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978-0-521-62094-9 - The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Ottoman Empire as a World Power, 1453–1603: Volume 2

Edited by Suraiya N. Faroqhi and Kate Fleet

Excerpt

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I

Introduction

SURAIYA N. FAROQHI

Of the Ottoman Empire we can say what Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) once wrote about the seventeenth-century military commander and entrepreneur Albrecht von Wallenstein (in Czech, Albrecht Václav Eusebius z Valdštejna, 1583–1634). According to Schiller’s verse, the favour and hate of [conflicting] parties had caused confusion, producing a highly variable image of Wallenstein’s character in history. Put differently, it was the diverging perspectives of the beholders that gave rise to this instability. Admittedly, being a poet, Schiller made his point far more concisely than the present author is able to do.¹

In certain traditions of historiography in the Balkans and elsewhere as well, denigrating the Ottoman Empire and making it responsible for all manner of “backwardness” is still widespread, although challenges to this view have been mounting during the last 30 years. On the other hand, romanticising the images of Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1451–81) or Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–66) is also quite a popular enterprise: witness the statue of Mehmed II in downtown Istanbul – a new one is in the planning stage – and the double monument to Zrínyi Miklós and Sultan Süleyman in a park of Szigetvar, Hungary.

To claim “objectivity” means to deceive oneself and others, but the authors of the present volume, whatever their views, have all clearly tried to distinguish the points made by the primary sources from the interpretations that they propose as historians of the twenty-first century. Readers will notice that in spite of wide areas of consensus on certain topics specialists do not necessarily agree, and indeed it has been a major concern of the present editors to demonstrate the variety of approaches current among Ottomanist historians.

¹ ‘Von der Parteien Hass und Gunst verwirrt, schwankt sein Charakterbild in der Geschichte’. See *Wallensteins Lager*, Prologue, in Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 270–5 (Internet version).

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Paradoxically, this book, the second of the four-volume series *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, is the last to appear in print. While nobody had planned such an outcome, it is perhaps appropriate, for we will be dealing with what an eminent Ottomanist historian has called the “classical age”, a period of significance if ever there was one. Thus we are in the happy position of presenting, at the end of our project, what many readers will consider the most interesting part of our story.² Certainly most contributors to this series believe that it is a mistake to subsume everything that happened after 1600 under the blanket term “decline”. Yet during the period between the 1450s and 1600, more than before or afterwards, the Ottoman elite and its subjects made their mark in a variety of different fields, achievements which the contributors to this volume will discuss.

Ottoman writing about the Ottoman world

To the historian, sources are primordial, and the period between the mid-fifteenth and the early seventeenth century is special not only because of the significance of the events that occurred and the more long-term processes that played themselves out but also because for the first time Ottoman sources become reasonably abundant. Under the early sultans, before the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, both Ottoman chronicles and archival documents were extremely rare. As a result, we can approach the image of Ottoman history as it may have appeared to contemporaries of Sultan Murad I (r. 1362–89) or Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) only in an indirect fashion: by the study of buildings and inscriptions, which, however, survive in their original shapes only in exceptional cases, or by a careful analysis of later narrative and documentary sources.

With the 1450s, however, matters begin to change: there survives the work of an Ottoman author who has written about the battle for Constantinople, and we also possess fragments of a tax register of newly conquered Istanbul (1455). When Mehmed II finally incorporated the Karaman principality into his domain, his officials produced a careful list of the pious foundations of Konya, including the rich and precious library of Sadreddin-i Konevi (1207–74), son-in-law to the mystic Muhyi al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240) and an important intellectual figure in his own right. Moreover, under the Conqueror’s son Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), we encounter what may well have been the first

2 Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (London, 1973). This work has been reprinted several times.

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dissenting voices from the Ottoman world that have come down to us, in the shape of certain anonymous texts describing the calamities that had befallen pre-Islamic Constantinople. Probably this fifteenth-century Cassandra, if indeed the author was a single person, intended to warn Bayezid II against making this accursed site into the seat of his sultanate.³

About the background of this author – or these authors – we know nothing. But they were by no means the only writers active at this time, for Mehmed the Conqueror and Bayezid II sponsored scholarly and literary activity, filling the palace libraries with books and sending largesse to poets. Certain works produced by these men – and women, for a few female poets were also active – have survived, and after 1520, when Süleyman the Lawgiver, also known as the Magnificent, had ascended the throne, the number of works preserved increased exponentially. During the second half of the sixteenth century, Ottoman divan poetry developed its own special character and was no longer just an offshoot of the Iranian tradition, Timurid style. An encyclopaedia of Ottoman poets, which contained short biographies and poetry samples, also appeared for the first time in 1538; afterwards the genre became popular, and some of these texts had claims to literary merit.

