

KAYA ŞAHİN:

*Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World.*

(Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilisation.) xxii, 288 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. £64.99. ISBN 978 1 107 03442 6. doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000907

As Ottoman sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66) prepared to depart for Hungary in 1529, he secretly summoned his chief secretary (*re'isülküttab*) Celalzade Mustafa (c. 1490–1567), explained that managing so large an empire required delegating certain prerogatives, and asked Celalzade to prepare a diploma (*berat*) for Grand Vizier İbrahim. As Celalzade later related, he worked through the night to compose the unprecedented document, which appointed İbrahim commander-in-chief (*ser'asker*) – a title possibly intended to match that of Süleyman's Habsburg opponent Ferdinand of Austria. Celalzade incorporated the *berat* into his celebrated history of Süleyman's reign, *Tabakat* – one of many documents and eyewitness accounts which make *Tabakat* such a valuable source for Ottoman historians. The language of power and ideology of empire which Celalzade articulated in İbrahim's *berat*, and above all in his historical and moral–political writings, are the focus of Kaya Şahin's immensely readable new study. Secretaries are often overlooked in political or intellectual histories, but Şahin demonstrates that overlooking Celalzade would be a grave mistake. Celalzade was not only Süleyman's chief stylist and, from 1534 to 1557, his long-serving chancellor (*nişancı*), but also consolidator of the empire's bureaucratic institutions, codifier of sultanic law or *kanun*, and author of the most detailed contemporary history of Süleyman's reign. Under Süleyman, Şahin asserts, secretaries like Celalzade “became the closest collaborators of empire builders” (p. 15).

Like his subject, Şahin's study is multifaceted. It is at once biography of a profoundly influential bureaucrat; examination of how new notions of empire and of bureaucracy were propagated in Ottoman history writing; and revisionist historiography of how Ottoman administration transformed in the first half of the sixteenth century to meet the twin challenges of imperial expansion and political, cultural and religious rivalry with the neighbouring Habsburg and Safavid empires. Şahin opens by positioning the early modern Ottoman Empire in this broader, Eurasian context. Though the insight this Eurasian context can provide is more often asserted than demonstrated, his work is not intended as comparative history; rather, it aims “to discuss the Ottoman case as a subset of early modern empire formation” (p. 11). This perspective places his work securely within some of the most recent and stimulating global historical approaches to Ottoman history, and will attract not only Ottomanists but also scholars of European or Asian intellectual, political and institutional history, in which Ottoman administration has too long been portrayed as pre-rational oddity.

In Part I, Celalzade's career is analysed through his *Tabakat* (c. 1557–67). Şahin's sympathetic yet critical reading of this challenging and highly stylized text offers a constant interplay between the individual and the institutional. He traces Celalzade's free-born (*'askeri*) roots and madrasa education, a social profile which distinguished sixteenth-century bureaucrats and profoundly influenced Celalzade's concept of good governance. Celalzade entered Ottoman secretarial service in 1516, at what Şahin labels “a favourable moment”: imperial expansion and inter-imperial rivalries, as Süleyman noted in 1529, prompted the development of new

bureaucratic cadres, institutions and practices. *Tabakat* provides a rich, insider's view on the factional struggles which attended these transformations early in Süleyman's reign. Celalzade's skills in political survival as well as literary composition soon made him trusted secretary to Selim I and, after 1520, to Süleyman. Şahin emphasizes how Celalzade was entrusted with compositional tasks not given to his superiors, such as İbrahim's *berat* or writing a new Egyptian law code in 1525. Şahin describes this document's elaborate preamble as the first enunciation of Süleyman's "new political theology", which Celalzade endowed with "sophisticated linguistic expression and complex political, historical, and theological arguments" in response to "the ideological challenges of early modern Eurasia" (p. 57). Celalzade was named *re'is-ülküttab* in 1525 and subsequently accompanied Süleyman on military campaigns. In campaign narratives which he later incorporated into his *Tabakat*, and in documents for domestic and foreign audiences, Celalzade was instrumental in propagating a messianic, universalist Ottoman idiom. As chancellor after 1534, Celalzade oversaw the systematization of bureaucratic practices and of sultanic law (*kanun*), which he increasingly promoted, together with Sunni Islam, as a fount of Ottoman legitimacy. Şahin stresses that the imperial idioms and ideologies Celalzade developed and articulated did not derive from existing "traditions" so much as from political, religious and cultural rivalry with first Habsburgs and later Safavids. Celalzade's *Tabakat* concludes with the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque in 1557, the year of his retirement and a decade before Süleyman's or his own death. By depicting the mosque as the ideological culmination of Süleyman's reign, Şahin suggests, Celalzade gave his own career a triumphant conclusion and avoided the post-1558 succession struggles.

The second half of the book returns to focus, with occasional repetition, on ideological and bureaucratic discourses highlighted in Part I. Şahin presents Celalzade's histories as not only linguistic and historiographical masterpieces, but more importantly, as "multi-layered textual reactions to their author's first-hand experience of imperial rivalries and religio-political tensions in early modern Eurasia" (p. 161). Though *Tabakat* has been read as a definitive and timeless statement on Ottoman institutions, Şahin's analysis squarely situates it as a product of a specific period and cultural environment. Celalzade's *Tabakat*, as well as his *Selimname*, his political advice treatise *Mevahib*, and his translation of the Prophet Joseph's vita, self-consciously promoted "a bureaucratic view of Ottoman history" – underscoring free-born bureaucrats' contributions, elevating secretarial virtues such as reason, piety and prudence, and defending as a sixteenth-century foundation the idea of empire based on merit, law and Sunni Islam.

Şahin engages in constant dialogue with the dynamic Ottomanist school around Cornell Fleischer at the University of Chicago. In argument as well as structure, *Empire and Power* shares many concerns with Fleischer's work on later bureaucrat-historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600). Reading these works in tandem helps to better evaluate Celalzade's influence on contemporary and subsequent writers. Likewise, a more comprehensive sense of Celalzade's day-to-day chancery activities and relationships with fellow chancery or treasury bureaucrats would do much to strengthen Şahin's claim that Celalzade was "one of the architects of . . . the empire's 'classical age'". Şahin's study is nonetheless a substantial contribution to understanding the institutional and ideological foundations of Ottoman imperial praxis under Süleyman.

**Megan K. Williams**  
University of Groningen