anatolia. Ottoman expansion followed two general directions: northwest into the Balkans through the conquest of new territory for Islam, and southeast into Anatolia at the expense of rival Muslim principalities.

Maintaining a balance between these opposite movements was first and foremost a logistical challenge, since it necessitated the transportation of armies across the straits at a time when the Ottomans were not yet a significant naval power. However, the ideological challenges were equally significant. For the Ottoman dynasty were upstarts whose main claim to fame was their conquest of new territory for Islam. This was no mean accomplishment, but was nonetheless inadequate to justify their attacks on other Muslim rulers, many of whom were

³ On these events and the role of the warriors of Karasi, see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 114–17.

well established with their own means of legitimising their rule in the ideological environment of the post-Mongol Islamic world. Among the strategies deployed were genealogy, military success, and ancient ideas about just administration. This last category was quite complex, involving among other things maintenance of social harmony and a functioning economy and patronage of holy men and other people of learning.⁴ Such goals were achieved in part by the construction of social infrastructure and pious foundations, which account for much of the built environment that has survived into our own times. Many of these buildings were used by the literate elites, who taught and studied in madrasas, gave sermons in mosques, and carried out mystical exercises in spaces constructed for this purpose. It is to these people, patronised to varying degrees by powerful military families including the Ottoman house, that we may ultimately trace many of the historical texts that have come down to us. An early example is Yahşi Fakih, the imam of the Ottoman ruler Orhan (d. 1362?) whose account was later incorporated into the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazade, a man himself descended from an important sufi family.⁵

By the end of the fourteenth century, the Ottomans had already become the masters of the eastern Roman world. Their territory extended from the Danube to the Euphrates and threatened the interests of major powers both in Central Europe and in the Middle East, notably Hungary, the Mamluks, and Timur. The first Ottoman historical narrative to have survived in its original form praises the Ottoman dynasty for expanding the domains of Islam into the Balkans, but criticises Sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) for attacking the Mamluks, the pre-eminent Muslim power of the time.⁶ In fact, Bayezid I was the first true Ottoman empire-builder, and because of his aggressive policies Byzantium's very existence came into question. Constantinople was subjected to a long blockade, and after the loss of Thessaloniki (1387) all that remained were a few islands and some territory in the Peloponnese, also threatened by Ottoman raids. Despite its imperial legacy which still inspired admiration, at

⁴ For the connection between social harmony and political legitimacy, see Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵ On Yahşi Fakih, see V. L. Ménage, 'The Menāqib of Yakhsī Faqīh', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26 (1963): 50–54.

⁶ For the relevant passage, see the critical edition and English translation by Kemal Silay, *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and their Holy Raids Against the Infidels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard NEHC, 2004), 21. See also İsmail Ünver, ed., *Ahmedî, İskender-nâme: İnceleme-Tıpkıbasım* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983).

this point in its history, Byzantium was more akin to an Italian city-state with overseas possessions than an empire, and its ruler by his own admission more of a manager than an emperor.⁷

Be that as it may, the Ottoman Empire was also still far from secure in its status. Despite the fact that Bayezid's armies were victorious against a number of adversaries, including the crusaders at Nicopolis (1396), his was still largely an empire of vassals. When Ottoman expansion to the south and east provoked the intervention of Timur, in the ensuing battle (Ankara, 1402) the Christian Serbs remained loyal, but the armies of the absorbed Muslim principalities did not. Thus the first Ottoman bid for empire ended in defeat and civil war. But the disaster was not total; in the half-century that followed, the Ottomans were able to rebuild their empire, achieve further victories against Muslim rivals and crusading armies, and finally capture Constantinople (1453). By that time, the former Byzantine metropolis was a mostly abandoned city, which had survived for as long as it did largely by sheltering Ottoman pretenders behind its massive walls.⁸ The continued existence of such a place was a major threat that left a mark on Ottoman historical conscience. The same was true of the incursions and machinations of Catholic Hungary, the Ottomans' main European adversary during this time.

As is clear from the literature it produced in both East and West, the conquest of Constantinople was a momentous event on multiple levels.⁹ First of all, of course, it effectively put an end to Byzantium—the Christian, Greek-speaking, eastern Roman Empire whose existence had stretched uninterrupted for over a millenium. It is true that the empire had never fully recovered from the Fourth Crusade (1204) and that its capital was but a

⁷ A recent study of the nature of Byzantine politics and society in this period is Tonia Kiousopoulou, *Emperor or Manager: Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453* (Geneva: La pomme d'or, 2011).

⁸ For the condition of Constantinople in 1453 and immediately thereafter, see Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 16–52. On the social and political situation in the city in the years immediately preceding the Ottoman conquest, see Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 117–232.

⁹ See Şahin, 'Constantinople and the End Time'. For the wider impact of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, see Michael Angold, *The Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans: Context and Consequences* (Harlow: Pearson, 2012).

shadow of what it had once been. However, as we have just seen, it was an enemy stronghold at the heart of the empire the Ottomans were trying to create. In addition to such practical considerations, on a cultural and ideological level, the fall of the city to an Islamic army was an event of enormous significance. From the earliest years of Islam, the conquest of Constantinople, the second Rome situated on the crossroads between Asia and Europe, had represented one of the ultimate goals of Islamic conquest. The city was attacked twice by Muslim ships and armies in the early medieval period (667–73, 716–17).¹⁰ In the first siege, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad named Abu Ayyub al-Ansari had died and been buried under the land walls of the city. When it was finally conquered by the Ottomans, his tomb was miraculously discovered and developed into a religious precinct. Since the early Arab attacks, sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*) predicted its eventual conquest and included a prophecy according to which the city would fall to someone bearing the name of a prophet. Perhaps it was for that reason that Bayezid I, the first Ottoman Sultan to attack it, named each of his sons after a different prophet of the Judeo-Islamic tradition.¹¹ In the end, the city did fall to such a person, Bayezid's great-grandson Mehmed II 'the Conqueror' whose name is identical to that of the prophet of Islam.

