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APPROACHING THE SULTAN'S WORD: OTTOMAN *FERMANS*, READING AND PERFORMANCE IN THE EARLY MODERN MOLDAVIA AND WALLACHIA

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Abstract

Throughout the Ottoman Empire's existence, the circulation of the imperial writs constituted one of the cornerstones of imperial governance, with orders of the sultan continuously circulating between the centre of the provinces, making the will of the sultan known, but also embodying the sultan's authority itself. At the same time, the very physicality of imperial fermans has long fascinated scholars of the empire, resulting in the enormous amount of studies devoted to the diplomatics of Ottoman chancellery. The present paper seeks to address the issue from a different perspective, one frequently ignored by the scholarship – namely those of intended addressees of those documents, who remained often not only at a physical, but also cultural distance from the imperial centre. As such, they were frequently unable to access the contents directly due to lack of linguistic or literacy skills in Ottoman Turkish. However, as the paper seeks to demonstrate, these difficulties notwithstanding, the early modern elites of Moldavia and Wallachia nonetheless were able to grasp the meaning conveyed in these lavish documents, but also the documents themselves were intended not as carriers of textual communication, but as part of the multimedia experience in which the presence of the sultan was recreated in a far-away province.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Moldavia; Wallachia; diplomatics; literacy; communication

1. Introduction

The Ottoman Empire has inscribed itself in historical memory and much of historiography as the empire of the sword; moments of triumph or defeat, such as the conquest of Constantinople or the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Vienna immediately come up to mind. For a long time, this martial image has also been the main focus of scholarship and set the parameters of the historiographical discussion, as in the case of the narrative of "Ottoman decline" following the death of Sultan Süleyman (1520-1566) – first used to describe the waning of the empire's military power and subsequently applied to all aspects of its life.[1] Since the Ottomans emerged from the status of a minor *beylik* on the outskirts of the Islamicate world in the beginnings of the fourteenth century as an aggressive and expansive power, the argument goes, it was this military might that constituted the make and break of the empire, and its declining capacity of waging violence on their neighbours and subjects alike was the key to the empire's demise.

However, in recent decades, Ottoman historians provided a much-needed corrective to this one-sided image, focusing on a more diffuse, gentler side of the imperial project. As numerous scholars point out, the Ottoman rule over its expansive "Well-Protected Domains" (*memalik-i mahruse*) should not be seen through the lens of the 'Turkish yoke' narrative, whereby over six hundred years of the empire's rule in Southeastern Europe and much of the Middle East effectively amounted to a military occupation, rejected by local population and upheld only by the threat of violence.[2] The rejection of a long-standing 'decline' paradigm that has been gradually chipped away since the 1970s has allowed to inspire novel perspectives in a number of previously unexplored directions, such as cultural history, political thought, identity and the relationship between the imperial elite and their non-Muslim subjects in ways that emphasized connectivity and coexistence rather than the alleged irredeemable antagonism, while at the same time placing the polity on a broader comparative and trans-imperial stage.[3] Within this new wave of scholarship, the established image of the empire of the sword is counterbalanced by its long-underappreciated facet – that of an empire made of paper.

As any student of the empire would readily admit, the Ottomans produced an astonishing amount of documents and the challenge for students of the empire is more often that of unmanageable wealth of data rather than scarcity. Within the capital, detailed registers of revenue sources, expenses, *timar*s (prebendal grants) and their holders sought to impose legibility of the empire's resources to the tiniest detail[4], while a constant flow of imperial *ferman*s (sultanic decrees) and *berat*s (appointment diplomas), containing orders, responding to petitions, as well as appointing and dismissing officials not only mobilized resources that the empire required to thrive and expand, but also made the authority of the sultan felt in the farthest corners under Ottoman suzerainty.[5] From this point of view, paper held the empire together, lubricating the wheels of imperial machinery, while the pen was more important than the sword. The pen's supremacy was precisely the point of one of late-seventeenth century officials and literati, Ṣaʿbānzāde Mehmed Efendi, in his dialogue *The Altercation of the Sword and the Pen* (*Münāẓara-ı Ṭıġ u Ḳalem*), in which the Pen triumphs in the competition, with Reason as the umpire:

> "in truth the pen the felicitous script is in the erudition of the world by the agreement of the people. In all aspects, it is superior and older than you. It is capable of transmitting exegesis and skilled in the knowledge of the old and the new."[6]

The author of this eulogy obviously was not an impartial judge and the victorious pen was meant to represent the likes of Ṣaʿbānzāde – the *kalemiyye*, scribal class within the Ottoman establishment, whose main duties included managing the empire's complex bureaucracy, as well as drafting documents and letters sent out across the empire and beyond in the name of the sultan, while their main claim to partaking in the elite was extensive training and knowledge of scribal matters and literary tradition of rhymed prose, known as *inṣa*.[7] By the mid-sixteenth century, the scribal class emerged as a self-identified and culturally homogenous group based on similar training and routinized chancellery practice, drawing on Islamicate models and employing Ottoman Turkish as the language of official correspondence, which replaced the eclectic structure and output of the chancellery of Sultan Süleyman's predecessors.[8] The scribes, or *katib*s, not only held the empire together, but also serve as our main guide for insights into understanding the Ottoman written culture of the early modern era: not only they were the ones responsible for composing the imperial correspondence, but also provided us with commentaries and glossa that help us understand various aspects behind imperial diplomatics. Finally, outside of their duties within the imperial administration, their high level of literacy meant that they were usually composing works of a non-official kind, including poems, rhymed prose, as well as chronicles and treatises on a variety of topics, including art criticism or geography.[9] Their prominence and centrality as creators and interpreters of the written word in the early modern Ottoman Empire makes it only natural that modern scholars observe the literary and documentary production of the period through the *katib*'s eyes.

