

ROUNDTABLE

The Dream Diary of an Ottoman Governor: Kulakzade Mahmud Pasha's *Düşnama*

Semra Çörekçi*

Department of History, Istanbul Medeniyet University, Istanbul, Turkey

*Corresponding author. E-mail: semra.corekci@medeniyet.edu.tr

“Muslims were not the first in the Near East to interpret dreams. This type of divination had a long history, and Muslims were not ignorant of that history.”¹ The interest of early Arab Islamic cultures in dreams can be proved by the vast literature on dreams and their interpretation as well as dream accounts written in diverse historical texts.² The Ottoman Empire was no different in that it also shared this culture of dream interpretation and narration. Unlike past scholarship that ignored the significance of dreams, the number of studies addressing the subject has increased in the recent decades, thanks to the growing tendency of scholars to see dreams as potential sources for cultural history. However, as Peter Burke has stated, scholars and historians in particular must bear in mind the fact that “they do not have access to the dream itself but at best to a written record, modified by the preconscious or conscious mind in the course of recollection and writing.”³ Historians must be aware of the fact that dream accounts might be recorded by dreamers who recounted how they wanted to remember them. The “reality” of the dream, in a sense, may be distorted. However, dream accounts, distorted or not, can provide a ground for historical analysis because they may reveal the most intimate sentiments, aspirations, and anxieties of the dreamer. Such self-narratives can provide the historian with information necessary to map the mindset of a historical personage, because “such ‘secondary elaboration’ probably reveals the character and problems of the dreamer as clearly as the dream itself does.”⁴ This paper focuses on a sampling of dreams related in an 18th-century Ottoman self-narrative to provide insight into the life and mind of an Ottoman governor. I will try to demonstrate how the author of the narrative made meaning of those dreams and revealed his aspirations.

When I began my research on Ottoman self-narratives, with a particular focus on dream narratives, one of the first catalogs that I looked at was Karatay's catalog of Ottoman Turkish manuscripts found in Topkapı Palace.⁵ I came across a manuscript titled *Düşnama* (Book of Dreams).⁶ This manuscript was the private notebook of an Ottoman governor who lived in the early 18th century. When I undertook further research on the manuscript, I realized that Cemal Kafadar had already introduced the manuscript in his seminal article, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature.”⁷ Kafadar compared it to late medieval Florentine account book-family memoirs, but I will refer to it as a dream diary, because it combines the literary features of

¹John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 7.

²Dwight F. Reynolds, “Symbolic Narratives of Self: Dreams in Medieval Arabic Autobiographies,” in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 263.

³Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 28.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Fehmi Ethem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu: Din, Tarih, Bilimler, Filoloji, Edebiyat, Mecmualar* (Istanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Yayınları, 1961).

⁶*Düşnama*, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi (Library of the Topkapı Palace Museum), MS Hazine, Istanbul, 1766.

⁷Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989), 129–30. Kafadar briefly mentioned the manuscript without giving many details. The identity of the author is first revealed by the author of this roundtable article.

dream accounts and diaries.⁸ In fact, the manuscript displays many of the literary features of diaries such as spontaneity, immediacy, and day-to-day records.⁹

The Author and His Family

On folio 28a, the author already has revealed his identity. He affixed his signature indicating that he was Mahmud Pasha, the governor of Avlonya (Vlorë in Albania).¹⁰ He also wrote about the positions he held through years. He was appointed as the brigadier (*mirliva*) of Vlorë on 2 February 1716, and he became governor general a year later, on 1 February 1717. In December/January 1718–19, the benefits of Yanya (Janina) also were assigned to Mahmud Pasha in the form of allowance.¹¹ According to sources regarding the provincial administration, Mahmud Pasha seemed to be operating in the Rumelian part of the empire until his death in 1745. He was originally from Belgrade and his family name was Kulakzade.¹²

According to the information given in the estate inventory of Mahmud Pasha, he died in Erzurum during a visit before June 1745.¹³ The register contains some clues about his family. According to the information given, his father was Hüseyin Pasha and his grandfather was Murad Pasha. In the *Düşnama*, there is no record revealing the identity of the father or grandfather. However, because his father and grandfather had the title of pasha, we can safely assume that Mahmud Pasha belonged to a powerful provincial family. His wife, Rabia Hanım, was the daughter of İslam Agha. Mahmud Pasha had three daughters, Meryem, Ayşe, and Kadire. We do not have any further information about his daughters; they are not mentioned in the *Düşnama* at all. İsmail Pasha, Süleyman Beg, and Mehmed Beg were the names of his three sons. In one of the dream records in the *Düşnama*, Mahmud Pasha wrote that he saw his son Derviş.¹⁴ In an archival document, I found this son referred to as Derviş İsmail Pasha. According to the document, Derviş İsmail Pasha was the former governor of Vlorë and his brother, Süleyman Beg, was living in Arnavud Belgradı (Albanian Belgrade).¹⁵ This document confirms the information given in the estate inventory and in the *Düşnama*. The family seems to have governed the district of Vlorë for at least for three generations.