During the same period, Ottoman chronicles, which before 1450 had mostly consisted of brief sketches, emerged as a genre in their own right. One of the most interesting is surely the collection of heroic stories put together by Aşıkpaşazade, the descendant of a line of dervish *şeyhs* and authors from Central Anatolia. An old man in the 1470s and 1480s, he celebrated the conquests of the sultans from Osman I (d. ca. 1324) and Orhan (r. ca. 1324–62) down to his contemporary Mehmed the Conqueror. The works of Aşıkpaşazade and his colleagues have caused some disagreement among modern scholars. Very few historians have accepted the legends recounted in them just as they stand, but there is a real dispute between people who prefer to ignore these tales as so many meaningless inventions and those who ever since the days of Fuat Köprülü have tried to interpret them with the help of the social anthropology and literary theories current in the researchers' own

³ Halil Inalcik and Rhoads Murphey, *Tursun Bey's History of Mehmed the Conqueror* (Chicago and Minneapolis, 1978); Halil Inalcik, 'Ottoman Galata 1453–1553', in *Première rencontre internationale sur l'empire Ottoman et la Turquie moderne: Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 18–22 janvier 1985*, ed. Edhem Eldem (Istanbul and Paris, 1991), pp. 17–116; Halil Inalcik, 'The Ottoman Survey of İstanbul, 1455', 1453, *İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Dergisi* 3 (2008), 19–27; Feridun Nafiz Uzluk, *Fatih Devrinde Karaman Eyaleti Vakıfları Fihristi* (Ankara, 1958); Stéphane Yérasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: légendes d'empire* (Istanbul and Paris, 1990).

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time.⁴ Whichever approach a given historian may favour, it is quite obvious that sixteenth-century authors tried hard to collect information about the earlier years of the Ottoman principality yet had a great deal of trouble in doing so. One of them, the chancery head (*nişancı*) Feridun Ahmed (d. 1583), apparently was so frustrated at not being able to find any documents issued by the earliest Ottoman sultans that he simply invented them; his deception was only discovered in the early twentieth century and has much damaged the reputation of his otherwise very valuable writings.⁵

In the sixteenth century, a number of high officials wrote historical works which are of special interest because these men had access not only to oral information current in the palaces of sultans and *vezirs* but also to archival documents. Thus Celalzade Mustafa (ca. 1490–1567), another head of the sixteenth-century Ottoman chancery, produced what is still regarded as the standard Ottoman source on Süleyman the Magnificent.⁶ Slightly later, the historian and litterateur Mustafa Ali (1541–1600) set the standard that many chroniclers working in the sultans' realm were to follow down to the 1800s. But as the author could not know about his posthumous fame, he spent much of his energy during his later years lamenting the injustices of a system that had failed to promote him according to his merits.⁷

Ottoman officials and literary men – who often played both roles simultaneously – from the late fifteenth century onwards also created a novel language. While the grammatical base remained Turkish, authors of the time imported Arabic and especially Persian words, and to some extent Persian grammatical constructions as well, to the point that in some works only the sentence endings indicate that we are not dealing with a Persian text. Unintelligible to the uninitiated, this language served only in written and not in oral communication. While it has fallen from favour during the last 150 years, and certain authors of earlier periods also preferred to write in a language closer to educated speech, the historian does need to keep in mind that many sophisticated subjects of the Ottoman sultans regarded this hybrid language as a major cultural achievement.

4 Fuat Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatı'nda İlk Mutasavvıflar*, 2nd ed. (Ankara, 1966); Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995).

5 Mükrimin Halil [Yinanç], 'Feridün Beg Münshe'âtı', in *Tarih-i Osmani Encümeni Mecmuası*, XI–XIII, 771336–9/1920–3, pp. 161–8, XIV n.s. 1 (78) (1340/1924), 37–46, XIV n.s. 2 (79) (1340/1924), 95–104, XIV n.s. 4 (81), 216–26.

6 [Koca Nişancı], *Geschichte Süleyman Kânûnîs von 1520 bis 1556 oder Tabakat ül-Memalik ve Derecat ül-Mesalik von Celalzade Mustafa genannt Koca Nişancı*, facsimile edition with introduction by Petra Kappert (Wiesbaden, 1981).

7 Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafâ Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, N.J., 1986).