However, *kalemiyye* were hardly a representative group to extrapolate their experience onto all subjects of the sultan. As a numerically minuscule group of highly-skilled professionals of the pen, socialized into the imperial administration by years of apprenticeship and practice, they differed significantly from the population of the empire as a whole; many of the sultan's subjects did not know Ottoman Turkish, or at least not at a level sufficient to grasp the ornate language of the sultanic writs. Moreover, even if they were able to speak and understand the spoken language, the sophisticated calligraphy of the documents could prove an unsurmountable obstacle. This did not necessarily mean that those unfortunate recipients were illiterate; they could just as well adhere to one of different traditions of the written word (such as Armenian, Greek, or Slavonic), whose adepts rubbed shoulders with Ottoman *katib*s across the squares and coffeehouses of the empire.[10] Ottoman Turkish remained a language alien to the majority of the population, to some extent even in such Islamicized regions as Bosnia of the seventeenth century.[11] Neither was the majority of the imperial subjects able to read and write the Arabic script. Finally, the intimate familiarity with Islamicate literary and scribal tradition that constituted the core of the *kalemiyye*'s *esprit de corps* was alien to the vast majority of even Muslim subjects within the Ottoman graphosphere.[12] To paraphrase an apt expression by Graham Barrett, while Ottoman textuality was ubiquitous, Ottoman literacy was represented by a small minority.[13] A good example of how taking scribes' experience as a general one could lead us astray can be seen in Mustafa 'Ali's treatise on calligraphy, *Menakıb-ı Hüner-veran*, where he distinguishes two types of people of the pen:

> "The first category [includes those] whose beautiful writing is agreeable and, in accordance with the noble hadith, 'Writing is what is legible,' those whose inability to write beautifully is not shameful. [They are] the eloquent authors, tughra-kashs with lofty positions; scribes of the chancery offices (divan) of exalted grandees; and accountants who keep the books of the treasury; above all, the judges and governors of the time; and the able, assiduous [pen holders] who are in need of help."[14]

The gist of Mustafa 'Ali's distinction is a juxtaposition between calligraphers and those men of the pen who are engaged in what modern scholars have called "pragmatic literacy", associated with drafting and issuing documents rather than literary or artistic exploits. At the same time, anyone familiar with the daunting experience of trying to decipher elaborate sultanic *tughra*s or notoriously difficult to read *siyakat* script used by the financial department of the imperial administration cannot help but smile at the notion of those being legible.[15] As a result, whereas their utterances and comments regarding the practices of reading may provide us with some guidelines, the *katib*s' perspective can hardly be a guide as to how the documents were approached and handled by those from outside this culturally elite circle.

In the pages that follow, I will try to find an alternative approach towards unearthing Ottoman subjects' experience with the written word of the sultan. Rather than looking at the *ferman*s from the point of view of the *katib* (both metaphorically and physically), I attempt to reconstruct the experience of the intended recipient, whose language and literacy skills did not necessarily afford him the ability to decipher the contents on his own. As I will argue, reading available evidence against the grain demonstrates that in the early modern period, interacting with the sultanic writs did not require *reading* them *by* the recipient, who did not possess cultural capital to do successfully on his own; instead, he was expected to *interact with* the *ferman* in ways that did not require him to possess linguistic or literacy skills on his own, while the contents of the document were transmitted orally to him by a trained scribe. Moreover, oral delivery constituted only part of the act of communication, which included visual confirmation of the sultanic origin of the document, as well as the gestures meant to demonstrate the respect accorded to the sultan and, by extension, the document issued in his name. Reframed in this way, the imperial writ no longer appears as an instance of written communication, but rather as an element of a multimedia, sensory spectacle meant to invoke the presence of the sultan, reaffirm his power, and confirm the authenticity of the order itself. As I argue, these parameters for reading *ferman*s were not accidental, but rather baked into the very features of the document itself, aligning with both the realities of limited literacy, as well as the concept behind the act of reading itself, which – rather than silent reading dominant in contemporary world – conceived it as a collective activity, which paralleled the experiences of Islamic *majlis*, a social gathering akin to literary salon.