On the Manuscript

On folio 27a, Mahmud Pasha recorded some of his travels in 1731. He described the places that he reached and stayed in every day. Interestingly, he sometimes even gave the hours and minutes; for example, at one point he indicated the time they stopped as 11:35 at night.¹⁶ On folio 1a, he kept a record of the zakat he distributed, specifying the identity of the people aided. He most often distributed zakat to dervishes and students of the Qur'an. Between folios 1b and 26a, which he titled as *Düşnama*, he recorded his dreams.¹⁷ Mahmud Pasha was very eager to record details that would be forgotten in the transience of

⁸Ibid., 129.

⁹Steven Rendall, "On Diaries," *Diacritics* 16, no. 3 (1986): 57–65. Used by Terzioğlu in the same way; see Derin Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyazi-i Mısri (1618–94)," *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002): 152.

¹⁰*Düşnama*, 28a. The signature read as *Mahmud Paşa mutasarrıf-ı Avlonya* (Mahmud Pasha the governor of Vlorë). The signature was the first record written in the notebook, dated 3 January 1718, but it appears on folio 28a. It is probably because the binding was made later, after the creation of the text. After folio 28a, where the author affixed his signature, there are nineteen more blank folios.

¹¹Ibid. The folios of the manuscript were numbered later, probably by different catalogers, so there are breaks between sequential pages. For the sake of simplicity, I have used my own version. I numbered the first folio on which dream narratives were recorded as 1b.

¹²T. C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi (Turkish Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Turkey), Ottoman Archives (hereafter BOA), AE. SHMD. I. 185/14366, 29 June 1745; Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicil-i Osmani*, vol. 3 (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 927; Fahameddin Başar, *Osmanlı Eyalet Tevcihatı 1717–1730* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997), 38–43.

¹³BOA, AE. SHMD. I. 185/14366, 29 June 1745.

¹⁴*Düşnama*, 12b.

¹⁵BOA, AE. SHMD. I. 165/12515, 20 November 1745.

¹⁶*Düşnama*, 27a.

¹⁷Kafadar also provided this brief information about the content of the manuscript ("Self and Others," 129–30).

everyday life. In this way the manuscript sheds light on the daily concerns of an Ottoman governor who had the tools to record them.¹⁸

The manuscript contains some 170 separate dream records with varying detail. In the first part, the records are rather short and obscure, and there is no indication of time. The rather unstructured style he adopted at the start suggests that Mahmud Pasha might not have intended to compose a dream diary. He seems to have started to record some of his dreams about appointments. In time, it turned into a diary of dreams that foreshadowed his reappointment to Vlorë as he was going through a time of hope and anxiety regarding his official position. Indeed, Mahmud Pasha had a habit of recording trivial details regarding his official duties and personal life. This habit of recording served to create a dream diary.

As time passed, his dream records became more and more detailed and lengthy, and in contrast to the earlier records the date was indicated. The longest dream narratives appear in the last part of the manuscript. Mahmud Pasha also was interested in the dreams of acquaintances in which he appeared. He also gave importance to dates when recording other people's dreams. In addition to recording his dreams, he also sometimes explained how they came true. Hence, the dreams basically served as portents of future events. One of his first dreams was about Osman Pasha's having the seal of grand vizierate. As Topal Osman Pasha became the grand vizier on 10 September 1731, we can state that the first dream was recorded in 1731.¹⁹ The last dream record is dated February/March 1735.²⁰

Mahmud Pasha's interest in adding the exact dates of his dreams in a sense blurs the boundary between the dream and reality. One might imagine one is reading about real events if Mahmud Pasha had not specified at the end of his record that he woke up. Also, his association of the dreaming experience with "sight" and "seeing" rather than specifying that he was actually experiencing a dream makes it difficult to separate the nocturnal visions from real waking experiences.²¹ Some rather short and straightforward records strengthen this idea. "We fought a little bit with `Ali Bey of Ergiri."²² "Ahmed Solak wants to kill me. I said to my men, 'Kill this [man].'"²³ These dreams were narrated as if they were objective realities. There is no clue about whether they were experienced in the dream world or the real one.

