

Magnificence as a Royal Virtue in Ottoman Jewish Political Thought

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Recent years have seen a growing body of literature on relations between Renaissance Italy and the Ottoman Empire. One of the major lacunae in this research concerns the role of the Jews in the transmission of Italian humanist ideas. In order to address this topic, this article will focus on the “Crónica de los reyes otomanos” by the Sephardi polymath Moses ben Baruch Almosnino (ca. 1515–ca. 1580). My goal is to identify a shared set of themes present in Almosnino’s thought and key fifteenth-century Italian sources on the correlation between magnificence and good government, and also to shed new light on the influence of Italian humanism in the Ottoman world.

INTRODUCTION

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN architecture and effective leadership has been an enduring concern in the history of political thought across the centuries. The pyramids in Egypt; the Great Wall in China; the Taj Mahal; the Eiffel Tower; the Sydney Opera House; the Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest building, in Dubai; the Istanbul Airport, the world’s largest airport; and the new complex of Germany’s Federal Intelligence Service (BND), the world’s largest intelligence headquarters, are all grandiose building projects that are imbued with political symbolism, exude glamor and prestige, and showcase political power, a flourishing economy, or military strength. Shortly after the devastating fire in April 2019 that ravaged Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, some of

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France's wealthiest families engaged in a contest of generosity, rushing to pledge substantial donations for the reconstruction of the 850-year-old monument.

The Renaissance saw similar attempts to use architecture to exude leadership in Europe and the Islamic world: the evolution of diverse courtly cultures across Europe and the emergence and consolidation of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal imperial polities in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world led to the reconfiguration of the physical environment and the creation of new cities and capitals designed to serve as loci of power and hubs of economic activity. Constantinople/Istanbul represents an outstanding example: a city in which new urban arrangements constituted an essential part of an ambitious plan to usher in a new era in Islamic history and convert the glorious capital of the Byzantine Empire into the cradle of Ottoman political culture.¹

While there is an extensive corpus of historical works written by both Ottoman Muslim and European authors about the reign of Sultan Süleymān I (Kānūnī [the Lawgiver]) (r. 1520–66), the goal of this article is to investigate how the sultan's personal attributes, style of leadership, and architectural achievements were perceived in Jewish political writing. In particular, I will focus on the *Crónica de los reyes otomanos* (Chronicle of the Ottoman kings) of the prolific Sephardi polymath Moses ben Baruch Almosnino (ca. 1515–ca. 1580). Unlike praises of Constantinople that were written in Ottoman Turkish and addressed to Ottoman dignitaries, Almosnino's *Crónica* was not targeted at a specific patron, but was deliberately crafted for a segment of the Sephardic diaspora literate in Ladino rather than Hebrew.² The *Crónica* is a rich source of rumination about the guiding norms of firm, just, and equitable government and the civic function of architecture. It encapsulates a new vision of the history of the Jewish people after the expulsion from Spain and marks the beginnings of Jewish political thinking in the Ottoman Empire.

In this article, I will identify a shared set of fundamental questions and concerns present in Almosnino's oeuvre and in key fifteenth-century Italian texts on the correlation of magnificence and good leadership. Finally, I will argue that the conceptual apparatus and certain motifs of the *Crónica* attest to the persistence and residual influence of humanist ideas in the Ottoman context. The work showcases the complexity of Almosnino's intellectual profile as an author deeply steeped in the biblical tradition and the classical legacy. It attests to Almosnino's effort to redefine Jewish identity and to come to terms with Ottoman political realities while also highlighting his role as a purveyor of

¹ For the urban development and demographic and economic growth of Constantinople during the sixteenth century, see, e.g., Kafescioglu; Mantran.

² The role of Ladino as a medium for literary production in the sixteenth century is examined in Borovaya, 2017 and 2012. See, in general, Lehmann; Bunis.

humanist and European scientific learning in the Ottoman world. More broadly, it is reflective of the emergence of certain Jewish thinkers as borderline Renaissance figures in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³

ALMOASNINO'S LIFE AND WORKS

Almosnino was descended from a prominent Jewish family, which originally came from Aragon.⁴ He received Halachic training, served as rabbi in the Jewish community of Salonika, and played a decisive role in the integration of ex-conversos, who formed a substantial part of his audience. Almosnino's magnum opus is the *Rejimyento de la vida* (The conduct [regimen] of life [Salonika, 1564; Venice, 1604]).⁵ He also composed a number of works in Hebrew, such as various commentaries on the Bible and a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Penei Moshe* [The countenance of Moses], 1556). Almosnino's commentary on the *Ethics* has been characterized as one of the most important pieces of Jewish philosophical literature written in the Ottoman era.⁶ It reflects Almosnino's endeavor to articulate an ethical theory founded on a mélange of ideas derived from the Jewish tradition and the Greco-Roman philosophical legacy.⁷

Almosnino also produced Hebrew translations of a number of scientific works, including Georg von Peurbach's (1423–61) *Theoricae Novae Planetarum* (*Shaar ha-shamayim* [The gate of heaven]) and Johannes de Sacrobosco's (John of Holywood, fl. first half of thirteenth century) *Sphaera mundi* (*Bet Elohim* [The house of God], 1553).⁸ Almosnino's interest in astronomy reflects a rich tradition of Ottoman Jewish scientific writing, exemplified by Moses Galeano's (Mūsā Jālinūs, fl. first half of sixteenth century) works, notably the *Ta'alumot hokmah* (Puzzles of wisdom, ca. 1500), a treatise in Arabic on theoretical astronomy, a tract in Ottoman Turkish on medicine

³ See Zonta, esp. 1–31.

⁴ On Almosnino's life and works, see Borovaya, 2017; Almosnino, 2004, 2–10, 38–41, 479–83; as well as the following two studies in Hebrew: Bnaya (cf. the review by Tirosh-Samuelson); Ben-Menachem.

⁵ Almosnino, 2004, 47–378.

⁶ Tirosh-Rothschild, 1997, 536. The commentary has not survived in its entirety. The only remaining copy is preserved in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, and comprises the parts that discuss books 1, 2, and 10 of the *Ethics*.

⁷ On the commentary, see Tirosh-Rothschild, 1997, 531–45; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 396–97, 423–38; as well as England, 115–17.

⁸ The translation of *Theoricae Novae Planetarum* was published in *Tarbits* 53 (1983/84): 569–603; see further Ben-Zaken, 350; Hacker, 1987, 118–19; Langermann, 1998. Almosnino refers to his translation of *Sphaera mundi* in Almosnino, 1998, 101, 110, 194.

(ca. 1507), and his Arabic translation of the canons of the *Almanach Perpetuum* (Perpetual yearbook, 1506–07) of the distinguished astronomer and historian Abraham Zacuto (ca. 1450–ca. 1515). After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Zacuto spent some time in Lisbon as royal astronomer to King John II of Portugal, moved to Tunis, and ended up in Ottoman lands. Galeano spent some time, between 1497 and 1502, in Padua and Venice and served at Bāyezīd II's (r. 1481–1512) court in the early sixteenth century. The *Ta'ulumot ḥokmah* is colored by Galeano's exposure to the higher levels of the Ottoman government and foregrounds his contribution to the circulation of scientific theories from Renaissance Europe in the Ottoman Empire.⁹

Almosnino's literary output also includes a description of Constantinople, which comprises four books (*libros*) that were written in Ladino in Hebrew characters in 1566–67 and were published by Pilar Romeu Ferré in 1998 under the title *Crónica de los Reyes Otomanos*.¹⁰ As in the parallel case of Galeano's *Ta'ulumot ḥokmah*, these texts are the distillation of Almosnino's experiences with the Ottoman court. They also depict the architectural makeup of Constantinople after a visit to the Ottoman capital as a member of a delegation sent by Salonika's Jewish community to the Sublime Porte. The goal of the mission was to gain access to Süleymān in order to renegotiate the trade and fiscal privileges previously enjoyed by the Jews of Salonika.¹¹ From 1537 onward, Salonikan Jews had been designated by Süleymān as the main suppliers of materials for the Janissary corps. That status had, however, been increasingly compromised due to imports from Europe, and in 1566 the Salonikan Jews were burdened with additional taxes.¹² The delegation never obtained the desired interview with Süleymān, due to his death in September 1566, shortly after their arrival. After placing multiple petitions, they were granted audience with Süleymān's son and successor, Selīm II (r. 1566–74). Through laborious negotiations they succeeded in having their privileges reinstated, after which they returned to Salonika in 1568.

⁹ Galeano's life and works are discussed in Morrison, 2016, 2014, and 2011; Parra Pérez, 37–42; Langermann, 2007.

¹⁰ Almosnino, 1998. On this work, see Borovaya, 2017, esp. 102–57; Meyuḥas Ginio, 2014; Fleming, 2010–11 and 2007. The linguistic aspects of the work are investigated in Romeu Ferré, 1988–89; Pascual Recuero, 1987, 1984, and 1983.

¹¹ The term used by Almosnino to refer to Salonika's Jewish community is *republica*. See Almosnino, 1998, 116. The genealogy and various meanings of this concept in Almosnino's writings are discussed in Borovaya, 2017, 144–45.