After the city was conquered, there were those in the Ottoman camp who thought it should be completely destroyed and abandoned, since it had become associated not only with the machinations of the infidel emperors, but also with various legends and prophecies about the end of times. But the city was too strategic for that, so Mehmed eventually (though not immediately) made it his capital by resettling and rebuilding its crumbling infrastructure. Apart from the conquest of territory and the elimination of vassals, Mehmed's imperial vision extended to asserting the state's power over the Muslim learned hierarchy, sufis, prominent families, and the Greek Orthodox church, which was to play a central role in the administration of his numerous subjects belonging to that faith. Having conquered the city, he rebuilt it as the capital of his own, Muslim empire. He placed his stamp on it by converting its immense cathedral of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, constructing palaces on its most prominent points, and building a complex including his own tomb on the very site where that

¹⁰ J. H. Mordtmann, 'Constantinople', *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Second Edition)*.

¹¹ The sultan in question was Bayezid I, who named his sons Süleyman (Solomon), İsa (Jesus), Mehmed (Muhammad), Musa (Moses), and Mustafa (another name of Muhammad). For the prophecy, see J. H. Mordtmann, 'Constantinople'.

of the city's founder Constantine was located. This act necessitated the destruction of the dilapidated church of the Holy Apostles.¹²

Such moves can be seen as representing the assertion of a personal vision, through which the sultan imposed his will and imperial designs by manipulating already existing ideas about the city and its conquest.¹³ Mehmed's interventions notwithstanding, however, the situation was still largely open to interpretation. Part of the debate over the significance of the Islamic conquest of Constantinople concerned prophecies about the end of times, many of which had their roots in Byzantium.¹⁴ The city of Constantinople was filled with ancient monuments that demanded interpretation. These included strange columns with friezes whose real meaning had long been forgotten, the famous bronze equestrian statue of Justinian, and of course Hagia Sophia itself, a building of remarkable size with an enormous dome and precious marble slabs and columns. It was not just Muslims who were perplexed by such objects. When the city had been sacked by the crusaders in 1204, the knight Robert of Clari had related stories about some of these and the prophecies attached to them, which he must have heard from the city's Byzantine inhabitants.¹⁵

When Constantinople finally fell to the Ottomans in 1453, a complex body of legends appeared in Turkish about the foundation of the city and its most famous building, which included such contemporary allusions as unfavourable comparisons between the treatment of the legendary boy architect who supposedly built Hagia Sophia and that of the real architect who built the complex of Mehmed the Conqueror.¹⁶ Versions of these stories appear in many manuscripts and have been studied in exemplary fashion by Stéphane Yerasimos, who was able to explain in detail their contents and the motivation behind the different variants. In fact, they are a synthesis of extremely diverse literary material ranging from Islamic literary and religious texts to late antique accounts and Byzantine prophecies.

¹² Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 66–67, 70, 84–86.

¹³ Key acts with deep religious significance were the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and the construction of the Islamic shrine of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari outside the city walls. See Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 18–22, 45–52.

¹⁴ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 196; Congourdeau, 'Byzance et la fin du monde. Courants de pensée apocalyptiques sous les Paléologues', in Lellouch and Yerasimos, *Les traditions apocalyptiques*, 55.

¹⁵ Ruth Macrides, 'Constantinople: The Crusaders' Gaze', in *Travel in the Byzantine World*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 193–212.

¹⁶ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 28–35, 138–59.

Moreover, such material was interpreted through the prism of key events taking place in the fifteenth century, notably the Battle of Varna (1444). For following a hadith in the canonical collection of Ibn Hanbal, the battle in question was identified with the fifth out of six signs of the apocalypse, the last of which was the conquest of Constantinople. At Varna, the crusading army was led by the Hungarian nobleman John Hunyadi (Hunyadi Janos), whose Slavo-Turkish name Yanko combined with a scribal error for Nikomedeia led to the notion that Constantinople was originally founded by a man named Yanko ibn Madyan.¹⁷

This is but one example of how difficult it can be to understand what is really behind the Ottoman narratives of the fifteenth century, which were written at a time when legends, prophecies and real events had become practically inseparable. While modern historians may be concerned with establishing ‘what really happened’, it is impossible to understand these texts and the society that produced them without bearing such considerations in mind. In order to properly evaluate Ottoman historical consciousness during this period, it is necessary to read narratives of the past in the context of the time when they were produced, without separating them artificially from hagiographies, epics, and anything else with a historical theme that was being read when they were written.¹⁸ Thanks to the research of Yerasimos, who followed in the footsteps of Victor Ménéage, Paul Wittek, and others, we now know that many early Ottoman histories are compilations made up of extremely varied material, often edited and re-edited in response to political circumstances and contemporary agendas.¹⁹

One aspect that has received little or no attention because of obvious methodological difficulties is oral transmission between different spoken languages. While it is generally accepted that there were legends circulating in Turkish-speaking communities about Muslim

¹⁷ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 62–65.

¹⁸ For a recent study showing the inseparable nature of history, legend, hagiography and Bektāṣi networks centred around shrines, see Zeynep Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate 2012).