Another important detail to highlight is Mahmud Pasha's insistence on using the sign of *sah* (ص). The word *sah* means "true." Redhouse's *A Turkish and English Lexicon* defines it as "the paraph or official mark written on a document when it has been examined."²⁴ This sign was mostly used on official documents as well as manuscripts as an indication of reliability and accuracy.²⁵ Many of the dream records in the *Düşnama* end with the sign of *sah*. So why did Mahmud Pasha use this sign at the end of dream accounts, as if one can test each dream's accuracy? Did he want to emphasize the precision of the dreams that he related? What about the boundary between reality and the dream? Did Mahmud Pasha have such a boundary in his mind? The most intriguing question is whether or not they were actual dreams. Was Mahmud Pasha using the dream plot as a literary device to record his innermost feelings, experiences, and aspirations?

My goal here is not to ask if Mahmud Pasha really had these dreams, but to scrutinize the intensive use of dreams by an Ottoman official to present the most intimate account of his life. I am interested in how he conceptualized the world around himself, how he interpreted his environment, and how he responded to problems. The *Düşnama* helps us understand how and why a provincial governor used dream narratives in his dream log-cum-diary.

¹⁸For Fleischer's similar observations about an Ottoman scribe's dreams and his access to means of writing, see Cornell H. Fleischer, "Secretaries' Dreams: Augury and Angst in Ottoman Scribal Service," in *Armağan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze*, ed. Ingeborg Baldauf, Suraiya Faroqhi, and Rudolf Vesely (Prague: Enigma Corporation, 1994), 85. I express my thanks to Bilgin Aydın for drawing my attention to the Ottoman institution of Kağıt Eminliği, which provided Ottoman officials with paper. Mahmud Pasha had easy access to the means of writing, which in turn must have facilitated the production of his dream diary. He seems to have used paper provided by Kağıt Eminliği to record his dreams.

¹⁹Abdülkadir Özcan, "Topal Osman Paşa," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 41, 244–46.

²⁰*Düşnama*, 25a.

²¹Mahmud Pasha preferred to say *gördüm* (I saw) or *bir adam gördü ki* (a man saw) rather than *rüyamda gördüm* (I saw in my dream) or *bir adam rüyasında gördü ki* (a man saw in his dream).

²²*Düşnama*, 7b.

²³*Ibid.*, 23a.

²⁴James W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon* (Constantinople: A. H. Boyajian, 1890), 1168.

²⁵For further information, see Mehmet İpşirli, "Sah," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 35, 490–91.

Dreams and Portents: Hope and Anxiety as Reflected in the Dreams of Mahmud Pasha

One must bear in mind the nature of the relationship between anxiety and dreams, which is helpful in contextualizing dreams and placing them in their own historical circumstances.²⁶ Dwight Reynolds notes that dream narratives play a prominent role in autobiographies and that they appear primarily at critical junctions in the author's life.²⁷ Dreams are valued because they make it possible to understand the reality beyond objective knowledge of the person, offering believers, to use John C. Lamoreaux's words, "a royal road that led not inward, but outward, providing insight not into the dreamer's psyche but into the hidden affairs of the world."²⁸ Mahmud Pasha was not an exception in this sense. This period was a brittle point in his life, therefore everyday concerns about acquiring a desired post occupied his dream narratives. Dreams helped him make sense of his personal life struggle.

The years between 1731 and 1735 were evidently a time of hope and anxiety, because all the dreams were experienced and recorded between these dates. Mahmud Pasha began to keep his dream diary when he was appointed to some other minor positions rather than the desired reappointment as governor general of Vlorë.²⁹ Mahmud Pasha, and other provincial governors as well, lived in some uncertainty, because appointments and dismissals were frequently renewed, and the duration of office was very short.³⁰ Governors who failed to attain a position must have reacted with anxiety and disappointment. Indeed, the dream diary of Mahmud Pasha is full of narratives that reveal his emotional status, which fluctuated from fear to certainty, from hope to anxiety.

The 30th of Ramadan. I saw that we were . . . in Belgrade. Five or six hundred people were praying, and they expressed their gratitude. I said, "Who are these?" They replied, "These are the men to whom you distributed alms during Ramadan." "Why are they grateful?" "[They are grateful] because you have been appointed to Vlorë." I said to 'Abdi Bey, "Vlorë was not given to me. Why did you lie?" ['Abdi Bey] said, "I do not know."³¹

In the recorded dreams, he habitually saw official papers coming from Istanbul, which were usually long and written in beautiful calligraphy. Those papers were obviously edicts, harbingers of his prospective appointment. The news of the desired appointment first arrived in dreams.