¹² The contribution of the Jews to the Ottoman economy is examined in Goffman; İnalçık, 2002 and 1989. On the role of the Jews in Ottoman political life, see Levy; *Jews, Turks, Ottomans*; Rodrigue; Epstein, 1982 and 1980. Consider also Hacker, 2018 and 1992; Ben-Naeh.

In book 1 of the *Crónica*, Almosnino mentions Süleymân's death during his Hungarian campaign and describes the sultan's funeral and Selim's appointment to the throne.¹³ Book 2 is devoted to Süleymân's reign, his military successes, virtues, and architectural projects.¹⁴ Almosnino focuses attention on three buildings: the mosque (Süleymaniye Mosque) where Süleymân was buried;¹⁵ an aqueduct;¹⁶ and the Büyük Çekmece Bridge in the western part of Constantinople.¹⁷ Book 3 includes praise of the physical layout, climate, geographic location, and urban organization of the Ottoman capital;¹⁸ and book 4 details the negotiations between the Jewish representatives and the Ottoman court.¹⁹ A transliterated and abridged version of the *Crónica* was produced by Jacob Cansino (fl. first half of seventeenth century), a translator and interpreter at the court of Philip IV, king of Spain and Portugal (r. Spain 1621–65; r. Portugal 1621–40), and appeared in Madrid in 1638 under the title *Extremos y grandezas de Constantinopla* (Extremes and great things of Constantinople).²⁰ However, in order to play down the Jewish aspects of the work, Cansino altered the structure of the text and omitted the part dealing with the negotiations between the Jewish delegation and the Ottoman authorities.²¹

ALMOSNINO AND THE OTTOMAN TRADITION

An important theme informing the *Crónica* is the greatness of Süleymân as a ruler and benefactor of his subjects. Almosnino commends the sultan's valor and his persistence in embarking upon major military expeditions,²² and he mentions the sultan's strong ambition to take over Vienna, despite his advanced age.²³ According to Almosnino, Süleymân had two motives in pursuing a policy

¹³ Almosnino, 1998, 59–103.

¹⁴ Almosnino, 1998, 105–205.

¹⁵ Almosnino, 1998, 180–81.

¹⁶ Almosnino, 1998, 188–96.

¹⁷ Almosnino, 1998, 196–201.

¹⁸ Almosnino, 1998, 207–34.

¹⁹ Almosnino, 1998, 235–69.

²⁰ [Almosnino], 1638; Almosnino, 1998, 207–34; English translation in Borovaya, 2017, 269–89. On Cansino's translation, see Schaub, 2003 and 1999; Romeu Ferré, 1994; Romeu and Hassán. On the term *extremos* and its Aristotelian background and trajectories in the Iberian context, see Gutwirth, 2011, 35–37. Compare Almosnino's statement that Süleymân manifested "superlative virtue" ("estremada virtud"; literally, "extreme virtue"): Almosnino, 1998, 205.

²¹ Borovaya, 2017, 105. See also Lattes.

²² Almosnino, 1998, 109–21.

²³ Almosnino, 1998, 61.

of lavish building and public works spending. First, the sultan's most important objective was to exhibit magnanimity and generosity. His primary concern was to benefit all those who could potentially use the buildings, fountains, bridges, and roads intended for the common weal, especially for the support of the poor and destitute. The sultan's second goal was to guarantee that all those architectural works would serve as visible and lasting testimonies to his greatness. He thus followed the example of most of the kings, princess, and great sovereigns of the past so that he would perpetuate his memory and enjoy posthumous glory. His actions were aimed at the common welfare; they can be viewed as the manifestation of his virtues rather than his vanity.²⁴ Süleymân was an unprecedented ruler when compared to past and future kings, the embodiment of the "right mean of reason,"²⁵ and a role model whom everyone should praise for the stability and longevity of his kingdom. In sum, the sultan should be held like a mirror that one should look in.²⁶

In addition, Süleymân encouraged all the members of his retinue, as well as the Pashas, provincial governors, and local notables, to follow his example and undertake the construction of edifices that would decorate and ennoble his dominion and serve the public good. Being aware of the sultan's expectations and fascination with building initiatives, his underlings strove to align themselves with the sultan's vision in order to court his favor, meet his expectations, and secure his confidence, trust, affection, and support.²⁷

Almosnino observes that in the Ottoman Empire, during Süleymân's reign, there were 6,004 Friday mosques, in which prayers took place on a regular basis and food was offered to the poor and the travelers who happened to visit them to take rest.²⁸ According to the *Crónica*, it was thanks to Süleymân's architectural aspirations that the population of Constantinople and of its suburbs, both inland and close to the banks of the sea, increased ten times. Given the size of its population, Constantinople can be reckoned to be a kingdom in itself, or at least a world capital that attracted people from all the other parts of the empire as well as from other countries who had heard of the sultan's unparalleled justice, clemency, and mercy, and flocked there to live under his excellent rule.²⁹

There is also a streak of political pragmatism in the *Crónica* that warrants a closer comparison between Almosnino and Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). In his

²⁴ Almosnino, 1998, 201–02.

²⁵ Almosnino, 1998, 204: "medida recta de la razón." Compare Aristotle's association of prudence with right reason in book 6 of the *Ethics*.

²⁶ Almosnino, 1998, 204. On the various connotations of the term *mirror* (*espejo*) and possible links to the mirrors-for-princes genre, see Borovaya, 2017, 145–47.

²⁷ Almosnino, 1998, 179, 202–03.

²⁸ Almosnino, 1998, 203.

²⁹ Almosnino, 1998, 203–04.

Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio (Discourses on the first ten books of Titus Livius, 1531), the Florentine author contends that the task of creating new institutions or redesigning the existing ones should in most cases be undertaken by a single person. A sagacious founder who does not act for the benefit of himself or his successors, but is solicitous of the general good, should seek to acquire absolute authority. He should resort to extraordinary actions if they are conducive to organizing a kingdom or a republic. Machiavelli mentions Romulus, who first murdered Remus and later consented to the death of the Sabine king Titus Tatius, with whom he had been ruling. In Machiavelli's view, Romulus's actions were driven by commitment to the common good and not his own ambition.³⁰

Almosnino's works contain ideas that are redolent of Machiavelli's political theory. For instance, in the *Rejimyento de la vida*, Almosnino argues that when a king privileges his own benefit over the good of the entire "commonwealth" ("republika"), it is usually because he has ascended to power by sheer "luck" ("suerte," "ventura") and not because he "descends from a royal family" ("de sangre real").³¹ In *The Prince*, Machiavelli likewise distinguishes between two types of principalities: hereditary, in which a dynasty has ruled for a long time, and new; he points out that one of the possible ways whereby one can ascend to power is by fortune.³² The first Ottoman translations of Machiavelli's *Prince* appeared in the eighteenth century as a sequel to the publication of the Ottoman version of King Frederick II of Prussia's (r. 1740–86) *Anti-Machiavel* (1740).³³ But in 1553, in a way similar to Machiavelli's advice, Süleymân would perform a notorious act of political realism and cold-bloodedness in defiance of any feelings of paternal love and blood relations, by ordering the execution of his eldest son Şehzade Muştafâ (1515–53).³⁴ A detailed description of the event is presented in an anonymous Venetian diplomatic report of Süleymân's military expedition against the Safavids in 1553.³⁵ The prominent French political theorist and legal scholar Jean Bodin (1530–96) wrote that Süleymân felt threatened by Muştafâ's increasing popularity and was compelled to have him murdered in order to assert his position as the sole rightful holder of sovereign authority.³⁶

A discussion of the Muştafâ episode is included in Almosnino's *Crónica* as well: Almosnino notes that Süleymân received reliable information about his

³⁰ Machiavelli, 1996, book 1, chap. 9, pp. 29–30. For further discussion, see Sasso.

³¹ Almosnino, 2004, 336.

³² Machiavelli, 1998, chaps. 1–2, pp. 5–7; chap. 7, pp. 25–33.

³³ Yılmaz Aydoğdu. The transmission of Machiavelli's political ideas in the Iberian world is traced in K. D. Howard. See also Syros, 2020.

³⁴ For further discussion, see Atçıl, 2016. See also Andrews and Kalpaklı, 247–50.

³⁵ [Anonymous], 207–12.