¹⁹ Yerasimos, *La fondation*; V. L. Ménéage, *Neshrī's History of the Ottomans: The Sources and Development of the Text* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); V. L. Ménéage, ‘The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography’, in Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt, *Historians of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 168–179; Halil İnalçık, ‘The Rise of Ottoman Historiography’, in Lewis and Holt, *Historians of the Middle East*, 152–167; Paul Wittek, ‘Zum Quellenproblem der ältesten osmanischen Chroniken (mit Auszügen aus Nešrī)’ *Mitteilungen zur osmanischen Geschichte* 1 (1921–2): 77–150.

heroes such as Battal Ghazi and Sarı Saltuk, which were compiled by litterati at the request of princes and viziers, there can be little doubt that further information, tales and gossip also circulated orally between Greek, Turkish and Serbian speakers, since there were many people who spoke and understood those and other languages. For how else can we explain the presence in Byzantine chronicles and even short chronicles of information generally viewed by Ottoman historians as directly related to social and ideological struggles within Ottoman society?²⁰ In fact, the foundational period of the Ottoman Empire was a time of conflict between different religious communities, but also one of dialogue and common pursuit of answers to universal problems. These included how and when the world would end, which religion was correct, what constituted the right form of religiosity, and what was the right and wrong relationship between those in power and other segments of society.²¹

The historical situation outlined above was one of insecurity, but also intellectual fermentation and exchange. During the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE, the decline of Byzantium and the Mongol conquest of most of the Islamic Middle East had resulted in a climate of extreme uncertainty in the eastern Roman world. This could only have been exacerbated by such catastrophes as the Black Death (1347–48) and its frequent recurrences. It was unclear what all of this meant and where it would end. In recent years, research has suggested that apocalyptic expectations in the Ottoman lands continued well into the reign of Süleyman I (d. 1566).²² As on the other side of the Mediterranean, where the

²⁰ A good example may be found in the different versions of the story of the flight and death of the Ottoman prince Emir Süleyman, who was overthrown by his brother Musa. Variants of the story with particular implications may be found in an anonymous Ottoman chronicle as well as in the Byzantine chronicle of Doukas. The idea that before the incident Süleyman was drinking in the bath, which is usually thought of as a politically loaded topos in the Ottoman chronicle tradition, is also present in a Byzantine short chronicle. For a full analysis, see Dimitris Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 153–58.

²¹ Such concerns were not limited to the Byzantine or Ottoman world, but appear to have been more widespread. For some recent studies demonstrating the importance of such considerations in the Islamic world around this time, see Evrim Binbaş, ‘Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (ca. 770s-858/ca. 1370s-1454): Prophecy, Politics, and Historiography in Late Medieval Islamic History’ (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2009), esp. pp. 316–59; Matthew S. Melvin-Koushki, ‘The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Şā’ in al-Dīn Turka İsfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran’ (PhD thesis, Yale University, 2012).

²² See Şahin, ‘Constantinople and the End Time’; Cornell H. Fleischer, ‘Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth

Spanish were completing their Reconquista and discovering the New World, Ottoman advances into the Balkans and Central Europe called for interpretation and a grounding in the more distant historical past, and were frequently interpreted as part of a divine plan.²³ This must all be borne in mind when assessing the development of Ottoman historical consciousness during the course of the fifteenth century. While we moderns may find it necessary and convenient to make a clear separation between history and mythology, it would seem fifteenth-century Ottomans were not always willing or able to distinguish between fact and legend, but had rather different criteria for what constituted historical truth. As in our own time, there was a certain degree of uncertainty and debate about historical events and their causes. This was understandable, since many events considered important were so temporally and/or spatially removed from the time of writing that sometimes even authors recognised the impossibility of knowing what had really happened. There can be little doubt that the distinction between fact and fiction or heresy did exist among early Ottomans. However, it was only one part of what went into a concept of historical truth that was constructed quite differently than it is today.

Let us now turn to some of the texts in question. This will help to clarify some of the major themes that seem to have preoccupied the Ottomans in the fifteenth century.

The Book of Saltuk, the Oxford Anonymous history, and Christian-Muslim encounters

In light of what has already been said about the absence of clear boundaries between historical fact and legend, we will begin our examination not with a text claiming to belong to the genre of history (*tārīḥ*, pl. *tevārīḥ*) but instead with a legendary and hagiographic text known as the *Book of Saltuk* (*Saltuk-nāme*). The work in question was compiled in the late 1470s for the Ottoman prince Jem, the son of Mehmed the Conqueror. Prior to Mehmed's death in 1481 and the ensuing succession struggle, which resulted in Bayezid II becoming

Centuries', in Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, eds., *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 231–43).

²³ An interesting case for comparison from the Iberian world is that of the lead books of Granada, forged objects made to provide an ancient Christian past for the persecuted Moriscos. See Elizabeth Drayson, *The Lead Books of Granada* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mercedes García-Arenal and Manuel Barrios Aguilera, eds., *¿La historia inventada?: los libros plúmbeos y el legado sacromontano* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2008).

Mehmed's successor and Jem living out the rest of his life in Europe as a diplomatic hostage, Jem was viewed as most likely to succeed him and continue his imperial project. According to the compiler of the *Book of Saltuk*, the Ottoman prince became interested in these popular legends when staying in Edirne in 1473.²⁴ He asked a member of his court to collect these stories, mostly from oral accounts but apparently also from some earlier written versions, resulting in the work that has been preserved to our day in several manuscripts.²⁵

Upon examination, the *Book of Saltuk* turns out to be a synthesis of legends and historical information pertaining to several different historical moments, ranging roughly from the mid-thirteenth century to the time of its compilation. By that time (i.e. the 1470s) its hero, a man named Sarı Saltuk, had become associated with Bektashism, a religious and social movement tracing its origins to the 1240s. From the Bektashi point of view, Saltuk was considered as a disciple of the movement's spiritual father Hacı Bektash (d. 1271?).²⁶ At the same time, he was viewed as the leader of a group of Turcomans who emigrated in the mid-thirteenth century from Anatolia to the Balkan region of Dobruja where the Danube meets the Black Sea. In light of the later Ottoman conquests of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he came to be seen as an early pioneer and forerunner of those conquests. He was thought of as someone who had first brought Islam there by migrating with his followers and confronting the local Christians, whom he was able to defeat both by force and by ruse. For he supposedly spoke twelve languages and was capable of disguising himself into a priest in order to charm Christians through his knowledge of their theology, religious texts and liturgical practices. Of course, he had an ulterior motive: to convert them to Islam by any means necessary. In other words, he is a hero who embodies the ideals of the Muslim frontier culture of the Balkans during the period of Ottoman expansion.²⁷ These ideals and their expression may appear strange and heterodox to us today, as they did to the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, who sojourned in the area and found many local beliefs about Saltuk contrary to

²⁴ Fahir İz, ed., *Şaltuk-nâme: The Legend of Sarı Şaltuk Collected from Oral Tradition by Ebū'l-Ḥayr Rūmī* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard NELC, 1974), preface (page not numbered).