From this point of view, seventeenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia offer an interesting case study: while both principles firmly entered the Ottoman orbit at the beginning of the sixteenth century and were considered by the Porte a conquered territory and their population had a status of *zimmi*s (protected non-Muslim subjects), neither did experience the introduction of the "classical" provincial administration nor the establishment of Ottoman institutional staples, such as *kadi* courts, *timar* system or *madrasa*s; instead, both principalities retained their pre-conquest institutional makeup, with voivodes claiming divine sanction, while simultaneously doubling as "tribute-payers" (*haracgüzar*) and slaves of the sultan, as well as Greek Orthodox boyar elite, which retained both their social and political status.[16] The geographical and cultural marginality within the Ottoman Empire that geography and confessional difference conferred meant that Ottoman Turkish was not the language of everyday conversation, even though some boyars were able to hold their own within the conversation. Similarly, sultanic writs arriving from the Porte were a regular but by no means quotidian occurrence – exceptional enough to be mentioned on occasions, but not so rare as to deprive us of meaningful data. With its own tradition of letters, based on Cyrillic script and Slavonic literary heritage that in the course of the seventeenth century increasingly adopted Romanian vernacular[17], both Moldavia and Wallachia stood apart from the Islamicate tradition that had been embraced by the Sublime Porte, but at the same time, frequent contacts provided at least a modicum of familiarity with the practices of the imperial chancellery.

The present paper consists of three parts, which touch on different aspects of the topic. The first section recounts the evolution of the Ottoman chancellery and its output in the early modern period, focusing on the transition from the eclectic and cosmopolitan model promoted by Mehmed II to a more rigid and canonical format that crystallized under Sultan Süleyman in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. As I argue, the transition away from multilingualism towards the full adoption of Ottoman Turkish as the language of the chancellery stands in apparent contradiction with the status of those writs as part of "pragmatic literacy"[18], focused on bureaucratic practice rather than literary achievements. Unwieldy, large, difficult to handle and written in complex calligraphy, the *ferman*s were nothing like what we would expect from bureaucratic production. Nonetheless, as I will argue later, the elaborate ornamentation and atypical format of those orders was not a mere pomp, but rather clues as to how they were intended to be read and in what spatial and social context the act of reading was supposed to unfold.

The second section moves from the Ottoman chancellery to Moldavian and Wallachian boyars of the seventeenth century. Whereas in the absence of quantifiable evidence, some scholars have advanced arguments in favour of a relatively widespread knowledge of Ottoman Turkish among the elites of the principalities, there is relatively little evidence to back up the claim, and even less to assert that a large number of boyars were able to read and write the language. In fact, numerous boyars and even voivodes were even illiterate in Romanian, making it difficult to believe that they would have enough familiarity with the script to write in Turkish. Most importantly, this section examines the extant evidence concerning the reading of sultanic *ferman*s in the Danubian principalities, juxtaposing them against visual and textual evidence stemming from Ottoman and Western sources. As I argue, when taken together, this evidence confirms the hypothesis regarding the role of oral delivery, gestures meant to evoke respect and visual confirmation, which – combined – recreate the physical presence of the sultan addressing his subjects.

The third section returns to the field of Ottoman cultural and political history, seeking to unearth the roots of this mode of reading. As I will argue, these can be identified in the social institution of *meclis*, a multi-purpose social gathering that had been established in the Middle East since the medieval period. Appearing in a variety of hypostases and roles, from dispensation of justice through scholarly debates to leisure and literary entertainment, the *meclis* was one of the centers of gravity for the intellectual life of the Ottoman Empire and one of the most important venues for members of the *kalemiyye* to demonstrate their mastery of language and knowledgeability. They also provided one of primary social spaces for reading, understood not as a solitary exercise in front of the book, but rather as a lively social activity that invited engagement and interaction. As I will argue, the *meclis* can be interpreted as a default format of reading envisioned by the literati of the Ottoman Empire and provided a surprising link between the highly-trained scribes of the Sublime Porte and the illiterate boyars of the Danubian principalities, demonstrating the flexibility of the institution, but also the commonality of space and experience shared by two seemingly disparate groups.

2. The Ottoman Chancellery and Its Output: Writing Down the Sultan's Speech

The Ottoman chancellery emerged only gradually under the first rulers of the dynasty; no document is known from Osman I (1299-1326) and only two Persian *vakfiye*s (diplomas establishing pious foundations) date from the reign of his son, Orhan, the oldest issued in 1324. As Linda Darling points out, indirect evidence suggests that the bureaucratic apparatus was very rudimentary and small in numbers, adapted to limited scope and sophistication of the tools of power employed by both rulers.[19] In the second half of the fourteenth century, however, the administrative expansion picked pace, drawing on the available pool of scribes from western Anatolia, particularly Kütahya, conquered in 1381. In the following period, the growing ranks of the chancellery were supplemented with the massive inflow of men of the pen drawn from among the conquered peoples, particularly Greeks and Serbians, who found employment performing administrative duties, as well as working in the scriptorium of the sultan. Furthermore, following his victory over Uzun Hasan of Aq Quyunlu in 1473, Mehmed II took over the defeated ruler's Persian chancellery and brought it to Istanbul. Apart from forced transfers, the Ottoman expansion also transformed the previous marginal polity into an increasingly attractive employer, particularly for much-appreciated Persian scribes, for whom the Porte offered stability difficult to find in the late fifteenth-early sixteenth-century Iran.[20]