³⁶ See Leo; Valensi, 1993, 63.

son's plans to marshal support in the court and co-opt the sultan's acolytes by promising rewards according to each person's rank. Subsequently, Süleymân ordered his son's execution and displayed excessive cruelty against him, for he believed that Şehzade Muştafa's plot and disobedience constituted treason, and the only proper punishment should be death. By coming across as the "most cruel butcher" ("cruelísimo carnicero") of his sons and grandsons, Süleymân sought to preserve the tranquility and peace of his realm, demonstrate that he was implacable in the enactment of justice, and affirm his commitment to punish malefactors in a rigorous and impartial manner. Otherwise, if he had been lenient, he would have turned into his own cruel enemy and would have compromised the legitimacy of his rule and jeopardized the longevity and stability of his kingdom.³⁷ In his treatment of fortitude in the *Rejimyento de la vida*, Almosnino glosses a biblical story similar to Prince Muştafa's execution on Suleyman's orders—namely, the death of Absalom, who had rebelled against his father, David (2 Samuel 13–19). Almosnino remarks that as a father and private person, David could have opted to sacrifice his life to spare Absalom, since such a decision would not have had any repercussions for the state. But as a king and public figure, he could not let paternal love override his dedication to the good of his people. Instead, he acted according to right reason, prioritized his safety, and refrained from putting his life at stake. Almosnino notes that the more the security of a state depends on its ruler, the more he should value his life and try to avoid dangers.³⁸

Almosnino's ideas about effective political agency can also be extrapolated from his account of Rüstem Paşa (ca. 1500–61), who served as Süleymân's grand vizier from 1544 until 1553 and from 1555 until 1561.³⁹ Almosnino remarks that Rüstem Paşa was so successful in the fulfillment of his duties, the management of the finances, and the administration of the empire that he surpassed all previous ministers. He embodied all the virtues requisite for the enforcement of justice, as well as prudence and intelligence.⁴⁰ He exercised power with sagacity and without any bias or prejudice. Moreover, he ensured that the emperor's wealth throughout the entire realm doubled. He dealt with all the sectors of society with exceptional liberality. During his tenure, state revenues increased threefold and expenses decreased by half compared to what had happened in the past, and in such a manner that no one had any reason to complain or protest for grievances or malfeasance. In addition, he ensured that the slaves of the emperor and all the ministers received their wages without delay

³⁷ Almosnino, 1998, 119–21, 162–63, 205. Consider also Borovaya, 2017, 142–47.

³⁸ Almosnino, 2004, 188–89. See also Abeles, 58.

³⁹ On Rüstem Paşa, see Atçil, 2015.

⁴⁰ Almosnino, 1998, 158, 162.

and that no subject was asked to pay an inordinate or unreasonable amount of taxes. His success at upholding balance in the public finances and the increase of revenues was the outcome of his dedication to and vigilance over political affairs.⁴¹ Rüstem Paşa was so resolved to render justice and suppress injustice and corruption that he was always accessible and granted audience to every subject. He listened with exemplary patience to all the claims and petitions expressed by those visiting his court and was more interested in listening to the complaints of the poor and vulnerable members of society than accommodating the demands and recriminations of the affluent and powerful. Furthermore, he pursued the administration of all affairs without procrastination and wasted no time in the application of justice, making sure that no action took place that would entail unnecessary expenses.⁴²

Süleymān, Almosnino writes, took notice of all of Rüstem Paşa's qualities and loved him not simply like a son-in-law but as a real son, and entrusted to him all the affairs related to the government of the empire.⁴³ Like Süleymān, Rüstem Paşa was particularly eager to sponsor the construction of sumptuous and magnificent buildings, such as mosques, public baths, and inns, which would serve the common good and earn him honor and lasting glory. In his architectural ventures, he followed Süleymān's lead and enlisted the services of an "architect" ("maimar bağı"), the best in his time.⁴⁴

Finally, Almosnino notes that Selīm was very perspicacious and generous, that he loved virtue and justice, and that he was very merciful, as befits a great ruler who governs such a great realm.⁴⁵ Selīm in every respect acted with absolute prudence in accordance with right reason and embodied two attributes requisite for righteous rule: first, in all his dealings he was circumspect and pursued the necessary investigation in order to ascertain the real truth and proceed accordingly. Second, he registered in his memory what happened in the past and utilized that information, whenever it was required. Another trait of Selīm's persona, according to Almosnino, was his deep sense of gratitude. He felt affection for and was eager to reward those who had benefited and supported him. Both of these characteristics are vital for a great ruler of his stature, who seeks to treat his subjects according to the dictates of justice and right

⁴¹ Almosnino, 1998, 160. Almosnino probably uses the term *slaves* to refer to the janissaries (*kapı kulları*).

⁴² Almosnino, 1998, 161.

⁴³ Almosnino, 1998, 161.

⁴⁴ Almosnino, 1998, 162, 203. Almosnino is referring to Mī'mār Sinān (ca. 1490–1588), the chief architect under Süleymān and Selīm II. See also Almosnino, 1998, 181, 188–89, 195–96, 198.

⁴⁵ Almosnino, 1998, 102.

reason.⁴⁶ As such, Selim performed a great number of good deeds toward his people and meted out benefits considering each person's quality and merits, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In doing so, his overriding concern was to reward those who had been loyal to him.⁴⁷

Praises of Ottoman rule had repeatedly been expressed, albeit often in vague terms, in other Jewish writings that were printed in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ One could argue that Almosnino merely aligned himself with an established pattern. In one crucial regard, however, his exposition of Ottoman political structures embodies significant deviation from contemporary or earlier writings, such as *responsa* literature produced by Samuel de Medina (Maharashdam, ca. 1505–ca. 1589), a rabbi, Halachic expert, and prolific author of sermons, who, along with Joseph Caro (1488–1575), was one of Almosnino's direct interlocutors in Salonika and explicitly referred to Almosnino in various texts.⁴⁹ Maharashdam professes and urges obedience and fidelity to the Ottoman sultans. He emphasizes how conscientious in the administration of affairs of state, how kindly, just, fair, compassionate, and clement Süleymân and Selîm II had been in their treatment of both their Muslim and non-Muslim constituents. Maharashdam's advocacy of loyalty toward the Ottoman authorities is grounded in a theological explanation, according to which life in Ottoman lands was dictated by divine will. At the same time, he, like Almosnino, highlights the generous benefits the Jews have derived from living under the auspices of the Ottoman sultans. As such, Maharashdam deems it incumbent upon every Jewish subject to respect and honor the sultans and to abide by their ordinances and laws, just as every Jew is expected to follow the divine commands.⁵⁰

It is possible that Maharashdam echoes sentiments common to Jewish historiography about the role of divine agency in human history, especially in connection with the disintegration of the Byzantine world and the Ottoman rise to dominance. The Cretan Jewish writer Elijah Capsali (ca. 1485–ca. 1555) looked to divine intervention in the course of human events as one of the chief causes for the dissolution of Byzantine power. Born to a family involved in the local administration and the Jewish community in Candia (present-day Heraklion) in Crete, Capsali studied from 1508 to 1510 in Padua and Venice, and after his return to Crete he served as rabbi of the local community from

⁴⁶ Almosnino, 1998, 100.

⁴⁷ Almosnino, 1998, 101.

⁴⁸ Borovaya, 2017, 111–12; Rozen, 43.

⁴⁹ On Maharashdam, see Goodblatt (on the links between Maharashdam and Almosnino, 17); Bornstein; Molho. With regard to the history of *responsa* in the Ottoman world and for references to earlier scholarship, consult Benaim.

⁵⁰ Shmuelevitz, 1984, 30–34; Goodblatt, 118–19.

1518 onward.⁵¹ Capsali's *Seder Eliyahu zuta* (The order of Elias the Younger, or The minor order of Elias, 1523) is a well-crafted narrative about the history of the Ottoman Empire that is structured around the reigns of Mehmed II (the Conqueror) (r. 1444–46 and 1451–81), Selīm I (r. 1512–20), and Süleymān.⁵² Capsali articulates a multi-causal conception of imperial decline that revolves around two main topics: Byzantine decline as the manifestation of divine retribution for the mistreatment of Jews, and misrule and factionalism.

Capsali supplies a narrative about the siege and fall of Constantinople that blames it on the oppression of the empire's Jewish population and construes it as having been dictated by the will of God, who arranges for one nation to fall and elevates another.⁵³ Capsali sees Sultan Selīm as selected and driven by God to attack and bring Egypt to heel.⁵⁴ Regarding the ascent of the Ottomans, Capsali puts Sultan Mehmed II on a par with great rulers of the pre-Islamic past, such as Cyrus and Alexander the Great.⁵⁵ Almosnino, on the other hand, defuses the theological or eschatological dimensions of the rise of Ottoman imperial power.⁵⁶ Rather, he privileges an approach to the workings of the Ottoman polity that is animated by the effort to come to terms with post-expulsion realities and to carve out a space for the existence of the Jewish community. In order to assess the distinctiveness of Almosnino's approach to the nexus of magnificence and architecture it will be instructive to situate his work in sixteenth-century Ottoman writings. There is a rich corpus of sources

⁵¹ On Capsali's life and works, see Paudice, 2010; Moreno Koch; Benayahu; Berlin, 1962. A detailed comparison between Capsali's and Almosnino's ideas is included in Fleming, 2010–11 and 2007.

⁵² Capsali's views on the rise of the Ottomans and Muslim-Christian relations are discussed in Jacobs, 2004, 2005, and 2002; as well as in Corazzol; Shmuelevitz, 1978; Berlin, 1971.

⁵³ Berlin, 1962, 102–05, 152–53. For further discussion, see Paudice, 2006; Kohn, 10–22.

⁵⁴ Berlin, 1971, 35–38; Berlin, 1962, 180–87.

⁵⁵ Berlin, 1971, 27–29.