²⁵ Unlike the İz edition, which reproduces a single manuscript and states in its preface that it is the only one, the three-volume edition by Şükrü Halûk Akalın, *Saltuk-nâme* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1988–90) is based on several available manuscripts.

²⁶ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, 'Hacı Bektaş', *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*.

²⁷ Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 71–72.

orthodox Islam.²⁸ Nonetheless, such beliefs and stories provide invaluable insights into the process of Ottoman expansion into the Balkans, how it was remembered by some of the people who participated in it, and their need to provide what they had done with deeper roots in a more distant past.

So what sort of stories does the *Book of Saltuk* contain? The reader without access to the original may gain a good idea from a long, recently translated passage at the beginning of the work.²⁹ This tells the story of how Saltuk crossed the straits of Gallipoli from Anatolia to Rumelia (i.e. the Balkans) disguised as a priest:

He reached a location by the sea whence infidel soldiers attempted to cross over [to Rumelia]. Some crossed [the sea] at Kilaşpol and others at the strait of Feranospol. [Saltuk] arrived at the strait of Kilaşpol and saw that no one could get across because of the high number of soldiers there. He was disguised as a priest. He asked for a boat from the infidels, but they did not give him one.

The problem of crossing the straits, which often required the cooperation of Christian powers and their ships, is a frequently recurring element in early Ottoman histories. An example may be found in an Ottoman history compiled around the same time as the *Book of Saltuk*, known from its unique manuscript as Oxford Anonymous (hereafter OA). In the chapter describing the struggle for the throne between Murad II and ‘the False’ Mustafa, we find the following passage, probably based on an eyewitness account:

When [Mustafa] reached the Straits, the galleys that were waiting ready there engaged themselves in transporting the army that was with him across to Rumelia as quickly as possible. And when the Sultan [Murad II] also reached the seashore and did not find a ship to cross, as he was standing around in a state of bewilderment, it happened that there was a merchant cog in the sea coming from Genoa. He brought it over and made an agreement by means of four thousand

²⁸ For Ibn Battuta’s reaction, see Gary Leiser, ‘Şarı Şaltūk Dede’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Second Edition)*.

²⁹ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, ‘Şarı Saltık Becomes a Friend of God’, in John Renard, ed., *Tales of God’s Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 136–44.

gold coins. Following the swearing of various oaths, he proceeded to transport the people of his Porte and the army of Anatolia across to the other side. The aforementioned Genoese ship took a few thousand men from among the janissaries, people of the Porte and fighters. When it approached the galleys, the men on them started firing canons and guns and [the Genoese] were unable to bring [Murad's people] near. Since they saw that it was not in their power to face the galleys, they moved on. They reached the mouth of the Kozludere River, where the cog came ashore and unloaded the army.³⁰

It is obvious that unlike the previous passage from the *Book of Saltuk*, here we are dealing with a real historical description rather than a legend. Nonetheless, a comparison of the two passages suggests that stories such as the one in the *Book of Saltuk* were ultimately inspired by real situations.

And what of the places mentioned in the Book of Saltuk? The name Kilaşpol resembles Kallipolis, the original Greek form of Gallipoli, whereas Feranospol is more difficult to identify, and is probably little more than a nonsense word that sounds like Greek. A parallel may be found later in the narrative, where Saltuk encounters a Latin bishop with the rather Greek-sounding name Filyon. But in OA, too, there is a chapter describing Mehmed I's siege and capture of an unknown castle named Felenbol. The chapter in question forms part of the main text on which OA is based, an older account I have called 'The Tales of Sultan Mehmed' (*Ahṡāl-i Sulṡān Meḡemmed*) which describes in epic fashion the struggles of Mehmed I (d. 1421) against his brothers and other adversaries.³¹ While its description of events is generally historical, albeit embellished to present its protagonist as an epic hero, the siege of Felenbol reads as a generic tale of the siege and capture of a castle, such as is

³⁰ Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Marsh 313, folios 108v–109r. This passage is taken from my forthcoming annotated translation of the entire manuscript: Dimitris Kastritsis, *An Early Ottoman History: The Oxford Anonymous Chronicle* (Liverpool, in press). A facsimile and transcription is available in Yaşar Yücel and Halil E. Cengiz, 'Rûhî Târîhi', *Belgeler* 14-18 (1989–92): 359–472 + 166 unnumbered pages. This edition must be used with care, including even the facsimile, which is missing one opening, does not include folio numbers, and has been rearranged.