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Furthermore, the sixteenth century was the period in which Ottoman geographers came into their own: Piri Reis (ca. 1465–1554/55) produced two world maps remarkable for the accuracy with which he had calculated the distances between continents. Dealing with realms closer to home, this scholarly admiral produced a collection of maps showing the Mediterranean, and especially its eastern sections, which by his time were a possession of the sultans. The author had intended his work as a handbook for sailors; however, many scribes rather seem to have produced richly decorated copies meant for the libraries of Ottoman gentlemen.⁸ Piri Reis's work thus served as a vehicle of elite geographical education as well.

Quantitatively speaking, however, the sultans' administration was the greatest producer of written texts. The activities of this bureaucracy, which had begun in the mid-1400s but gathered speed a century later, necessitated the institution of government archives, which are still our major source in spite of losses due to accidents, neglect and also malice aforethought. Especially the great tax registers of this period, which contain the names of taxpayers and the dues payable by villagers and townsmen while listing also pious foundations and their beneficiaries, allow us to write social histories at least of certain towns and regions. Or, to be exact, this enterprise becomes fruitful if we can compare the information contained in the tax registers with documents recorded by the scribes of urban judges, for since the late fifteenth century in the Bursa case and since the 1500s in many other Ottoman towns, a number of scribes recorded not only court cases but also sultanic commands emanating from Istanbul. In addition, these men served as notaries. Since having one's writing preserved was very much an elite privilege, even with this material at hand we cannot claim to write "history from below". But at least these works do convey an image of society as it appeared to Ottoman elites.

The taxpaying subjects: Peasants and nomads

Like the governing classes of other empires from the Ancient Near East to the nineteenth century, the Ottoman elite drew its resources largely from peasant taxes. The vast majority of the Ottoman population in the Balkans as well as Anatolia and the Arab provinces tilled the land; in certain regions, such as the dry steppe of Inner Anatolia and Syria, nomads and semi-nomads also were common. Due to the population increase which occurred in the entire

⁸ Svat Soucek, *Piri Reis and Turkish Mapmaking after Columbus: The Khalili Portolan Atlas* (London, 1992).

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Mediterranean world during the 1500s, a certain number of former nomads settled down, and the Ottoman administration, which generally preferred villagers because they were better taxpayers and did not pose any military threat, was more than eager to record them as settled folk. In reality, people in some regions seem to have had a foot in both worlds: peasants pastured their animals on summer pastures, where they might move with their entire households for the duration, while certain Anatolian nomads practiced small-scale agriculture in their winter quarters. Presumably such people could be villagers or nomads according to circumstances, especially if they had relatives among the migrant population.

About the lives of Ottoman villagers we know very little, as the tax registers of the time only record the names of adult men and the villages or tribal units to which they belonged. Due to the lack of surnames, we cannot say anything about the number of families that remained on a given site for generations compared to those who left and settled elsewhere. Certainly the Ottoman administration ordered peasants to stay put unless they could get permission from their local administrators to move away, or unless the sultan decided on wholesale resettlement of certain groups of the population to consolidate new conquests. But the government's power of enforcement in the more outlying regions must surely have been limited.

Yields from dry-field agriculture tended to be low, and villagers were vulnerable to droughts, which were especially disastrous during the 1590s. At least in Anatolia, where navigable rivers were few, the authorities probably could enforce the rule that every administrative district should only feed the local town, and any reserves should be at the disposal of armies that might cross the area on their way to the front. The only exception was the coastal regions, from which the owners of surpluses could export grain. Down to the mid-1500s, the sultans in peacetime permitted sales to Venice, but once the population increase of the sixteenth century had become obvious, they strictly forbade such exportation. However, since merchants from outside the realm often paid better prices, there always was a certain amount of smuggling not only of grain but also of raw materials such as cotton.

Trade and artisan production

At the same time, urbanisation was an ongoing process: cities such as Bursa, Aleppo, Damascus and Cairo expanded in the sixteenth century as the population gradually recovered from the plague epidemics of the 1300s and 1400s.

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Istanbul newly emerged as a major centre with a population of several hundred thousand in the sixteenth century. Inter-empire trade focused on these cities: although the Genoese withdrew from the eastern Mediterranean during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, Florentines and especially Venetians frequented Istanbul and Bursa, while Muslim, Christian and Jewish subjects of the sultan all traded in Venice. French commerce by contrast remained limited: the often discussed *ahidname* (capitulations) of 1536 remained a draft and were never implemented, and while the sultan did grant such a document to the king of France in 1569, the French civil wars of the period prevented merchants from making full use of them. By contrast, during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, English merchants began to import woollen cloth into Ottoman ports and exported Iranian raw silk that they purchased in the same venues.⁹