⁵⁶ Baer, esp. 1–52, has attempted to deconstruct Jewish narratives about the Ottoman Empire and to show how the messianic elements that inform them translate into a utopian and idealized vision of the Ottoman sultans. Although certain Jewish authors, such as Capsali, do exhibit strong eschatological tendencies toward the Ottomans, Baer fails to acknowledge that such tropes are an enduring feature of medieval Latin, Byzantine, and Islamic writing, particularly praises of rulers. The multidimensionality of Capsali's account of the fall of Byzantium and the ascendancy of the Ottomans consists in the simultaneous application of diverse motifs (divine will, natural causality) to the explanation of major historical events. Another serious lacuna of Baer's analysis is related to the omission of Almosnino's writings, which, albeit laudatory of the sultans, embrace a more temperate, down-to-earth approach to Ottoman government that is bereft of the messianic strands that characterize fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Jewish historiographic sources.

in Arabic about the merits (*faḍā'il*) of various cities, such as Jerusalem and Baghdad, or regions of the Islamic world (e.g., Syria), which is analogous to the European (*laus urbium*) and Byzantine (*ekphrasis*) genre of descriptions and panegyrics of cities and urban chronicles.⁵⁷ There is also a genre of Ottoman political writings (*şehrengîz*) that include praises of cities focusing on handsome boys, usually from the lower strata of society.⁵⁸

The civic dimension of architecture is a recurrent theme in Islamic discourse on urban life, the genesis of human civilization, and imperial formation, as crystallized in the work of the great historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), *al-Muqaddimah* (Introduction to history, prolegomena, 1377). Ibn Khaldūn's ideas about the rise and fall of dynasties exerted a lasting influence on Ottoman political literature on the various stages in the evolution of the state (*devlet*) (i.e., growth, stagnation, and decline). Ottoman authors showed little interest, however, in glossing those sections of the *Muqaddimah* about city planning, the creation of monuments, or the political function of architecture.⁵⁹

The Byzantine historian Critovoulos of Imvros (d. ca. 1470), in his *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, devotes considerable attention to the building projects that were undertaken by Mehmed II after the capture of Constantinople and aimed at the urban transformation of the former Byzantine capital. Mehmed arranged for all the bridges and roads that led to the city to be repaired, and funded the construction of inns for travelers, a large and beautiful marketplace at the heart of the city, public baths, and aqueducts. He gave incentives to large numbers of people from both the European and Asian regions of the empire to relocate to the city, and took care of them, especially the Christians. He encouraged all wealthy persons to invest in building elegant mansions throughout the city as well as baths, inns, and marketplaces. Moreover, he readily sponsored the construction of a new mosque and a new palace, both of unparalleled size and beauty. Critovoulos remarks that the sultan supervised the construction of the mosque and the palace. Mehmed also ensured the use of the best quality materials and the recruitment of the most experienced and competent workmen and foremen.⁶⁰

Some of the ideas expressed in earlier Arabic literature resonate with Almosnino's contemporary, the accomplished poet Lâtîfî (ca. 1491–1582). Lâtîfî's most famous work, the *Tezkire-i şuara* (Treatise of poets), includes

⁵⁷ On the *faḍā'il* genre, see Hillenbrand, 162–65; Gruber, esp. 49–82. Consider also Hermes and Head.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Çalis-Kural; Bernardini.

⁵⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, 143–46, 263–72, 319–21. For a recent reappraisal of Ibn Khaldūn's Ottoman reception, see Sariyannis, 2019b.

⁶⁰ Kritovoulos, 104–05, 140–41, 149; [Kritovoulos of Imvros], 338–41, 434–39, 462–63. See, in general, Lowry.

the biographies of Ottoman poets and was presented to Süleymân. Lâtîfî also wrote an encomium of the Ottoman capital (*Evsaf-ı İstanbul* [The qualities of Istanbul]), which, as indicated by its title, is reminiscent of the *faḍā'il* literature and Arab praises of cities. Lâtîfî came from Kastamonu (north-central Turkey) and, like Almosnino, he spent an extended period in the Ottoman capital only later in his life. He professes admiration for Constantinople as the most distinguished of all the cities, countries, and most prosperous regions of the world. Lâtîfî also mentions that Constantinople has become the habitat and seat of power of the sultan, showcases Süleymân's honor and protection, and is embellished in its entirety with the finest works of art. Situated on the confluence of the Mediterranean and Black Seas and abounding with marvelous buildings, Constantinople is a replica of heaven.⁶¹ Lâtîfî expounds on the characteristics of Constantinople and notes that it is an enormous and magnificent city that is comparable to Egypt in terms of greatness. All these are the features, in Lâtîfî's view, of every great city, and are thanks to the diversity and size of its population.⁶²

In a similar vein, Celâlzâde Muştafâ (ca.1490–1567), who served as the head (*nişancı*) of the Ottoman imperial chancery (*divân*), in his *Tabakat ül-memâlik ve derecât ül-mesâlik* (Layers of kingdoms and levels of routes), a chronicle about Süleymân's reign from 1520 until 1557, celebrates the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque as the ultimate architectural symbol and the apex of Süleymân's imperial project, according to which military expansion and monumental urban construction went hand in hand.⁶³ Celâlzâde Muştafâ sets forth the vision of Süleymân as an exceptional and unequalled sovereign in the history of humankind, who superseded earlier rulers, such as King Solomon and Alexander the Great. Celâlzâde Muştafâ also declares that Süleymân epitomized all the virtues requisite for perfect rule, including piety and modesty, which, in the *Tabakat*, are presented as being consonant with Islamic ethics.⁶⁴

Certain elements of Almosnino's inventory of the qualities conducive to good government can be found in a body of Ottoman political writings that depict generosity (*sehâvet/sehâ*) as a salient virtue of rulership.⁶⁵ The significance of the sultan's magnanimity or munificence is commonplace in most introductory or panegyric sections of Ottoman works and is often associated with the circle of

⁶¹ Lâtîfî, 1977, 8–9; Lâtîfî, 2001, 50–51.

⁶² Lâtîfî, 1977, 13; Lâtîfî, 2001, 56–57. The term Egypt (Mişr) is used in writings of this period to refer to Cairo. I am grateful to Benjamin Arbel for calling my attention to this point.

⁶³ Şahin, 2013, 137–45. On Celâlzâde Muştafâ's life and contribution to Ottoman historiography, see Şahin, 2013 and 2018; M. Ş. Yılmaz; [Celâlzâde Muştafâ], 3–35. The political significance of the Süleymaniye Mosque is discussed in detail in Necipoğlu-Kafadar.

⁶⁴ Şahin, 2013, 142–43. See, in general, Fleischer; Kunt and Woodhead.

⁶⁵ See Sariyannis, 2019a, 29–62; Sariyannis, 2011; H. Yılmaz, 22–96, which also explores the reception of earlier Islamic rulership literature in the Ottoman world.

justice, which also prescribes the relationship between the ruler and the use of wealth and resources for the benefit of the people.⁶⁶ The *Tevārīh-i Mülūk-i Āl-i ‘Osmān* (Histories of the kings of the Ottoman dynasty) by Tāceddīn İbrahim b. Hızır Ahmedī (ca. 1335–1412) ascribes to generosity the same importance as justice, and he lauds the generosity manifested by the first sultans.⁶⁷ Aşıkpaşazade Derviş Ahmed (b. ca. 1400), in his *Tevārīh-i āl-i Osman* (Histories of the house of Osman), a chronicle of the rise of the Ottomans until 1478, proclaims generosity toward both the poor and the dervishes, and identifies charitable activities as one of the principal attributes of the model ruler.⁶⁸ The religious scholar Sinan al-Dīn Yusuf Paşa (ca. 1444–86), who served as vizier and grand vizier from 1470 until 1476, in his *Maārifuṅame* (Book of knowledge), draws a distinction between two types of generosity: low, which requires that the ruler does not abuse his power to exploit his subjects; and high, which involves distributing benefits, particularly to the fragile members of society and the soldiers and their families, as long as the ruler is able to generate resources in a licit manner.⁶⁹

Another type of Ottoman source that treats beneficence falls under the rubric of the Persianate *akhlāq* genre, and resembles, in many ways, European works on political ethics, such as Giovanni Pontano’s *De Principe*, which I will discuss later, and Erasmus’s (1466–1536) *Institutio Principis Christiani* (Education of a Christian prince, 1532). The intellectual antecedents to this tradition can be traced to the *Akhlāq-i Naşīrī* (The Nasirean ethics) of the distinguished Persian philosopher Naşīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–74). Tursun Beğ (after 1426–after 1490) imbibed Ṭūsī’s ideas in the *Tārīh-i Ebū’l-Feth* (History of the conqueror), a praise of Mehmed II and Bāyezīd II.⁷⁰ Tursun Beğ lauds Bāyezīd’s generosity toward certain sectors of society in terms of reinstating privileges (agricultural lands and villages) that had been revoked by Mehmed.⁷¹ He also provides a lengthy description of the various plans for urban reconstruction and reorganization and the measures designed to boost demographic growth in Constantinople that were initiated by Mehmed.⁷² Ahmed bin Hüsameddīn Amasī’s (fl. first half of fifteenth century) *Kıtab-ı mir’atü’l-mülūk* (Book of a mirror for kings, 1406) subsumed generosity under the category of honesty and defined it as a corollary of the appetitive

⁶⁶ For further discussion of the circle of justice as the principle governing the relations among the various parts of the state, see Darling; Syros, 2013.

⁶⁷ Sariyannis, 2019a, 55, 58.

⁶⁸ Sariyannis, 2019a, 37–38.

⁶⁹ Sariyannis, 2019a, 55–56, 482–83. On Sinan Paşa, see also H. Yılmaz, 35–36.