³¹ OA 52r-54v.

common in the early Ottoman chronicle tradition.³² Even the name of the castle seems to confirm this legendary character, since the generic word for unknown people and things is the Arabic *fulān* (Turkish *filan*, *falan*), similar to ‘so-and-so’ or ‘such-and-such’ in English. When one adds to this the suffix ‘*bol*’ (derived from the Greek *polis*), the result is a name that may be translated as ‘Such-and-suchopolis’.³³

The important point to retain here is the fluid boundary between fact and legend, categories that are probably more meaningful to us today than they were to many Ottomans in the fifteenth century. I do not mean to suggest that a more positivistic view of history was altogether absent from early Ottoman society. On the contrary, such a view had a long history in the Islamic civilisation to which the Ottomans were heir.³⁴ But alongside such ‘scientific’ ideas of history, and probably preceding them in time, early Ottoman historical literature seems to have fulfilled a need to explain and express lived historical experience through narrative, a need that must have been as much social as psychological.³⁵ If we continue to read the story of Saltuk’s crossing to Rumelia, we will find many other recurring elements that crop up time and again in the history and historiography of the establishment of the

³² For a classic example, see Paul Wittek, ‘The Taking of Aydos Castle: A Ghazi Legend and its Transformation’, in George Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 662–72.

³³ The same phenomenon may be at work with ‘Fumeranos’, a name appearing in an Ottoman caption on a Byzantine image which in fact depicts an Emperor of Trebizond. The image in question is one of approximately 250 in the Venice Byzantine Alexander Romance (*Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5*) all of which received Ottoman captions based loosely on an oral reading of the pre-existing Greek ones. For further information and translations of some of the captions, see Dimitris Kastritsis, ‘The Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5): The Ottoman Fate of a Fourteenth-century Illustrated Byzantine Manuscript’, *Journal of Turkish Studies* 36 (2011): 103–131; Giampiero Bellingeri, ‘Il “Romanzo d’Alessandro” dell’Istituto Ellenico di Venezia: glosse turche “gregarie”’, in Antonio Pioletti and Francesca Rizzo Nervo, eds., *Medioevo romanzo e orientale: Il viaggio dei testi* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1999), 315–40. Judging from the content and preoccupations of these captions, many of which are quite extensive, this process appears to have taken place in the late fifteenth century in response to contemporary geopolitical and apocalyptic concerns. More research is needed to determine the extent to which this is the case. My preliminary work on the subject suggests that the captions should be read alongside the other material discussed here; however this is outside the scope of the present article, and will form the subject of future publications.

³⁴ For a famous example, see Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 11–24.

³⁵ For the complex relationship between social memory and historical narrative, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 185–238; James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

Ottoman Empire. These include caricatured representations of Christian beliefs and behaviours (e.g. Saltuk takes refuge in a chapel full of drinking infidels); place names associated with different parts of the Balkans and Central Europe (Bosnia, Morina, Malkara, Edirne, Istanbul); and rumours of the Christian burning of heretics ('they were in the habit of burning those with whom they were incensed').³⁶

As already suggested, one of the most noteworthy aspects of the *Book of Saltuk* is its emphasis on its hero's cultural versatility, which allowed him to impersonate not only an ordinary infidel but even a highly erudite member of the Christian clergy. He was able to achieve this thanks to his multilingualism (Saltuk 'read and wrote in twelve languages') and his knowledge of their faith, which made him capable of reciting from the Gospels so well that 'all the infidels [in a church] wept and were beside themselves [with ecstasy]'.³⁷ Of particular interest are references to theological debates. After being exposed and condemned to death by fire, Saltuk is rescued by the intervention of a jinn and taken to visit the prophets Hızır (Khidr, Khadir) and Ilyas, who inform him that the place where they are standing (near Edirne) '...is Eden on earth. It will become the hearth of the warriors for the faith.' Then Saltuk returns to Edirne, this time disguised as a different priest, and challenges the local clergy to a theological debate. When he emerges as the clear winner, the infidel king (who thinks Saltuk is dead) exclaims: 'That Turk we burnt should have been alive now. He would have answered this [man] if he had debated him'.³⁸

Like the other elements already discussed, this reference to theological debates between different groups of Christians as well as between Christians and Muslims had its roots in the lived historical experience of the eastern Roman world in which the Ottoman Empire came into being. Of course, there was nothing new about theological debates, which had been a feature of Christian and Muslim life since late antiquity. As Byzantines, Latins and Muslims were brought into ever closer proximity as a result of the Fourth Crusade and Ottoman expansion into the Balkans, these intensified to the point where even a Byzantine Emperor, the erudite Manuel II Palaiologos, found it fitting to write a long work on the subject. This was based on a real dialogue he had with a Muslim teacher while campaigning in Anatolia as

³⁶ Karamustafa, 'Sarı Saltık', 137-39, 141.

³⁷ Karamustafa, 'Sarı Saltık', 140.

³⁸ Karamustafa, 'Sarı Saltık', 142-43.

an Ottoman vassal.³⁹ Another example of a historically documented Christian-Muslim theological debate early in the period under examination involved Gregory Palamas, a Byzantine archbishop and major intellectual figure who was captured by the Ottomans in 1354. A brief discussion of his captivity will serve to suggest just what is at stake in the *Book of Saltuk*'s offhand references.

As an Ottoman captive, Palamas had a series of theological discussions with Muslims, which have come down to us thanks to his own writings and those of the Ottoman court physician, a Byzantine man named Taronites. The first of these involved a mysterious group called 'Chionai', whose identity is still much disputed but who were almost certainly Jewish converts to Islam.⁴⁰ From Taronites's description of the debate, even taking into account his obvious bias in favour of Palamas and the Christian faith, it would appear that the Chionai lacked the necessary theological skills to confront as sophisticated a theologian as Palamas. In fact, these people seem to have known very little at all about Islam. Nonetheless, the Ottoman ruler Orhan apparently considered them learned enough to maintain in his court, even if theology was not their forte. This is all the more intriguing as there were clearly other people in early Ottoman society with a good knowledge of Islamic theology and law, who were capable of holding their own in such debates—in fact, Palamas encounters one of these later on. However, as the cases of Palamas and Manuel Palaiologos both demonstrate, such members of the Muslim learned classes ('*ulemā*') were known in the late fourteenth century

³⁹ Erich Trapp, *Manuel II. Palaiologos, Dialoge mit einem "Perser"* (Vienna: in Kommission bei G. Böhlau, 1966); Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, 'Religious Dialogue between Byzantines and Turks during the Ottoman Expansion', in Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner, *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 289–304. For a more general perspective on these dialogues, see the rest of the volume in which Zachariadou's article appears, as well as Averil Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity* (Washington, D.C.: Harvard CHS, 2014). Cameron is currently involved in a larger project to study such dialogues for the entirety of Byzantine history.