The result of these accumulation of talent was a broad, albeit admittedly eclectic composition of Mehmed's chancellery and legitimacy, which drew liberally on personnel familiar with pre-Ottoman traditions of diplomatics and also implemented their elements to enhance the legitimacy of the reigning sultan. This accumulation of talent in the chancellery resulted in a particularly multilingual and multicultural milieu composed of sultan's scribes, with the documents issued written in a variety of languages, including Greek, Italian, Serbian, and even Uyghur.[21] Appropriating this multiplicity of traditions did not mean wholesale borrowing, but rather the development of a hybrid protocol that navigated the middle ground between innovation and established tradition. This much can be discerned from Serbian-language documents, analyzed by Vančo Boškov; according to the scholar, the documents issued in the name of Ottoman sultans shared certain elements of Nemanjići diplomatics of the fourteenth century, while at the same time introduced a number of features shared with contemporary orders issued in Ottoman Turkish.[22] Non-Turkic languages were also extensively employed for the contacts with the outside world: of seven *'ahdname*s (known commonly as capitulations, Ottoman unilateral instruments of peace) issued to Venice prior to 1517, only one was composed exclusively in Turkish.[23]

The reign of Sultan Süleyman brought a massive shift in the composition and output of the imperial chancellery, as the multilingual, cosmopolitan model embraced by Mehmed II was abandoned in favour of a more streamlined, monolingual (with few exceptions), hierarchical format that no longer catered to the linguistic skills of the recipient, but instead imposed Ottoman Turkish and a distinctively imperial idiom as a means of communication with the outside world.[24] This transition caused considerable difficulties in diplomatic communication, since Christian courts lacked staff with linguistic skills to handle such correspondence; for, instance Polish envoys complained about their inability to read the *'ahdname*s received at the Porte and pleaded for the return to the previous practice of composing the documents in Italian or Latin, but to no avail.[25] From now on, the Ottoman imperial chancellery ceased to produce official correspondence in languages other than Ottoman Turkish, with small exceptions granted to Persian and Arabic.

This massive paradigm shift, associated with the tenure of *Nișancı* Celalzade Mustafa Efendi (d. 1567), included two main and intertwined components: an evolution of the chancellery staff itself, as well as recalibration of the chancery output. Whereas under Süleyman's predecessors the secretaries originated from different walks of life and intellectual backgrounds, in the sixteenth century their education becomes more homogeneous and reliant on *madrasa* education within the Ottoman domains.[26] This in itself provided a stark contrast with the fifteenth century, when a significant part of the bureaucrats had been recruited on an *ad hoc* basis and hailed from abroad, due to the lack of established institutions of learning that would be able to fill the expanding polity's need for men of the pen.[27] Massive patronage of Mehmed II and Süleyman and the establishment of official hierarchy of *madrasa*s largely resolved this problem and, by mid-sixteenth century, virtually all of *katib*s working in the chancellery boasted similar background, strengthening the group's *esprit de corps* and facilitating both institutionalization and routinization of scribal work.[28]

Although the transition to Ottoman Turkish as the default language of the chancellery may be interpreted in purely pragmatic terms, it also was part of a much broader process unfolding in the first half of the sixteenth century, whereby Ottoman imperial culture and identity came on its own. As Gülrü Necipoğlu's comprehensive studies of Ottoman architecture and pottery in this period demonstrate, during the reign of Sultan Süleyman, the visual idiom of the empire took shape, detached itself from its international Timurid models and proclaimed the empire's aspirations to universal, Sunni monarchy.[29] In a similar manner, another crucial artistic field – that of illuminated manuscripts – have developed a distinct aesthetic that increasingly juxtaposed itself against Safavid models, emphasizing order, stability and hierarchy within officialdom and the world as a whole.[30] Even in a seemingly static realm of Hanafi *madhab*, the Ottoman consolidation brought major changes, with new curriculum that emphasized the role of *Rumi* scholars, association of the learned hierarchy with the dynasty, as well as new legal interpretations, largely codified by Süleyman's influential *şeyhülislam* (chief jurisconsult), Ebu's-Su'ud.[31] Chancellery staff, with *nişancı* Celalzade Mustafa Efendi at its helm, were deeply involved in this reformulation of Ottoman identity; as early as 1525, Celalzade penned a law-book (*kanunname*) of Egypt, whose preamble laid out the ruler's aspirations to universal monarchy and served as a basis for Ottoman ideological program.[32] Presiding over the growing scribal apparatus and as an accomplished historian in his own right, Celalzade in many ways defined both the institution he presided over and also the Ottoman ideology for centuries to come.[33]

By the end of Celalzade's life in 1567, the imperial chancellery was very different than it had been at the time of his entry into the ranks of the *kalmiyye*. Apart from the aforementioned shift in training and output, the chancellery staff was also much larger than it had been in the past. Whereas by the 1490s, the number of *katib*s amounted to ca. 25, a hundred years later it quadrupled, divided between the *divan* and treasury (*hazine*).[34] The social profile of the *kalemiyye* also changed and the boundaries of the group hardened; whereas most scribes of the early sixteenth century came from *madrasa* background, by the end of the sixteenth century, *madrasa* graduates were perceived as outsiders on the ground of their lack of experience within administration. Instead, the professional formation of the new scribes took place on the job, with the apprentices (*şagird*) learning the trade under the guidance of their masters.[35] This tendency was even reflected in the script employed for the imperial documents produced within different branches; whereas the scribes working in the financial department employed a cursive and near-unreadable *siyakat*, their counterpart within the chancellery was *jali divani*:

> "this stylized chancery hand is written in widely spaced lines that ascend to the left. The extreme stylization and increasing number of unauthorized connections make it not only challenging to write and read divani, but

> almost impossible to have words or lines interpolated in it. The script thus insured confidentiality and protected documents from forgery."[36]