⁷⁰ On Tursun Beğ’s political ideas, see Sariyannis, 2019a, 68–69.

⁷¹ Tursun Bey, 267. See also Sariyannis, 2019a, 69, 79.

⁷² Tursun Bey, 84–97.

faculty as long as it is tempered.⁷³ Almosnino's contemporary Kınalızade Ali Çelebi (1510–71), author of the most comprehensive treatise in the mold of *akhlāq* literature ever produced in the Ottoman world, the *Ahlāk-ı Alāī* (The sublime ethics, 1563–65), launched into a dissection of the constituent elements of generosity (i.e., beneficence, magnanimity, and forgiveness).⁷⁴

Another piece of Ottoman advice literature (*nasihatnâme*) that achieved considerable popularity throughout the sixteenth century and lends itself to a comparison to Almosnino's work is the *Âşafnâme* (The book of Asaph, written between 1541 and 1563) of Lütüfi Paşa (1488–1504).⁷⁵ Lütüfi Paşa is mentioned in the *Crónica* and served in various administrative posts and as governor of various provinces, third vizier under Selīm I, and grand vizier under Süleymān.⁷⁶ The opening section of the *Âşafnâme* provides intimate details about Lütüfi Paşa's career and his tenure as grand vizier from 1539 until 1541.⁷⁷ The allusion to Asaph, the minister and counselor of King Solomon, in the title of the work is ambiguous: it is possible that Lütüfi Paşa's intention is to evoke associations between the ideal grand vizier with the biblical figure of Asaph and implicitly express admiration for the Ottoman Solomon (Süleymān); or to identify himself with Asaph and, being less sanguine than Almosnino about the future of the Ottoman state, to give vent to his frustration and chagrin about the failings of the Ottoman administration and the early symptoms of what he most probably saw as the decline of the empire, just as Asaph had witnessed the degeneration of Solomon's rule.⁷⁸

⁷³ Sariyannis, 2019a, 78–79.

⁷⁴ Sariyannis, 2019a, 79, 82–83, 94, 181, 485.

⁷⁵ The *Âşafnâme* is one of the most frequently cited works in sixteenth-century Ottoman political discourse. See Aksan, 54; and, in general, D. A. Howard.

⁷⁶ Almosnino, 1998, 156–59. On Lütüfi Paşa's life, career in the Ottoman administration, and political ideas, see Imber; Mordtmann.

⁷⁷ [Lütüfi Pascha], 3–5.

⁷⁸ See Lewis, 71–73. The vagaries of political life form a continual subtext in the *Âşafnâme*. Lütüfi Paşa notes that as he entered the upper echelons of the imperial administration, he found the affairs in the *divān* (imperial council) in disarray. He relates that within seven years, he managed to restore order, but fell victim to court intrigues and defamation. In order to protect himself from calumnies and plots, he decided to step down and retire to his estate in Adrianople (Edirne, present-day Turkey). He also writes that certain practices and habits at the court were at odds with what he had expected, and he felt perplexed. For this reason, he decided to spell out the personal qualifications and moral qualities and attitudes expected of the grand vizier for the benefit of those aspiring to that office: [Lütüfi Pascha], 5–7. Compare Almosnino's portrayal of King Solomon as the paragon of wisdom and perspicacity, as well as the personification of the Renaissance vision of the *homo universalis*. On this point, see Tirosch-Samuelson, 2003, 425. See also Milstein. Compare David ben Judah Messer Leon's (ca. 1470–ca. 1535) ideas about the *ḥakam kolel*: Tirosch-Rothschild, 1991, esp. 34–54.

According to Lütfi Paşa, the paradigmatic grand vizier should be characterized by impartiality and selflessness.⁷⁹ He should also seek to protect the ruler against greed and venality that can be caused by bribery.⁸⁰ In fulfilling his duties the grand vizier should act like a skilled physician and provide succor to those that have been afflicted by poverty and penury.⁸¹ Thus, one of the grand vizier's foremost duties is the efficient administration of the finances, since the longevity of the empire requires a healthy economy, which, in turn, is contingent on the existence of a firm and lasting political and social order. Abuse of power and misgovernment, on the other hand, lead to the erosion of the economy and social divisions. The grand vizier should therefore ensure that the amount of revenues exceeds that of the overall expenses and that there is no shortage of supplies in the body politic.⁸² Additionally, he should appoint as treasurers worthy individuals who possess the necessary experience and abilities to generate wealth and exact taxes, place the common weal above their personal interests, and make scrupulous use of the public funds.⁸³

ALMOsnINO AND ITALIAN HUMANISM

Ottoman Jewry did not exist in a vacuum and was not immune to the cultural stimuli of its surrounding environment, Ottoman discourse on good and sustainable government, and the merits and achievements of the sultans. It is worth noting that Almosnino evinced keen interest in Islamic philosophy, as indicated by references to various Muslim thinkers in his writings and his commentary (*Migdal Oz*, 1569) on the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifah* (The intentions of the philosophers) of the great Arab theologian and jurist al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), which was available in a Hebrew translation.⁸⁴ Upon his return to Salonika, Almosnino gave a sermon in 1568 in order to report on the activities of the Jewish delegation in Constantinople. There he referred to several key figures of the Jewish community in the Ottoman capital who provided access to the senior government officials.⁸⁵ In the *Crónica*, Almosnino mentions that he obtained a brief chronicle (*Tavarij Otmán*) about the Ottoman kings

⁷⁹ [Luṭfi Pascha], 8.

⁸⁰ [Luṭfi Pascha], 12.

⁸¹ [Luṭfi Pascha], 10.

⁸² [Luṭfi Pascha], 28–29.

⁸³ [Luṭfi Pascha], 30.

⁸⁴ Tirosh-Samuelson, 1997, 232.

⁸⁵ Borovaya, 2017, 114–15; “Moses Almosnino: Sermon on *Elleh Fequde* (1568, Salonika),” in Saperstein, 217–39, esp. 225–26.

from Osman until Süleymān, and he asked a good friend of his, who had a good command of Turkish, to assist him in verifying the information contained therein.⁸⁶

The *Crónica* shares some general features with Ottoman manuals of ethical and political advice and discourse on architecture. What, however, sets Almosnino apart from other Ottoman authors and foregrounds the uniqueness of his approach to the Ottoman court is his deployment of the notion of magnificence and other philosophical concepts, such as “mañanimidad” (“greatness of soul”).⁸⁷ A more detailed investigation of the use of these ideas in the *Crónica* can help determine the intellectual resources, notably the ancient Greek philosophical heritage and the Italian humanist tradition, that Almosnino tapped into in order to transpose and adapt civic virtues vested with strong Christian connotations to his depiction of a great Muslim ruler.⁸⁸ A similar approach to the workings of the Ottoman regime undergirds a number of reports (*relazioni*) written by Venetian ambassadors for the Senate, in which descriptions of the physical characteristics, personality traits, and habits of Ottoman emperors, high-ranking state officials, and leading dignitaries are often framed in conceptual categories akin to those used in references to political figures in Christian Europe.⁸⁹ The *Crónica* also lends itself to comparison with the oration on Mehmed II’s profile, which was delivered in January 1454 by the Byzantine-Venetian humanist and diplomat Niccolò Sagundino (Nikolaos Sekoundinos, 1402–64) at the Aragonese court to Alfonso I of Naples (Alfonso V of Aragon; Alfonso the Magnanimous) (r. 1442–58), and points to the connection between Naples and the Ottomans.⁹⁰

Almosnino’s account of magnificence and how it bears upon the administration of financial resources and architectural public works is indebted to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Almosnino was thoroughly acquainted with

⁸⁶ Almosnino, 1998, 87. See also Borovaya, 2017, 116.

⁸⁷ For instance, Almosnino, 1998, 99–100, 109, 202, 204–05.

⁸⁸ For similar developments and the reception of humanist ideas in Jewish thought in Renaissance Italy, consult Lesley; Ruderman.

⁸⁹ For a similar point, see Valensi, 1993, 55. For the application of the term *magnifico* to various Ottoman statesmen, including Süleyman and Rüstem Paşa, consider, e.g., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, ser. 3, 2:20, 24–26, 28–32, 34, 36–37, 39, 41–42, 50–51, 56, 58–59, 64–65, 80–82, 84, 85–90, 92–94, 96, 101, 117, 136, 164, 175, 177–78, 189, 263, 353, 406, 412, 420. The importance and veracity of the *relazioni* as a repository of information about the Ottoman world is discussed in Dursteler, 2011. See also Dursteler, 2018; de Vivo. Notable contributions to the study of European perceptions of the Ottoman political system include Malcolm; Valensi, 1990.

⁹⁰ [Sagundino].