⁴⁰ The essential work on Palamas's captivity and dialogues, which includes editions of the relevant texts, is Anna Philippidis-Braat, 'La captivité de Palamas chez les Turcs: dossier et commentaire' *Travaux et Mémoires (Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance)* 7 (1979), 109–222. See also Zachariadou, 'Religious Dialogue'; Michel Balivet, 'Byzantins Judaïsants et Juifs islamisés: des "Kühhân" (Kâhin) aux "Χιόναι" (Χιόνιος)', *Byzantion* 52 (1982): 24–59. Ruth Miller, 'Religious v. Ethnic Identity in Fourteenth-Century Bithynia: Gregory Palamas and the Case of the Chionai', in Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir, *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 27–42 argues that the name *Chionai* is a geographical designation, but to me the argument seems stretched, since it is clear from Taronites's report that the people in question were Jewish converts to Islam.

by other names.⁴¹ Perhaps, then, the ‘Chionai’ were experts in the occult sciences of divination, as has been suggested.⁴²

In any case, people who were truly accomplished in both the ‘external’ and occult sciences (*ẓāhir - bāṭin*) were relatively rare in the Ottoman territories at this time. An example of such a person may be found in the enigmatic Şeyh Bedreddin, a child of Ottoman Rumelia, who by spending time in Cairo under Mamluk patronage was able to reach the apogee of both. He appears to have had many admirers at both ends of the social spectrum, a fact that is key to understanding his involvement in a revolt in 1416 which led to his execution.⁴³ While Bedreddin’s revolt was of major importance, it is still poorly understood. It seems to have had social, political and religious aspects, not unlike an earlier one around 1240. Both uprisings and their protagonists were later appropriated by the Bektashis, who as we have seen also venerated Sarı Saltuk. In light of all this, it is possible to interpret the passage we have seen as the product of a deeply held desire on the part of the people who brought the Balkans under Ottoman rule for a leader who could create a bridge between Christianity and Islam, mystical knowledge and theological erudition, and the skills of the crafty warrior and those of the madrasa teacher. Such a desire makes sense in the context of a world in which Byzantine clergy, intellectuals and common people were brought face to face with Muslim teachers and dervishes, both in battle and in peaceful conversation.⁴⁴

⁴¹ These included *danışman* (τασιμάνης, from Persian *dānīshmand* ‘knowledgeable’) or *müderris* (μουτερίζης, from Arabic *müderris* ‘teacher’) which appear in the Byzantine texts.

⁴² Balivet, ‘Byzantins Judaïsants’, 36.

⁴³ For Bedreddin’s career and revolt, see Michel Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans. Vie du Cheikh Bedreddin le ‘Hallâj des Turcs’* (Istanbul: Isis, 1995); Dimitris Kastritsis, ‘The Revolt of Şeyh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–13’ in Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Halcyon Days in Crete VII. Political Initiatives “From the Bottom Up” in the Ottoman Empire* (Rethymno: University of Crete Press, 2012), 233–250. Saygın Salgırlı, ‘The Rebellion of 1416: Recontextualizing an Ottoman Social Movement’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012): 32–73 makes the argument that the rebellion of 1416 was of an entirely social nature, and that the role of Bedreddin has been exaggerated. While the social aspect was undoubtedly important, social conditions and their connection with the revolt are still poorly studied and understood. A purely materialistic, Marxian perspective seems unnecessary and contrary to the evidence, which clearly suggests a religious dimension as well.

⁴⁴ An instance of the more violent kind of confrontation may be found in Murad II’s siege of Constantinople in 1422 as described by the Byzantine eyewitness John Kananos. According to the author, in addition to the hostile armies, the inhabitants of the city were confronted by the Ottoman holy man Emir Seyyid (Emir Sultan, Sayyid Shams al-Din b. Ali al-Husayni al-Bukhari, the patron saint of Bursa) with five hundred dervishes. See John Kananos, *De*

When assessing the significance of works like the *Book of Saltuk*, which as we have seen combine legendary accounts of the past with others reflecting contemporary events and experiences, it is tempting to call such works popular in nature in order to distinguish them from more elite works of history. While there is a grain of truth in such an assessment, which is sometimes supported by the views of later Ottoman intellectuals, it is misleading for a number of reasons. First of all, as we have seen, the patron of the *Book of Saltuk* was no less elite a person than the Ottoman prince Jem. There is substantial evidence that such heroic and at times fantastic tales, destined to be frowned upon by some later Ottomans and modern scholars alike, were viewed as nothing less than fundamental by Ottoman princes and sultans, other elite members of society including the powerful marcher lords of the Balkans, as well as many others from various walks of life (raiders, janissaries, tribesmen, etc.).⁴⁵ In 1484, after securing his throne by defeating his brother Jem several times in battle and forcing him into captivity, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II carried out a campaign against the infidel ruler of Moldavia, seizing from him the important northern Black Sea ports of Kilia and Akkirman. Following this event, he commissioned a chronicle which ends in that year and which contains some of the most important historical material circulating at the time. The work in question is none other than the history we have already referred to as OA. As we have seen, it contains the account of Mehmed I's struggles for the throne after 1402, which largely involved internecine warfare against his own brothers. It is clear that this account was included in the later history in order to strike a chord with the history's patron, Sultan Bayezid II, who was facing a similar situation with Jem as his great-grandfather, Mehmed I, had faced with his own brothers.