This new, distinctly Ottoman, idiom came to prominence not only in the matters of script and language, but also in the literary models perused by scribes composing official correspondence. Sixteenth century saw the emergence of original works of rhymed prose (*inşa*) that served as a manual of style for the *kalemiyye*.[37] The most influential oeuvre within this genre was without any doubt the *Münşeatü's-Selatin* of Feridun Ahmed Bey, whose collection of real or purported letters would set the parameters for the literary production for the period to come.[38] Although the *inşa* did not translate directly into the language of imperial orders, featuring more prominently within correspondence, its role in shaping the Ottoman cultural identity of the scribes cannot be underestimated.[39]

While the bureaucracy of the Ottoman chancellery grew, the underpinning concepts of power and authority it served were personalist in nature. The political theory of the early modern Ottoman Empire hinged upon the sultan and the concepts of justice and equity. In this regard, the Ottomans were by no means innovators, but rather drew on a massive tradition of Middle Eastern statecraft, dating back all the way to the Sassanian period. Within this framework, the main role of the ruler was to uphold the established order of the world (*nizam-i ʻalem*), primarily by dispensing justice (*ʻadalet*) and protecting his subjects from oppression (*zulm*).[40] From this obligation stemmed the power of the sultan over his officials, frequently identified in the sources as the main perpetrators of oppression through violence, extortion, greed and bribery[41]; in order to combat these abuses, the ruler was expected to punish the wrongdoers by means of his political authority (*siyaset*), including the right to dispense capital punishment. Thus, the ruler's role as the refuge for the oppressed and dispenser of justice formed the cornerstone of the theoretical model of the world as a whole, frequently taking the form of the "circle of equity", as represented in the work of Kınalızade:

> Justice leads to rightness of the world; the world is a garden, its walls are the state; the state is ordered by the shariʻa; the shariʻa is not guarded except by the ruler; the ruler cannot rule except through an army; the army is summoned only by wealth; wealth is accumulated by the subjects; the subjects are made servants of the ruler by justice.

What is crucial for the topic at hand is the fact that in political theory the task of protecting the subjects against oppression by the sultan's servants required the existence of open channels of communication between the ruler and the population of the imperial domains. This was realized through what Heather Ferguson has aptly called 'protocols of authority,' which included the means of clarifying the elevated status of the ruler, as well as legitimize him as the apex of human hierarchies and the refuge of the world.[42] This included ceremonial displays and careful staging of imperial grandeur, while also providing controlled access to the ruler within the space of the palace and the Ottoman capital. The solemn procession that accompanied the ruler on his way to the Friday prayer also provided an opportunity for the subjects not only to witness the sultanic glory, but also to present him their petitions asking for redress.[43] The process of petitioning served several important functions: it required the petitioner to formulate a proper address to the sultan, thus acknowledging his sovereignty, as well as involving the central administration into the resolution of the subject's grievance.[44] The petition was subsequently logged in and evaluated by junior officials before a decision was taken within higher rank of the administration. Subsequently, a *ferman* was drafted and confirmed while its contents before sending were copied to the chancellery registers: either *Mühimme Defterleri* (The Registers of Important Affairs) or *Şikayet Defterleri* (The Registers of Complaints).[45] Although the sultan himself was usually not directly involved in the process that was handled within the imperial chancellery and the *divan*, both the petition and the response referred to him as the sole decision-maker, with the *ferman* formulated as a direct speech by the sultan in the first person.

Along with ceremonies, the official correspondence constituted another protocol of authority employed to legitimize and uphold the Ottoman polity. For most of the subjects of the far-flung empire unable to observe the sultan during his outings, the *ferman*s constituted the only way of interacting with and witnessing the power of their ruler in Istanbul. Unlike Christian rulers, the Ottomans did not propagate the image of the sultan by means of his portraits; although those existed and circulated, their reach was relatively restricted, in many instances to the walls of the palace.[46] As a result, the imperial document brought to the provinces was the only way the presence and authority of the sultan was projected into all corners of the empire. As I will argue further in the following sections, this constatation should inform our understanding of the way those documents were approached by the contemporaries and the purpose for their distinct format.

The peculiar and immediately recognizable format of the sultanic *ferman*s is one of the most distinctive features of the Ottoman diplomatics. Shaped in the form of a vertically oriented scroll, with the symbolic invocation to God in the form of a single word *huve* ('He') placed at the top, followed by the imperial cipher (*tughra*), which formed the visual centre of the document. The *tughra* derived from a long tradition of Islamicate and Turkic signs of authority, displaying similarities in shape and function to the Fatimid and Sicilian *'alama*.[47] However, the most obvious precedent for the sultanic monogram came through the Turkic tradition dating back to the Great Seljuks, where we find an official named *tugrag*.[48] The calligraphic symbol subsequently entered the repertoire of Anatolian *beylik*s and was adopted by the first rulers of the Ottoman dynasty in the early fourteenth century, the first preserved example being the one found atop the *vakifname* issued by Orhan in 1324.[49] While originally containing a relatively simple, unadorned composition that contained the name and patronymic (*Orhan ibn Osman*), under the following rulers its contents and complexity increased, reaching its mature form under Sultan Süleyman. Placed below the *invocatio*, the imperial cipher was by far the largest element of the *ferman*, as well as its only means of authentication. From the sixteenth century onward it was also the most lavishly decorated element of the imperial writ, frequently traced in gold or red ink and adorned with floral motifs in *saz* style.[50] Affixing the *tughra*, which corroborated its status as an official imperial rescript, was delegated to the head of the chancellery, *nişancı*, as well as *tuğrakeş*, whose task it was to produce an aesthetically pleasing and authoritative cipher.[51] The fact that this task was highly prized within the Ottoman establishment can be deduced from the fact that one of the first epigraphic *tughra*s that survived to this day was not meant to eulogize the sultan, but rather convey the identity of his chancellor, Nişancı Mehmed Pasha, whose mosque in Istanbul bears the cipher of his master, Sultan Murad III (1574-1595).[52]