Aristotle's philosophical doctrines, wrote a detailed commentary on the *Ethics*, and his *Rejimyento de la vida* is influenced by Aristotle's ethical teachings.⁹¹ Aristotle associates magnificence (*μεγαλοπρέπεια*) with the mean and moderation in the context of the management of wealth. Magnificence differs from liberality (*ἐλευθεριότηης*) in that the latter deals with a small amount of wealth,⁹² whereas magnificence pertains solely to a greater amount of wealth and resources.⁹³ Aristotle specifies that the size is relative, given that the amount of expenditure is proportionate to the spender as well as to the object and the circumstances surrounding the use of money. A person cannot be designated as magnificent if he spends adequate sums of money on objects of moderate or minor significance. It calls for the ability to spend on great things in a moderate fashion.⁹⁴ The vices related to magnificence—vulgarity or tastelessness—do not indicate excesses in expenditures on suitable objects, but rather the attempt to make a display of one's wealth on the wrong occasions and in an inappropriate manner.⁹⁵

The magnificent person is, according to Aristotle, an expert in expenditure, as he has the ability to discern what is appropriate and to adjust outlays accordingly. His expenditure is both suitable and great, and as such his actions aim at objects that are also great and suitable and justify proportionate or even greater outlays.⁹⁶ The deeds of the magnificent person are oriented toward the pursuit of good and he is keen to spend lavishly and concerned with how to implement his plan in the noblest and most splendid manner instead of caring about the potential costs associated with it or looking for the cheapest option.⁹⁷ Magnificence is intertwined with liberality, since a generous person is also willing to spend the proper amount in a proper way. Magnificence, however, involves the element of greatness in the amount and method of expenditure and the magnificent person will attain a more magnificent outcome from an equal outlay than a person lacking this virtue.⁹⁸

For Aristotle, specific types of expenditure can be designated as honorable, such as expenditure on the service of gods (votive offerings, public buildings, sacrifices, and the offices of religion in general), as well as public benefactions

⁹¹ For references to magnificence in the *Rejimyento de la vida*, see Almosnino, 2004, 60–61, 181, 223–27. Almosnino's reception of Aristotle's moral philosophy is explored in Abeles.

⁹² Aristotle, 98–101 (2.7.4–6).

⁹³ Aristotle, 204–05 (4.2.1).

⁹⁴ Aristotle, 204–05 (4.2.2–4).

⁹⁵ Aristotle, 204–05 (4.2.4).

⁹⁶ Aristotle, 206–07 (4.2.5–6).

⁹⁷ Aristotle, 206–07 (4.2.7–9).

⁹⁸ Aristotle, 206–09 (4.2.10).

that are the objects of ambition, such as sponsoring a chorus, the construction of a warship, or a banquet for the public. But in all these cases, the level of expenditure can only be evaluated in relation to the financial situation of the spender, since expenditure should be proportionate to the financial resources a person has at their disposal, and be suitable to the donor and not just the situation.⁹⁹ Great public works constitute the highest and most elevated form of expenditure and are suitable only for those who possess sufficient resources from their own efforts or who have inherited from their ancestors, and for those of noble lineage, since there a dimension of greatness and excellence to birth and fame.¹⁰⁰

Aristotle elaborates upon the differences between magnificence and liberality, as well as on the ability of the genuinely magnificent person to pool the amount of resources requisite for grand-scale building projects. In the wake of the formation of courtly cultures in Italy, notably in Florence and Naples, these ideas served as a fulcrum for extensive debates on the ways in which magnificence bears upon political success.¹⁰¹ Machiavelli addresses this topic in chapter 16 of *The Prince*, and underscores the need for the ruler to be generous, but also warns that liberality can have the opposite effect: if it is practiced in a scrupulous and judicious manner, as it should be, there is always a possibility it may not receive due appreciation. Furthermore, a prince aspiring to appear virtuous will need to advertise and make a consistent display of his liberality. But the public demonstration of largesse will deplete his resources, and he will be forced to burden his people, levy excessive taxes, and devise new sources of revenue. As such, the ruler will incur the hatred of his constituency and be less respected as he becomes poorer. But if he decides to cease being generous, he will be vilified for being miserly. Thus, Machiavelli recommends that a prince who is unable to earn a reputation for liberality without having to jeopardize his rule should not be concerned with the risk of coming across as miserly, as long as he acts prudently, because he will gradually be perceived as more and more generous when people realize that by being frugal he has a sufficient amount of assets at his disposal, can protect his realm against enemies, and does not need to burden his subjects.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Aristotle, 208–09 (4.2.11–12).

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, 208–11 (4.2.14–15).

¹⁰¹ For general background, see Guerzoni; Warnke; Kloft.

¹⁰² Machiavelli, 1998, 62–63. I am grateful to Giorgio Lizzul for discussions on this point and for sharing his manuscript “Liberality as a Fiscal Problem in Medieval and Renaissance Thought: A Genealogy from Aristotle’s Tyrant to Machiavelli’s *Prince*” (forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*) with me.

Aristotle's *Ethics* attracted numerous commentaries in the Jewish philosophical tradition and served as the matrix of new interpretations of magnanimity and generosity, and, in part, of magnificence; these are echoed in Almosnino's commentary.¹⁰³ Bahya ibn Paḳuda, who lived in Zaragoza in the second half of the eleventh century and produced one of the first systematic treatises on philosophical ethics, *Al-Hidāyah ilā farā'id al-qulūb* (Guide to the duties of the heart, ca. 1080), decried the Jewish courtiers' haughtiness, patronage of artists, and the generosity they displayed for the purposes self-gratification and self-glorification. He proposed instead that a genuinely generous person is animated by good disposition toward all people.¹⁰⁴ Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), in his *Shemonah Peraḳim* (Eight chapters), disputed the connection drawn by Aristotle between magnanimity and grand-scale benign deeds, insisting on upholding moderation and cautioning against excess and prodigality.¹⁰⁵ Both works had a lasting impact on subsequent debates on ethics, and a Ladino translation by Tzaddik ben Yossef Formón of the *Ḥovot ha-lehavot*, Yehudah ibn Tibbon's (1120–ca. 1190) Hebrew version of Bahya ibn Paḳuda's *Guide to the Duties of the Heart*, was published under the title *Obligación de los corazones* in Constantinople in 1550 and 1569.¹⁰⁶

Almosnino's commentary on the *Ethics*, which was published in 1556, ten years before the completion of the *Crónica*, attests to deep engagement with rabbinical ethics and the preceding Jewish commentaries on Aristotle, but also with Scholastic philosophers, such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and Renaissance humanists, such as Agostino Nifo.¹⁰⁷ In the *Rejimyento de la vida*, which was written for the edification of his nephew, Almosnino envisions the study of the *Ethics* as a propaedeutic for proper conduct and an essential guide in "the path to ultimate felicity."¹⁰⁸ In the *Crónica*, which can be seen as a sequel to these two works, Almosnino amplifies the scope of magnanimity and deviates from both Bahya ibn Paḳuda and Maimonides by rehabilitating the Aristotelian notion of large-scale spending as a distinct feature of magnificence, especially in the sphere of civic affairs. It is possible that Almosnino is following a trend inaugurated by fifteenth-century Jewish writers

¹⁰³ The reception of Aristotle's moral philosophy in sixteenth-century Ottoman Jewish thought is traced in Regev. For the Hebrew translations and commentaries in the Iberian context, see Rothschild, 2016 and 2011; England, 112–15; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 394–411.

¹⁰⁴ Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 185–86.

¹⁰⁵ Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 235–36.

¹⁰⁶ Lehmann, 261; Meyuḥas Ginio, 2015, 45–46.

¹⁰⁷ Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 424.

¹⁰⁸ Almosnino, 2004, 87–88: "el kamino dela 'ultima filisidad." See also Tirosh-Samuelson, 2003, 425.

who espoused a more sympathetic attitude toward courtly cultures.¹⁰⁹ As such, his work speaks to an important facet of Italian humanism that repudiated the Franciscan poverty doctrines and valorized the accumulation, use, and display of wealth.¹¹⁰ More crucially, as will be shown later, there is strong evidence to suggest that Almosnino echoes a line of humanist thinking that depicted gratefulness and generosity as necessary conditions for and emblems of the proper exercise of power.

The dialogue *De Avaritia* (On avarice, 1428) by the prominent humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) offers a set of forceful arguments in favor of the accumulation of wealth. For Bracciolini, all human beings have a natural desire for money. If they were bereft of the drive to acquire something more than what suffices for their basic needs, the cultivation of virtues, such as mercy and charity, would slack off, every splendor, beauty, and ornament would disappear, churches and loggias would no longer be built, and all artistic activity would cease. The eradication of avarice would lead to upheavals and chaos in both the private lives of people and in civil affairs. Bracciolini declares that cities, states, provinces, and kingdoms are, in essence, laboratories of avarice and that money is indispensable and sustains society. He also mentions that many rulers in history were perceived as avaricious: he adduces the example of King Robert of Sicily, who was seen as overly avaricious and accrued an enormous amount of wealth, but performed glorious deeds and achieved a great reputation.¹¹¹

Similarly, Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72), in his treatise *Della famiglia* (On family, 1440), argues that wealth is beneficial to both family and community. Wealth helps one make friends and earn praise by supporting those in need. Investing in great and noble things with generosity and magnificence helps one bolster their reputation and power. In times of need, the assets of private citizens can be useful for their country. For whoever seeks to defend the liberty and dignity of his country by using arms and spilling his blood cannot sustain himself solely on subsidies from the public purse, and states cannot expand their power without great expenses.¹¹² In his *De Re Aedificatoria* (On the art of building, ca. 1450), Alberti adduces an array of ancient rulers who were eager to sponsor architectural projects, notably Moses, Solomon, Semiramis,

¹⁰⁹ On the reappraisal and positive estimate of magnanimity in fifteenth-century Jewish thinking, see Tirosh-Samuels, 2003, 236. Consider also Decter; Davidson.