The style of this older text, first composed in the early fifteenth century, is that of an epic or hagiography such as the one we have been discussing. Yet with the exception of a few chapters (notably the taking of Felenbol) it is directly connected to recent events. While this historical nature sheds light on struggles that are otherwise unknown, the text also presents a

Constantinopolis Obsidione (Naples: Libreria scientifica, 1968), 9–16, 22; Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187–8; J. H. Mordtmann and F. Taeschner, 'Emīr Sultān', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Second Edition).

⁴⁵ For the contested connection between the early Ottomans and the spiritual fathers of the Bektāşi movement, which was supported by Balkan marcher lords, see Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography*, 65–78.

more or less subtle political argument about those same struggles, which is largely implicit in the narrative.⁴⁶ The epic describing the adventures of Mehmed I makes up no less than a third of OA. However, like other early Ottoman histories, this work also contains a great variety of other material ranging from the largely factual to the completely legendary. Of particular interest is the description of Murad II's struggle for the throne against his brother 'the False' Mustafa, who was almost certainly a genuine Ottoman prince taken prisoner at Ankara. This account, which has already been discussed, contains many lively elements which have the flavour of authenticity, such as the story of his troubled crossing of the straits aboard a Genoese ship. Another example is Mustafa's attempt to gain the loyalty of Ottoman troops by displaying his battle wound from Ankara.

What we are dealing here is probably another text in the genre of a 'Book of Exploits' which presumably originated as the oral account of an eyewitness before being written down. It was probably included for the same reason as the long account of Mehmed I's struggles—because it resonated with Bayezid II's own struggles against his brother Jem. If so, what are we to make of the fact that the last chapter in OA mentions Bayezid's visit to the tomb of Sarı Saltuk following his victory at Kilia and Akkirman? By visiting the shrine of Saltuk, Bayezid was probably trying to one-up his brother Jem, the patron of the Book of Saltuk as it has come down to us today. But this must be placed in the wider context of what Saltuk represented in the late fifteenth century for the frontier warriors of Rumelia and the Dobruja, the area where the tomb was located; by 1484, the Dobruja had a long history as a centre of support but also resistance for the Ottoman imperial enterprise. By visiting the tomb of Saltuk and commissioning a complex to be built there upon his return to Istanbul, Bayezid was probably trying to gain the support of the local population and others who venerated Saltuk, elements in Ottoman society whose favour he had hoped to gain by presenting himself as a conqueror of new territory from the infidel.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For the narrative argument of this section of OA, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 206–20; Dimitris Kastritsis, 'The Historical Epic *Ahvāl-i Sulṭān Meḥmed* (The Tales of Sultan Mehmed) in the Context of Early Ottoman Historiography', in H. Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013), 1–22.

⁴⁷ For Bayezid's building activity in the Dobruja see Machiel Kiel, 'Ottoman Urban Development and the Cult of a Heterodox Sufi Saint: Sarı Saltuk Dede and Towns of İsakçe and Babadağ in the Northern Dobruja' (sic), in Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l'orient seljoukide et ottoman* (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 283–98

As we have just seen, Oxford Anonymous ends in 1484, the date when Bayezid II made the only conquest of new Christian territory during his reign. This conquest was highly significant, for unlike Mehmed II, whose power was unchallenged by pretenders and whose conquest of Constantinople had given him enormous prestige and power to impose his will, Bayezid's position was far less secure. It was limited by two major factors: the need to maintain a balance between the various social groups polarised by his father's policies, and the Latin captivity of his brother Jem.⁴⁸ In fact, these factors were connected, for Jem's continued captivity required maintaining peace with Jem's captors in Europe, who might otherwise release him into Ottoman territory to gain the support of disaffected groups. Preventing such a scenario must have seemed at times to Bayezid and his advisors like a no-win situation. For to prevent Jem's return, it was necessary to maintain peaceful relations with Hungary, the key Christian power in the Balkans and main instigator of Crusades against the Ottomans. But such a policy risked alienating important Ottoman military elements, notably Balkan border warriors (*akıncı*) — the very sort of people whose legends Jem had admired and asked to be written down.

In the end, there was only one solution to the dilemma. This was to attack Moldavia, a lesser Christian power and sometime Ottoman vassal, while also making a show of visiting and patronising Sarı Saltuk's tomb in Dobruja. The chronicle ends with the following lines:

[Akkirman] is the second conquest of Sultan Bayezid Khan. The aforementioned Sultan immediately appointed a qadi and a castellan, turned its churches into mosques and its bell-towers into minarets, and performed the Friday prayer ... From the spoils, he bestowed endless gifts and bounty to his people who were assembled there. On the twenty-second day of the aforementioned Rajab [15 August 1484] which was a Sunday, he departed from Akkirman and passed in front of the castle of Kilia. Then he marched and crossed the river Danube after visiting [the shrine of] Saru Saltuk Baba. Safe and enriched [with spoils], in the last third of Shaban of the aforementioned year [11–21 September 1484], with

⁴⁸ For the complex political and diplomatic situation during this period, see Halil İnalcık, 'The Ottoman Turks and the Crusades, 1451–1522', in K. M. Setton, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 6 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 331–47.

auspicious fortune he reached the Abode of Glory Edirne. He entered the palace and occupied himself with the administration of justice.⁴⁹

This comes at the end of a detailed account of the campaign, which presents Bayezid in a manner clearly based on the way his ancestors are depicted in earlier parts of the compilation. The chapter begins by suggesting that the sultan was ‘following in the footsteps of his noble forefathers and great ancestors’ and ‘decided on *ğaza*’ (raiding in the name of Islam) because while the lord of Moldavia ‘had been rendering tribute, he ceased to do so’.⁵⁰ This presentation of events, along with the fact that both Oxford Anonymous and the first draft of Neşri’s compilation end with the the campaign of Kilia and Akkirman, have led some to suggest that 1484 was a pivotal year for Ottoman historiography. According to this theory, after returning from his campaign against Kilia and Akkirman, Bayezid called for the compilation of general histories of the Ottoman dynasty, resulting in the works that have come down to us today.⁵¹ While this assertion has been questioned recently, and is indeed exaggerated since not all the histories in question end in 1484, there can be little doubt that it is correct for at least one of these, namely OA.⁵² Moreover, this was not the only historical text compiled during the reign of Bayezid II that was produced in response to direct patronage by the sultan and his court.