However, the Ottomans traded with Eastern as well as Western countries. Iran was a major source of raw silk, converted into cloth by weavers in Bursa and Istanbul; however, Selim I briefly interrupted the trade in the early 1500s when he attempted to reduce the revenues of his Safavid rival by declaring an embargo on silk.¹⁰ Spices from India and South-east Asia found avid consumers in the Ottoman Empire, too, with pepper a special favourite. Moreover, in this period the products of certain manufacturers found outlets beyond the borders of the empire, traders from Poland and Venice for instance purchasing camlets in Ankara.¹¹ During the years covered by this volume, for a brief period it seemed as if members of the Ottoman elite might find the gains from interregional and inter-empire trade so attractive that they would be willing to allow long-distance traders a certain amount of leeway and loosen the constraints of the “command economy”. Attractive possibilities opened up especially in Aleppo and Cairo, where traders with India typically established their businesses.¹² However, around 1600, economic and financial difficulties, doubtless in part due to war on both the western and eastern fronts, tended to make life far more difficult for aspiring merchants.

9 Gilles Veinstein, ‘Les capitulations franco-ottomanes de 1536 sont-elles encore controversables?’, in *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community: Essays in Honor of Suraiya Faroqhi*, ed. Vera Costantini and Markus Koller (Leiden, 2008), pp. 71–88; Susan Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578–1582* (London and Oxford, 1977).

10 Fahri Dalsar, *Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Tarihinde Bursa’da İpekkilik* (Istanbul, 1960).

11 Özer Ergenç, ‘1600–1615 Yılları Arasında Ankara İktisadi Tarihine Ait Araştırmalar’, in *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri, Metinler-Tartışmalar, 8–10 Haziran 1973*, ed. Osman Okyar and Ünal Nalbantoğlu (Ankara, 1975), pp. 145–68.

12 Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma’il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1998).

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Florescence of the arts

In art and architecture as well, it is the period covered by this volume that stands out, for the 1400s and 1500s were the time when Mehmed the Conqueror, Bayezid II, Süleyman the Magnificent and Selim II (r. 1566–75) had great foundation complexes built, usually in Istanbul but sometimes also in cities like Damascus or Edirne. Moreover, *vezirs* also founded more modest but still impressive complexes, and by the second half of the sixteenth century there came the time when female members of the Ottoman dynasty were able to sponsor major charities as well. The town of Üsküdar, opposite Istanbul on the other side of the Bosphorus, owed its growth and development at least in part to the religious and charitable constructions of Süleyman's daughter Mihrimah (d. 1578) and the latter's sister-in-law Nurbanu (ca. 1530–83), mother of Murad III (r. 1574–95). Although claiming to be of noble Venetian descent, Nurbanu had entered the imperial harem as a slave; yet, contrary to Ottoman dynastic tradition, she ultimately became the lawful wedded wife of Selim II and used her position to become a major patroness.¹³

In many of these projects, the architect Sinan (ca. 1490–1588) had a hand, either because he had designed them and later supervised their construction on site or because he approved – and perhaps revised – the projects of his students. While Sinan outlived Sultan Süleyman by over 20 years and his relationship to this ruler had often been tense, in death the two were united: as a gesture unique in the history of Ottoman building, Sinan's mausoleum was set close to an outer wall of the Süleymaniye complex.¹⁴

While architecture was the art form for which the Ottoman world has become famous, the history of miniature painting was also significant, albeit much shorter; to a very significant extent, major achievements occurred during the period under review. As for the potters of İznik (Nicaea), in the period covered by our volume, they produced splendid examples of faience as decorative panels for mosques and palaces but also as tableware for the well-to-do.¹⁵

13 Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford, 1993); Leslie Peirce, 'Gender and Sexual Propriety in Ottoman Royal Women's Patronage', in *Women, Patronage and Self-representation in Islamic Societies*, ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles (Albany, N.Y., 2000), pp. 53–68; Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany, N.Y., 2002); Maria Pia Pedani, 'Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy', *Turcica* 32 (2000), 9–32; Benjamin Arbel, 'Nurbanu Sultan (c. 1530–1583): A Venetian Sultana?' *Turcica* 24 (1992), 241–59.

14 Aptullah Kuran, *Sinan, the Grand Old Master of Ottoman Architecture* (Washington, D. C., and Istanbul, 1987); Gülrü Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2005).

15 Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, *Iznik: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Yanni Petsopoulos (Istanbul and London, 1989).

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While today's connoisseurs have learned to appreciate the art of the painter Levni (d. 1730) and eighteenth-century architecture as well, it remains true that some of the most memorable items that a visitor to Istanbul will retain are the work of artists and architects who flourished in the sixteenth century.