¹¹⁰ Baron, 1988, 1:158–257; Baron, 1938; Goldthwaite, 1972, esp. 990–97. See also Rubin, 2007, 34–42.

¹¹¹ Bracciolini, 1964, 12–15; Bracciolini, 1978, 259–63. For further discussion of Bracciolini's *De Avaritia*, see Oppel; Bausi, 2017 and 2009; Field, 308–15.

¹¹² Alberti, 1994, 174.

Alexander the Great, Numa Pompilius, Julius Caesar, and Nero.¹¹³ These ideas reverberate in the treatise *De Optimo Cive* (On the best citizen, 1474) of Bartolomeo Sacchi (Platina) (1421–81), which was addressed to Lorenzo the Magnificent and explicates the rationale behind Cosimo's construction of grand public buildings for the utility and magnificence of the entire city.¹¹⁴

The themes of liberality and magnificence are discussed in Matteo Palmieri's (1406–75) *Della vita civile* (On civil life, written 1431–38). In Palmieri's mind, wealth and material abundance are the tools whereby a worthy person is able to perform virtuous deeds. For many virtues can only be nurtured with the support of the "goods of fortune," and without them they become weak and deficient.¹¹⁵ Echoing Aristotle, Palmieri asserts that magnificence is manifested in great expenditure for marvelous and remarkable things. As such, it is a virtue that can be properly exercised only by rich and powerful persons. The magnificent person invests in things that generate honor and glory and are not public but private, such as the construction and embellishment of churches, theaters, porticos, and activities like public ceremonies, games, and banquets.¹¹⁶ Palmieri also notes that among the things that can be characterized as useful, one group contributes to comfort and the adornment of splendid living. This category includes magnificent houses and those things that result from and serve the desire for beauty in human life and that, although created by specific persons, are conducive to the general decoration of the city and civil beauty, which are the source of greatness, reputation, and the welfare of the entire city.¹¹⁷

The concept of magnificence evolved into a central component of humanist praises of various Italian cities in the fifteenth century. The urban projects of the Medici, particularly Cosimo (1389–1464) and Lorenzo (1449–92), were the catalysts for extensive and enthusiastic literature on the civic relevance of architecture.¹¹⁸ In the Florentine context, the Aristotelian and Thomist definitions of magnificence were used for apologetic purposes, to vindicate Cosimo's urban

¹¹³ See, e.g., Alberti, 1988, 238–43; for further discussion and references, see Kanerva; and, in general, Calzona et al., 2007.

¹¹⁴ Battaglia, 207–08, 260–61. Compare Platina's references to the magnificence of royal residences in his work *De Principe* (On the prince, 1470): [Sacchi], 94–95.

¹¹⁵ Palmieri, 153. See also Rubin, 2007, 38–40. For Palmieri, see Mita Ferraro.

¹¹⁶ Palmieri, 147.

¹¹⁷ Palmieri, 183.

¹¹⁸ The literature on Renaissance ideas about magnificence and the civic value of architecture is extensive. Notable studies include: Ago; P. Howard; Polcri; Lindow; Kent; Calzona et al., 2002; Shepherd; Rubin, 1995; Green; Jenkins. See also Skinner, 2002, 136–37, 225–27; Skinner, 1978, 127; Elam.

activity. The foundations for this body of thought were laid by Timoteo Maffei (1415–70) in his tract against Cosimo's detractors and critics.¹¹⁹

Another approach to the civic ramifications of magnificence drew inspiration from the Aragonese rulers' use of architecture in Naples as a potent tool that enabled them to bolster their power, enhance their political legitimacy, and burnish their public image.¹²⁰ The renowned philosopher, historian, and diplomat Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459) glorifies the qualities of Alfonso I of Naples, including magnificence.¹²¹ Likewise, the court historian Bartolomeo Facio (ca. 1405–57), in his philosophical dialogue *De Vitae Felicitate* (On the happiness of life, 1445), extols Alfonso's exceptional beneficence.¹²² Antonio Beccadelli (also known as Panormita, 1394–1471), in his exposition of Alfonso's reign entitled *De Dictis et Factis Alphonsi Regis Aragonum* (On the sayings and deeds of Alfonso king of Aragon and Naples, published posthumously in 1485 under the title *Alfonsi Regis Dicta aut Facta*), lauds the king's architectural ambitions, such as the Aragonese Arch in Naples and new ports, underground aqueducts, and fountains, as testimony to his magnificence.¹²³

The Neapolitan humanist Giuniano Maio (ca. 1435–ca. 1493), who was connected with the Aragonese court, contends in his treatise *De Maiestate* (On majesty, 1492), written for King Ferdinand I (Ferrante) of Naples (r. 1458–94), that majesty, when tempered by wisdom and guided and illuminated by justice, is per se valuable. But it is more appealing and impressive when dignified by magnificence, which is a fount of beauty and admiration for those observing it. Maio reiterates Aristotle's definition of magnificence as the virtue that is associated with honorable deeds, such as those related to divine worship, and with public activities aimed at entertainment in the form of spectacles and public ceremonies. According to Maio, magnificence can only be expressed to the fullest extent by a person who exhibits the highest dignity and grandeur and possesses the highest majesty. As such, it is a quality that pertains to kings and princes, since the excellence and grandeur emanating from it matches the loftiness of their office. In practical terms, magnificence is mirrored in the lifestyle and actions of rulers and the construction of spacious palaces, strong fortresses, sumptuous temples, defensive walls, quays or piers, shipyards, cities, and

¹¹⁹ *In Magnificentiae Cosmi Medicei Florentini Detractores Libellus* (ca. 1454–56). See *Deliciae Eruditorum Seu Veterum ἀνεκδότων Opusculorum Collectanea*, 12:150–68. See also Jenkins, 165–66, 169; Shepherd, 48–51.

¹²⁰ On Aragonese Naples and civic humanism, see Delle Donne; Stacey, 2007 and 2011. See also De Nichilo; Delle Donne and Torrò Torrent; de Divitiis, 2016.

¹²¹ Shepherd, 52.

¹²² Facio, 20. On Facio, see Bentley, 100–08.

¹²³ Beccadelli el Panormita, 96–97, 124–27. See also Shepherd, 52–53; Taylor; Schadee; Patrone.

fountains, all of which are intended to serve the common utility in addition to being imposing ornaments. Magnificence aims at producing both beauty and lasting benefits and thereby generates even greater glory and fame.¹²⁴

The extent to which public buildings are an indicator of a city's magnificence is one of the central themes of the *De Institutione Reipublicae* (On the founding of a republic, written in the 1470s; published 1494) by Francesco Patrizi (1413–94). This Siennese humanist and author of the treatise *De Regno et Regis Institutione* (On the kingdom and the education of the king, written 1481–84; published 1519), which he addressed to Alfonso, Duke of Calabria, considers that the most commendable way to invest public resources in times of peace is to lend public buildings the utmost magnificence. In Patrizi's view, the more magnificence the churches, palaces, theaters, public baths, porticos, and other buildings in the city exude, the greater the city's reputation.¹²⁵ The Neapolitan strand of humanist thinking about the correlation between architecture and good rule is most vividly exemplified in the work of Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503). Pontano served the Aragonese dynasty from 1447 until 1495 in various capacities (as advisor, military secretary, and, later, chancellor).¹²⁶ He succeeded Panormita as tutor to Duke Alfonso, for whom he wrote the treatise on princely rule *De Principe* (On the prince, 1468), modeled after Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (The education of Cyrus).¹²⁷ Unlike Machiavelli, Pontano identifies generosity as one of the chief qualities underpinning the proper exercise of power.¹²⁸ While in the *De Principe* there is a scant emphasis on magnificence, Pontano engages in an extensive discussion of its civic ramifications in the *Libri delle virtù sociali* (Books of the social virtues, 1498), a corpus of tracts on the five virtues that befit great persons—notably, liberality, beneficence, magnificence, splendor, and conviviality.¹²⁹

Drawing on Aristotle, Pontano sets the parameters for the philosophical vindication of magnificence as a civic virtue, and expatiates on the ways in which it relates to architecture.¹³⁰ He points out that magnificence originates from wealth, as evidenced by the public edifices constructed in the past, especially artificial ports, piers, exquisite temples, and all other buildings intended for the common utility and the people's security.¹³¹ Since it aims at great things,

¹²⁴ Maio, 223–31; Kraye, 110–12. See also Celati, 2019.

¹²⁵ Patrizi, 363 (8.12). On this point, see also Tafuri, 106–08; Aurigemma.

¹²⁶ Kidwell; Bentley, 127–34. See also Celati, 2021, 143–56; Cappelli; Canfora.

¹²⁷ Alfonso's book collection included a copy of the Latin translation of the *Cyropaedia*, which was produced by Poggio Bracciolini for Alfonso. See Hersey, 13.

¹²⁸ Pontano, 2003, 8–9.

¹²⁹ Pontano, 1999. See Tateo, 1965 and 1972; Roick.

¹³⁰ Pontano, 1999, 164–219. See also Ricci; de Divitiis, 2010; Imesch, 45–61.