In fact, 1484 was a significant year both because of Bayezid’s conquest of Christian territory which had eluded his predecessor Mehmed the Conqueror, as well as because of its proximity to the dates discussed earlier in the article in connection with apocalyptic expectations (1491–92 and 1493–94). As Yerasimos has shown, it is no coincidence that 1491 was the year that saw the first full recension of the Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles, which contained among other things the tales of the foundation of Constantinople. These include an intriguing story set in the Danube region in 1484 involving Sultan Bayezid II and his alleged plans for future

⁴⁹ OA 167r–167v.

⁵⁰ OA 165r–165v.

⁵¹ See especially Halil İnalçık, ‘The Rise of Ottoman Historiography’, 164.

⁵² Murat Cem Mengüç, ‘Histories of Bayezid I, Historians of Bayezid II: Rethinking late Fifteenth-century Ottoman Historiography’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76.3 (2013): 373–89 has questioned the importance of the date, but his argument is not entirely convincing or easy to follow.

conquests in the area.⁵³ We are told that the original founder of Constantinople, the famous Yanko ibn Madyan, a fictitious character discussed earlier whose name was associated among other things with the Hungarian leader Hunyadi Janos, had a son named Buzantin who had moved to Hungary. This man, who was appropriately named since he would eventually return to Constantinople and rebuilt it, had brought with him on his way to Hungary an enormous sword inherited from his father, which had originally belonged to the legendary pre-Islamic Arab ruler Shaddad ibn Ad.⁵⁴ While crossing the Danube, he dropped the sword into the river where it stayed until the year 889 A.H. (1484 C.E.) It was rediscovered by fishermen (the modern reader is reminded of Tolkien's magic ring) and sold to a Hungarian merchant, who repaired it by removing a section that had rusted away and fitted it with a new scabbard. Meanwhile, an Ottoman emissary in Hungary found out about the sword and tried to obtain it for Bayezid, but the merchant was afraid of the potential consequences of selling it to the infidel. In the end, the ambassador persuaded the King of Hungary to intervene on his behalf and was able to get hold of the sword. Before handing it over, the King 'brought in various people from among the monks of Hungary, but no one belonging to these various groups was able to read the date on it or to say what language it was in'.⁵⁵ The sword was then brought to Bayezid in Istanbul, who also had monks brought in 'from among the Franks, Romans and Greeks who were knowledgeable about history' and no one was able to read it, until a Frankish monk 'who had seen the land of the West' (*Magrib*) figured out that the mysterious writing was Syriac. Thanks to that man, Bayezid and his court learned that the sword had belonged to Shaddad ibn Ad and was exactly four thousand and ninety-one years old. The sultan's reaction was to praise God and declare that since the sword had come from Hungary, it was a sign that just as his father Mehmed had conquered Constantinople, either he or his sons would be blessed with the conquest of Hungary. The story ends with the following words: 'And now this sword is in the treasury of Sultan Bayezid, in this year 891' [1486].⁵⁶

⁵³ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 19–21, 97–98; Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 86–88.

⁵⁴ On this ancient king, whose tribal name appears in the Qur'an and came to be associated with the legendary many-pillared city of Iram, see F. Buhl, 'Ād', *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Second Edition)*. The historicity of Iram was rejected by Ibn Khaldun (*Muqaddimah*, 17–18).

⁵⁵ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 20; Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 87.

⁵⁶ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 20–21; Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, 87.

What are we to make of this story, and what can it tell us about late fifteenth-century Ottoman views of the past? As with the earlier examples from the *Book of Saltuk*, it is difficult to distinguish here between fact and fiction. As Yerasimos has suggested, it is possible that there is a grain of truth here and that a strange sword did arrive at Bayezid's court around this time. As any modern visitor to the Topkapı Palace Museum is aware, this would not be the only such object in the Ottoman treasury with legendary or religious associations. As it turns out, the first embassy from Bayezid to the Hungarian court of Matthias Corvinus (son of Hunyadi Janos) was in 1487, not 1484—but this is a mere detail, and other versions of the same tale speak of a Hungarian embassy to Istanbul instead.⁵⁷

To sum up, for the Ottomans of the fifteenth century, historical memory was intimately intertwined with legends and apocalyptic expectations. During the course of that century, an empire was built on the ruins of Byzantium, in struggle with the Catholic world and in competition with other Muslim powers. The Ottomans' main claim to legitimacy was their conquest for Islam of new territory in Europe, including Constantinople, a city with powerful associations. All of this was accompanied by millenarianism, especially in the first years of Bayezid II's rule, when both the Byzantine and the Islamic calendar conspired with the momentous events that had been taking place to suggest that the end of times was drawing near. These facts must be taken into consideration when studying the textual production of the time, which included not only accounts of recent historical events, but also more legendary material whose manner of presentation sheds light on the culture of the time when it was recorded. It is only by examining this corpus as a whole, in the still largely unknown historical context of the time when it was written and compiled, that we may begin to gain a better understanding of both the historical texts in question and the society that produced them.

⁵⁷ Yerasimos, *La fondation*, 98, note 125. The other histories containing the story of the sword are the one attributed to Ayas Paşa and that of Rüstem Paşa.