The *tughra*, which in some cases occupied as much as a quarter of the length of the document was followed by the rest of the document, which involved an *inscriptio*, *narratio* and *dispositio*, signalled by standard phrases and formulated as a direct speech of the sultan. The rhetoric of these sections emphasized two crucial aspects of Ottoman political culture: the role of the sultan as the upholder of the established order (*nizam-i 'alem*), as well as his full authority over his subjects and servants. In the former case, the message was embedded in the structure of the text; most *ferman*s recorded in the *Mühimme Defterleri* provide a detailed account of the original petition, presenting the ruler's intervention as a restoration of justice and the proper order of things. At the same time, the extensive quotation of the petition from the subject justified monarchical intervention and provided the venue for the ruler to demonstrate his justice and power, marked by the *dispositio* section, whereby the sultan commanded the addressee to take measures to resolve the matter. While forceful in tone (*buyurdum ki*), these commands were not necessarily specific with regard to the eventual steps to be taken; for instance, eighteenth-century *ferman*s responding to petitions over legal disputes usually did not provide the verdict, but rather ordered the officials involved to investigate the conflict in a just and impartial manner.[53] Nonetheless, even such unspecific orders provided the platform for disseminating the image of the rulership[54] as the single protector against oppression, with the message conveyed in the standard conclusion of many of the writs, *baki ferman sultanımındır* ('it is the sultan's sole authority to issue commands').[55]

Finally, another characteristic feature of many imperial *ferman*s was their physical format and appearance. Although the length and lavishness of decoration differed from a document to another, they could reach a considerable size of several running meters of densely written vertical scroll, adorned with meticulous calligraphy, ornament and sprinkled with gold. An illustrative example of the size such documents could reach is the deed (*mülkname*) granted by Selim II to Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1567, which measured an impressive 111 cm in length and 30.5 cm in width, filled with a carefully crafted *divani* script, with gold and dark blue illumination.[56] Once unfolded, these documents are difficult to handle and force scholars to immobilize them on a flat surface in order to consult their contents. Also, their outsize format creates issues with their proper storage.

From the perspective of the Ottoman *kalemiyye*, diplomatics "was an everyday, essentially mechanical and repetitive, task assigned to the scribal bureaucracy", the bread and butter of the daily toil within the chancellery.[57] As they developed along with the internal culture of the chancellery, as well as the empire as a whole, the *ferman*s constituted part and parcel of Ottoman administration, but also main vehicles for projecting imperial presence and legitimacy to the subjects. Their striking physical and textual features, representing the sultan as the protector of his subjects against oppression and dedicated restorer of the proper world order, they constituted a main means of communication between centre and the periphery, bridging the vast expanses of the empire and making the sultan's authority visible to the population. The format and conventions of those writs, informed by the cultural and professional background of the *kalemiyye* class, signified their status as products of the Ottoman cultural milieu, as conceived by the imperial bureaucracy.

However, as I have pointed out, the *katib*s are not necessarily the most representative sample to examine the Ottoman society's interaction with sultanic writs. Due to their education and professional experience as creators of said documents, they were uniquely positioned to access their contents with ease. However, this was not a standpoint shared by the majority of the sultan's subjects, who lacked training in Islamicate chancellery tradition, as well as literacy and language skills. From their perspective, many of the characteristic features of the *ferman*s served as a serious obstacle: unable to decipher Arabic script or understand Ottoman Turkish, they could not 'read' the document as we would expect today. However, as I argue in the following section on the case of Moldavia and Wallachia, they were nonetheless able to interact with and understand their contents; grasping this process, though, requires us to reconceptualize the place of the document within the social and physical space in which they appeared.

3. Moldavia and Wallachia: Reading the Word

Recent decades have brought a growing interest in the history of reading and literacy in the early modern Ottoman Empire. As scholars such as Nelly Hanna, Timothy Fitzgerald and Dana Sajdi point out, literacy among the sultan's subjects was more widespread and variegated than previous generation of scholars had assumed.[58] Where the received wisdom was that the vast majority of the male population of the empire remained illiterate, this new wave of scholarship has increasingly brought to light a relative abundance of textuality and a not insignificant literacy that cut across social boundaries. For instance, Hanna's research on Cairo merchants has brought to light the existence of a literate middle class, with some individuals possessing quite extensive manuscript collections.[59] In turn, Dana Sajdi's exquisite study of Ibn Budayr, a Damascene barber-turned-local historian, demonstrates that the ability of reading and writing was by no means the preserve of the cultural and political elite.[60]