On the 13th of Muharram, the Shaykh of Niş [Nis] once saw in a lucid dream that they performed the Friday prayer. They brought him two horses. He tied the horses and they fired three artillery shots. In another dream, they said to him that three papers will come from Istanbul addressed to Mahmud Pasha. He saw one of them in my hand. The other two papers will also come.³²

The 15th of Ramadan, I saw that I planted cotton and it grew. I was having a conversation with Mustafa Agha of Delvine. They brought me something in an envelope [sent] by Fatma Sultan. And, a man of mine came from the capital city and said, "We obtained Vlorë, soon they will come with an edict."³³

The 18th of Zilkada, while I was sitting in the mansion, İsa arrived and rushed in. He gave me an edict. I thought that it was the edict of Vlorë. When I read it, I saw that it was the charter of Janina. May Allah make it auspicious.³⁴

²⁶For other examples of Ottoman dreams, see Fleischer, "Secretaries' Dreams"; Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 205–13; and Aslı Niyazioglu, "On Altıncı Yüzyıl Sonunda Osmanlı'da Kadılık Kabusu ve Nihani'nin Rüyası," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 31, no. 2 (2007): 133–43.

²⁷Reynolds, "Symbolic Narratives," 262.

²⁸Lamoreaux, *Dream Interpretation*, 4.

²⁹BOA, C. DH. 290/14484, 26 May 1731. According to the document, the governorship of Ilbasan was given to Mahmud Pasha in May 1731 in return for his services under Osman Pasha.

³⁰I. Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government 1550–1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 70–72. For governor appointments to Vlorë and durations of office during Mahmud Pasha's time, see Başar, *Osmanlı Eyalet Tevcihati*, 42–43.

³¹*Düşnâme*, 10b.

³²*Ibid.*, 13a.

³³*Ibid.*, 10b.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 11a.

Certain objects seen in previous dreams at important instances enabled the dreamer to interpret some of his more recent dreams. Horses were the animals that appeared most commonly in Mahmud Pasha's dream accounts. In one series of dreams, he saw the same horse twice. In the prior dream, the horse ran away from him, and this resulted in his dismissal from Vlorë. In the next dream, on the contrary, the horse advanced toward him rapidly. The shared elements of these two dreams enabled Mahmud Pasha to interpret the rapid advance toward him of the same horse as a probable augury of his reappointment to Vlorë. It seems that dreams could clarify the past, present, and future, and that they continued to be relevant.

Again, I saw that we were on the top of a mountain. We were proceeding on foot, but the horses were ready. We wanted to ride our horses. I said bring the horses. . . . They first brought Bayram's horse. The horse was limping. Following it, my horse was coming. They brought it very fast. . . . And this horse was the same horse that escaped in my dream when I was dismissed from Vlorë.³⁵

Robert Dankoff notes that there was a culture of dream narration and dream interpretation among Ottoman elites.³⁶ The *Düşnama* illustrates this point and further shows that dreams were an integral part of the public domain: Mahmud Pasha incorporated others' dreams into his personal notebook. It is evidence that people not only related their dreams to each other, but also preserved other's dreams in writing. They created, in a sense, a network of dreams that interconnected people's waking and visionary activities.³⁷

Mahmud Pasha's *Düşnama* is, to use Katz's words, "illustrative of how an individual's [very intimate] experience enters the public domain and finds a resonance."³⁸ Mahmud Pasha included dreams of shaykhs and acquaintances in which he himself appeared. These dreams were mainly about his appointment to Vlorë:

The 19th of Muharram, Wednesday. The Shaykh of Nis saw that Mehmed Pasha built a new mosque. I also went to [the mosque]. In came the imam and we prayed in congregation. One man came with a paper. [The shaykh] asked, "What is this?" He said that they gave [the governorship of] Vlorë to Mahmud Pasha.³⁹

During the month of Ramadan, the sheikh of Leskovik [Korçë county, Albania] came and said to me, "Do not doubt, Vlorë will be given to you."⁴⁰

In this roundtable paper, my aim has been to introduce a new source of Ottoman self-narratives and provide insight into the inner self of an Ottoman governor. The textual evidence shows that Mahmud Pasha interpreted dreams as messages from the spiritual realm that acted as portents of his future appointment. The frequency of the dream records foretelling his desired appointment reveals that dreams served to ease the difficulty the dreamer was experiencing.

Acknowledgments. My ongoing PhD studies at Istanbul Medeniyet University formed the basis for this article. The current title of my dissertation is, "A Methodological Approach to Early Modern Self-Narratives: Representations of the Self in the Ottoman Context (1720s–1820s)." A short version of the text was presented at the Workshop on Ottoman Ego-Documents, Istanbul Medeniyet University, 11–13 March 2020. I am indebted to Selim Karahasanoglu for his insightful comments and suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank IJMES editor Joel Gordon for his detailed review and suggestions.

³⁵Ibid., 26a.

³⁶Dankoff, *Ottoman Mentality*, 206.

³⁷The notion of dreams being linked to one another is also noted by Fleischer ("Secretaries' Dreams," 87).

³⁸Jonathan G. Katz, "Shaykh Ahmad's Dream: A 19th-Century Eschatological Vision," *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 180.

³⁹*Düşnama*, 14b.

⁴⁰Ibid., 11a.