¹³¹ Pontano, 1999, 164–65.

its practice involves great expenses, since with a small amount of wealth it is impossible to pursue large-scale projects. Although other virtues are oriented toward great things, they concern other spheres of human action, as is the case with a brave person who achieves great things by confronting dangers. But the magnificent person achieves and showcases greatness through great outlays. His deeds are manifested in resplendent palaces, temples made of excellent materials, theaters, porches, streets, and other similar things, which extend beyond the scope of liberality. The generous person offers money in order to give and to benefit from giving. The magnificent person, on the other hand, is more inclined to spend than give, though spending falls under the rubric of giving gifts, and the magnificent person is by default generous. The generous person is not necessarily magnificent. In addition, the generous person seeks to be useful to others, whereas the truly magnificent person frequently acts in such a way as to please someone else.¹³² The measure for assessing a person's magnificence is that it must pursue an honest aim and generate a work that is useful and necessary and, as such, the reason for undertaking them is considered to be just.¹³³ Pontano distinguishes between works of public character, such as the examples mentioned earlier, from those of private character, such as magnificent palaces and villas. The magnificent person concentrates more on works that are destined to be long-lasting and durable.¹³⁴

Another interesting point of intersection between Almosnino and Pontano is related to royal funerals as a prime instantiation of magnificence. The opening section of the *Crónica* features a detailed account of the funeral rites held in honor of Süleymân and of the ceremonies observed in Selîm's coronation in fall 1566.¹³⁵ Pontano refers to the impressive funeral organized by the Roman emperor Hadrian for his father Trajan, and to the exceptional pomp of the funeral ceremonies arranged by Ferdinand II of Aragon (r. 1479–1516), who served as king of Naples from 1504 until 1516, for his spouse, Isabella, queen of Castile (r. 1474–1504), and his daughters, Eleanor and Ippolita, as outstanding expressions of magnificence and greatness.¹³⁶

Although there is no evidence that Almosnino had direct access to Pontano's texts, it is highly probable that he and other Ottoman Jewish authors were exposed to the Neapolitan humanist's ideas and, more generally, to debates on the linkages between architecture and sound government. Both Almosnino's family and Pontano operated within the wider Aragonese cultural

¹³² Pontano, 1999, 166–67.

¹³³ Pontano, 1999, 176–79.

¹³⁴ Pontano, 1999, 184–85.

¹³⁵ Almosnino, 1998, 75–87.

¹³⁶ Pontano, 1999, 200–05.

orbit. Thanks to the Aragonese rulers' political backing and avid patronage, Pontano was at the forefront of cultural developments in the Kingdom of Naples, especially after his appointment as the head of the Accademia Pontaniana in 1471. It is possible that a number of Jews who lived in Naples had direct or indirect links to the Accademia.¹³⁷ Pontano's writings exhibit certain common characteristics with, and might have influenced the composition of, the *Dialoghi d'Amore* (Dialogues of love, beginning of the sixteenth century) of Leone Ebreo (Yehudah Abravanel, ca. 1460–1525), the son of the distinguished philosopher, biblical commentator, and courtier Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508). Leone Ebreo lived in Naples from 1492 until 1496 and later from 1504 until his death, and he came from a family that, as was the case with Pontano, was closely associated with the Crown of Aragon.¹³⁸ More importantly, Naples evolved into a major transit station for Jewish migrants from Spain, who could have served as conduits for humanist learning in Salonika and other thriving centers of commercial and cultural activity in the Ottoman realm.

Previous scholarship on the evolution of the Ottoman Jewish tradition is focused on its ties to the Iberian legacies.¹³⁹ As such, there is a genuine need to reappraise the importance of Italy, particularly Naples, as one of the filters through which ideas from Sepharad passed and were transformed prior to their percolation in the Ottoman world.¹⁴⁰ To be sure, a number of Renaissance Spanish political writings thematize the relevance of magnanimity, construed as a Christian virtue, to stable and prosperous rule.¹⁴¹ There are also a few Spanish sources that discuss humanist architecture, such as the *Tratado de la perfección del triunfo militar* (Treatise on the perfection of the military triumph, 1459) of Alfonso de Palencia (1423–92). Palencia came from a converso family and studied for almost six years in Florence. During his stay in Italy, Palencia got acquainted with several prominent intellectual figures, such as the Byzantine émigrés Cardinal Bessarion (1408–72) and George of Trebizond (ca. 1395–ca. 1485). After returning to Spain, he was appointed royal chronicler to Henry IV of Castile (r. 1454–74) and had a hand in brokering the marriage between Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469.¹⁴² Overall, however, magnificence in architectural terms was never accorded the same importance in Spanish political

¹³⁷ Lelli. See further Furstenberg-Levi.

¹³⁸ Lawee, 286. On the question of possible connections between Leone Ebreo and Pontano, see Veltri, 190; Guidi, 18–19.

¹³⁹ Tavim; Hacker, 1987, 133–35; Hacker and Attias; Gutwirth, 1986 and 1999.

¹⁴⁰ See Morrison, 2014, 34–35; Morrison, 2017.

¹⁴¹ See Truman, 51–52, 100, 166, 304, 364; Fernández-Santamaría; Galino Carrillo.

¹⁴² Tate, 1982 and 1979.

discourse as compared to its centrality in Quattrocento Italian writing. This difference can also be ascribed to the fact that Spanish political discourse placed more emphasis on the type of government that prevailed in a city rather than the size of its population or its architectural configuration.¹⁴³

Albeit not always a two-way street, there was a continuous process of intercultural exchanges between Italy and the Ottoman world throughout the Renaissance that contributed to the diffusion of Italian thought about architecture. Notably, Mî'mâr Sinân's autobiographies, which the great Ottoman architect dictated to the painter and poet Sa'î Muştafâ Çelebî (d. ca. 1595), exhibit strong affinities with the biographies of the Italian architects Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), Michelangelo (1475–1564), and Giorgio Vasari's (1511–74) *Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors, and architects, 1550).¹⁴⁴ Finally, it is important to point to the existence of communities of Italians that were an important transmitter of humanist learning and architectural theorizing from Italy.¹⁴⁵ A number of Italian intellectuals and theorists of architectural magnificence visited or stayed in Constantinople in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in order to pursue the study of Greek and various literary projects; they looked on the Byzantine and, later, Ottoman capital as the exemplary city. A case in point is the humanist Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), who spent the period between 1420 and 1427 as secretary of the Venetian consul (*bailo*) in Constantinople. Filelfo represents a body of writing about urban arrangements in Milan, and in his work *Convivia Mediolanensia* (Milanese banquets, 1443), which he wrote for the Duke of Milan Filippo Maria Visconti (r. 1412–47), while he was in the latter's employ, enlarges on the Aristotelian theme of magnificence.¹⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Almosnino's ideas about the links between salutary rulership, magnificence, and the value of architecture as an integral ingredient of the Ottoman imperial aesthetic culture extend beyond the domain of the personal attributes of the sultan. Rather, they are anchored in a broader vision of social action that is not confined to the mere allocation of trade or tax privileges. In this scheme, public buildings are perceived as one the forums that allow the members of the state to partake of the benefits derived from the ruler's greatness. A pervasive shift

¹⁴³ On this point, see Kagan; Goldthwaite, 1993, 189–92.

¹⁴⁴ Necipoğlu, 2006, xii; Necipoğlu, 2005, 82–103, 117–18, 135–47, 181. See also Burns.

¹⁴⁵ Dursteler, 2006; Rothman.

¹⁴⁶ Jenkins, 166–67.

from the persona of the sovereign to the greatness of urban arrangements and state architecture occurred in sixteenth-century Europe as well. It is crystallized in Giovanni Botero's (1544–1617) *Delle cause della grandezza e magnificenza delle città* (On the causes of the greatness and magnificence of cities, 1588), which, to a certain degree, represents the Venetian perspective on the nexus of magnificence and urban growth.¹⁴⁷

Neither Almosnino nor any of the Renaissance Jewish authors who discussed statehood in the Islamic world and Europe entertained a conception of citizenship in modern terms. A major concern that permeates their writings, however, is the participation of the Jews in various sectors of public life. Unlike earlier Jewish writers, who subscribe to eschatological interpretations of the decline of ancient Israel and of other nations and polities in the course of human history, Almosnino's ruminations about Ottoman political structures are informed by cool pragmatism and strong hope for a new phase in the history of the Jewish nation under the aegis of the Ottoman rulers. By extension, his espousal of magnificence as one of the key features of good leadership could be construed as an implicit rejection of an ethos of piety, or even as a gesture toward the secularization of political ethics.

Almosnino leveraged a distinctly humanist lexicon and interlaced miscellaneous motifs emanating from the ancient Greek philosophical legacy and Renaissance political thinking to convey and communicate his views about the Ottoman regime and render them palatable to a readership that was not yet fully acquainted with Ottoman political life. Although it would be far-fetched to interpret the *Crónica* as an exercise in identity politics, the work attests to a profound identification with the Ottoman Empire and an erosion of exilic consciousness. Perhaps one would have expected Almosnino to present a memorandum or a blueprint that would delineate strategies for negotiating with the Ottoman authorities. The rabbi from Salonika opted instead to build up the image of Süleymān as the exemplar of a great sovereign on a par with those figures whom Italian humanists depicted as the prototypes of good and meritorious government—that is, the Aragonese rulers of Naples and the Medici.

¹⁴⁷ See Versteegen et al.

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