These phenomena of what Sajdi calls *noveau literacy* overlap with the continued presence of administrative textuality, pointed out by Fitzgerald, who emphasizes the role of legal records and *fetva*s as the main locus of interaction between the sultan's subjects and the written word.[61] In short, reading and writing was by no means a preserve of scholars and bureaucrats, but was shared by the broader social base, with Hanna pointing out that we should not consider the situation as a 'great divide' between a narrow circle of literate individuals and illiterate masses.[62]

As illuminating as these new results are, they require several caveats. First, most of the cases explored by Sajdi, Hanna and Fitzgerald originated from major urban centres in Syria and Egypt, such as Cairo, Damascus or Aleppo, and cannot be easily extrapolated to the empire as a whole. With a long tradition of Islamic learning and hundreds of *vakf*s dedicated to learning established throughout centuries, these cities were uniquely positioned to have a relatively literate population. The elementary school network in Cairo, providing basic skills of reading and writing, consisted of over 300 institutions[63]; in turn, Ibn Budayr's immersion in the literary culture of Damascus stemmed from his social and physical proximity to the intellectual and religious elite of the Syrian metropolis. However, such experiences were not necessarily replicable in other parts of the empire, less saturated with educational institutions. Moreover, while discussing the level of literacy, the authors frequently refer to the ability of reading and writing alone, without considering which language their protagonists were able to decipher. As Helen Pfeiffer points out, in the sixteenth century, the politics of language in the Arabic provinces were by no means clear cut: whereas Arabic was the established cosmopolitan language of the Qur'an and learning, Ottoman Turkish was only slowly building its prestige, but at the same time enjoyed the advantage of being the language of the new elite with ties to the political centre.[64] This paradoxical situation led to contradictory incentives for both sides of the linguistic divide among the *ulema*: whereas *Rumi* scholars from Anatolia studied Arabic in order to gain recognition and prestige of their peers in Damascus, their Arabophone counterparts found it increasingly difficult to advance without the mastery of Ottoman Turkish. At the same time, Arabic remained the hegemonic language of the Levant, but played a diminished role within the imperial elite, which increasingly coalesced around Ottoman Turkish. As James Baldwin points out, it is unlikely that most recipients of *ferman*s from the Sublime Porte were able to read their contents, even if they were able to make out the letters of the Arabic script.[65]

The limits imposed on literacy by the linguistic and scriptural diversity of the Ottoman Empire can be seen even in such a province as Bosnia, which has undergone a massive process of Islamization and served as a recruiting pool for Ottoman establishment.[66] As Selma Zecevic points out, despite adopting Islam, the vast majority of the Muslim population was illiterate and knew at most some spoken Turkish, while "there existed a sharp gap between those who could read and write Ottoman Turkish, and the rest of population in Ottoman Bosnia."[67] Conversely, knowledge of the script did not necessarily mean that the written language would be Ottoman Turkish; local authors also composed so-called *alhemiado* literature, which employed the Ottoman script to render Slavonic language.[68] Other scripts were also present within the graphosphere of Bosnia; local officials also employed Cyrillic and Latin scripts to address their counterparts in Venetian Dalmatia and the Republic of Ragusa.[69] Of course, this does not mean that Ottoman Turkish was absent from the linguistic landscape; however, it was primarily a preserve of those involved in imperial commercial, scholarly or political networks, which on occasions acted as go-betweens mediating contact between the imperial institutions and the local community.[70]

This complexity of languages and script casts doubt on the notion of a single, measurable literacy in the early modern Ottoman domains. Although the Ottomans' conquest and political hegemony in Southeastern Europe established Ottoman Turkish as a *lingua franca* throughout the empire, it did not bring an end to alternative traditions of the written word. Speakers of different languages and users of numerous scripts, such as Greek, Slavonic or Armenian, rubbed shoulders on the streets and markets throughout the empire, but not necessarily were able to decipher each other's texts. For instances, a literate Orthodox monk could be considered fully literate in Greek, but would struggle to decipher a text written in Ottoman Turkish. This phenomenon was even more widespread, as the Ottomans did not actively promote Ottoman Turkish beyond the ranks of the elite; unlike Arabic, whose status came from its association with Qur'an, there was no organized system of teaching Turkish, which was acquired through social interaction rather than formalized training beyond the *medrese*, where it served as a language of scholarly education. Thus, rather than a single Ottoman literacy, it is more useful to speak about multiple, not necessarily correlated, literacies that mingled and co-existed within the broader Ottoman graphosphere.