Military and political successes

For us denizens of the 2000s, the Ottoman legacy in art and architecture tends to take centre stage. But for contemporaries both within and outside the sultans' realm, the rapid expansion of the latter was far more important. Reactions varied according to time, place and the social position of the people concerned. As a result, contemporary texts reflect fear and rejection, but also acceptance and even anticipation.¹⁶

Our period begins with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and the small principalities into which the Byzantine Empire had split after the "Latin" campaign of 1204, also known as the Fourth Crusade. Venice had become a major power in the eastern Mediterranean due to its territorial acquisitions upon that occasion, which for about half a century even included a share of formerly Byzantine Constantinople. However, in the reign of Mehmed II, Venice lost Euboa (Negroponte) as well as the ports which the Signoria had held on the Peloponnese. In the early 1500s, when Venice and the Ottoman Empire were once again at war, the terrified inhabitants of the lagoon could see the smoke rising from villages in Friuli, in today's north-eastern Italy, which had been burned by the advance guards of Sultan Bayezid's army.¹⁷

With the occupation of Akkerman and Kilia (1484), today in Ukraine, the Black Sea became an Ottoman lake, closed to Genoese and Venetian merchants. As for the hanate of Crimea, in 1475 Mehmed the Conqueror made it into a dependent principality. While the established dynasty remained in place, the sultan could now depose a *han* and place one of the latter's relatives on the throne. This arrangement remained in place until the late eighteenth century.

In the Balkans, Mehmed the Conqueror repressed the uprising of Skanderbeg (1405–68) in Albania.¹⁸ At the same time, the Bosnian kingdom

16 Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge, 2009).

17 Maria Pia Pedani, 'Turkish Raids in Friuli at the End of the Fifteenth Century', in *Acta Viennensia Ottomanica, Akten des 13. CIEPO-Symposiums vom 21 bis 25. September 1998*, ed. Markus Köhbach, Gisela Prochaska-Eisl and Claudia Romer (Vienna, 1999), pp. 287–91.

18 One of the most recent additions to the long bibliography on this subject is Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Skanderbeg: Der neue Alexander auf dem Balkan* (Ratisbon, 2009).

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also came to an end, and Saraybosna (Sarajevo), previously an insignificant village, became an important Islamic town and a showcase of Ottoman power. In 1480, the forces of Mehmed II also took Otranto in southern Italy; probably it was due only to the Conqueror's death the next year and the long, drawn-out struggle for the throne between his sons Bayezid and Cem that the Ottomans attempted no further Italian campaigns.

With the – not altogether peaceful – accession of Selim I (r. 1512–20), the empire expanded to the east and south. In a campaign against the newly formed polity of the Safavids, whose founder Shah Isma'il I (r. 1501–24) had taken over the defunct empire of the Akkoyunlu, Sultan Selim conquered eastern Anatolia, including the cities of Erzurum and Erzincan in 1514. In 1516–17, there followed a victorious campaign against the Mamluk sultanate of Syria and Egypt, which Selim I incorporated into his territory as a set of directly ruled provinces. Given the dependence of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina on Egyptian food supplies, the *şerif* of Mecca voluntarily submitted to the Ottoman ruler. From 1517 to the end of the empire, the *şerifs* were to form a subordinate princely dynasty.

With the conquest of the Mamluk Empire, the character and composition of the Ottoman polity changed dramatically. Until 1517, it had been first a principality and then a regional empire on the margins of the Islamic world, albeit with considerable prestige for having conquered Constantinople. But with the acquisition of Egypt, Syria and – after a campaign in 1533–4 – Iraq as well, the sultans no longer governed a largely non-Muslim population but controlled the historic heartlands of the Islamic world, which had been largely Muslim for centuries. In addition, the Ottoman rulers became the protectors of the pilgrimage to Mecca, an essential requirement for all Muslims who can afford the expense. But at the same time the sultans also came under considerable pressure to legitimise their rule, for now they needed to compete, in terms of “magnificence” and good government, with the Mamluk sultans, who after all had been the only rulers capable of keeping the Mongol armies at bay.¹⁹ As the Mamluk sultans were Sunni Muslims, scholar officials called upon to legitimise the Ottoman conquest in religious terms were in a delicate position, and it is impossible to say how many people were willing to accept Sultan Selim's claim that the Mamluks had deserved deposition because of the support they had given to the “heretic” Shah Isma'il. Be that as it may, throughout the sixteenth century, Istanbul's control over Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus and Mecca remained on the whole quite solid.

19 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment to Ottoman Rule: Institutions, Waqf and Architecture in Cairo, 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden, 1994).