However, if we try to discern how illiterate subjects in Ottoman Turkish approached the imperial writs, arguably the most appropriate case study is provided by the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, whose position within the Ottoman domains largely isolated their elites from day-to-day contact with the imperial cultural idiom. Although both principalities entered the orbit of the Porte by the early sixteenth century, neither experienced the introduction of 'classical' Ottoman institutions, such as provincial administration, *timar* system, *kadi* courts or *medrese*s.[71] Instead, both principalities retained their pre-conquest institutional and social framework, with Greek Orthodox voivodes and boyar class retaining the hold on power within the principalities, the former complementing their legitimacy as divinely-ordained Christian rulers with their status as the sultan's "tax collectors" (*haracgüzarlar*). The Muslim population resident in the Danubian principalities was small and overwhelmingly transitory and, while the elites were unable to prevent individuals from embracing Islam, conversion meant exclusion from the political and social arenas of Moldavia and Wallachia and the forfeiture of the convert's properties.[72] As a result, although deeply embedded within the political structure of the empire, the ruling class of the principalities remained solidly Greek Orthodox and attached to the traditional cultural idiom and ideology of power. This included a chancellery tradition that predated the advent of the Ottomans and drew on post-Byzantine models, employing Slavonic language (Romanian since the seventeenth century) and Cyrillic script, with the model of diplomatics largely inspired by Balkan chancelleries of the late Middle Ages.[73] In other words, Moldavian and Wallachian boyars represented within the Ottoman ecumene an interesting case of a double marginality: geographical position at the northern frontier of the empire and a cultural separation from the hegemonic culture of the imperial centre. As such, they provide us with a good sample regarding the ways those unfamiliar with the Ottoman written word interacted with sultanic writs.

The relative deficit of sources burdens our estimates of the level of literacy and knowledge of Ottoman Turkish with a considerable margin of error and in the past has produced contradictory arguments. For instance, in a recent contribution, Mariana Goina has argued that since the principalities' emergence, the reliance on the written word has spread and became a relatively generalized phenomenon by the end of the sixteenth century[74]; in her argument, she relies on Michael Clanchy's methodology, which focuses on the growth of written record and pragmatic literacy, understood as the "development of literacy for and from practical purposes of day-to-day business rather than creative literature."[75] Thus, as she argues, the growth of textuality and documentary sources in the first three centuries of the principalities' existence suggests a corresponding growth of literacy. While the focus on pragmatic diplomacy fits well with the current framework, there is considerable evidence to suggest that illiteracy even in Romanian letters remained endemic among boyars. For instance, Iancu Costin, the *hatman* under Voivode Miron Barnovschi (1626-1629) and the father of a famous Moldavian chronicler, Miron Costin, clearly could not write, since he was unable to put his signature and had a *diac* write it down for him. In another, somewhat amusing episode, when Constantin Duca dispatched letters ordering his boyars to arrest his adversaries in Moldavia, the messenger handed the letters to boyar Ștefan Cerchez. However, Cerchez being illiterate, passed the letters to one of those whom he was supposed to arrest, giving him time to flee the principality. We find illiterate individuals not only among boyars, but also among voivodes in the late seventeenth century. Constantin Cantemir was the butt of jokes by contemporaries and subsequent chroniclers for his inability to read and write. According to Ion Neculce, Cantemir never learned to write, learning only to draw his signature instead.[76] According to another chronicler, Alexandru Amiras, Cantemir's decision to execute one of the most influential boyars of his reign, Velicico Costin, because the latter had made fun of him, calling him a 'moron' for being illiterate.[77] Thus, one could argue that while a number of boyars were literate, some (as Dimitre Cantemir or Miron Costin) even eminently so, the lack of literacy skills in Romanian and Cyrillic script was a constant phenomenon among boyars throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, one could also assume that the level of literacy in Ottoman Turkish, a foreign language and script with which there was little direct contact in Moldavia and Wallachia.[78] As a result, the boyars in Moldavia and Wallachia had arguably little chance of overcoming the barrier created by language and the writing system that separated them from Ottoman *ferman*s. However, neither did reading exhaust the options of interacting with the writs, nor were they intended to be read by the recipient as we would expect. In order to untangle this issue, we have to reconstruct the spatial and social context in which those documents appeared in the public eye.

The most comprehensive description of ceremonies involving an imperial *ferman* is a 1762 *Condica lui Gheorgachi*, a compilation of ceremonial order on the Moldavian court.[79] In the description of the investiture of the new voivode, he provides us with a situation that could not be different from our basic assumptions about the act of reading:

> "When you arrive [with a ferman], you have to dismount by the stairs and proceed before the voivode to the divan, where the voivode climbs and takes his place on the throne. You have to stand before him, keeping in both hands, the robe of honor and the ferman [in the covering]. Then the voivode stands up, takes the ferman and kisses it, subsequently handing it over to divan efendi to read. You, along with other boyars, stand still, holding the robe of honour until the reading of the ferman concludes. Then, the divan efendi takes the robe in his hands and puts it on the voivode's shoulders. The voivode, in his turn, bestows robes of honour upon you and the divan efendi, while after the ceremony concludes, you leave. [Subsequently], the treasurer reads the translation at the divan…"[80]

Rather than such public events, our first association with reading is profoundly shaped by silent reading; a solitary exercise performed without distraction. However, the development of this form of interacting with the text is by no means universal throughout history and does not seem to have been the dominant mode of interacting with the written word in Moldavia and Wallachia.[81] At the first glance, the aural delivery by the *divan efendi*[82] and subsequent reading of the translation by the *vistier* may be associated with the solemnity of the occasion – the confirmation of the ruler. However, there is evidence suggesting that this was not the case; Amiras mentions that in 1714 Abdi Pasha called the exiled Polish king Stanisław Leszczyński and the Crimean khan to his tent in order to read the ferman together.[83] He also mentions another ceremonial reading of the *ferman* confirming Grigore II Ghica's rule in Moldavia.[84] In a similar manner, Radu Popescu, describes that during the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu, „*following the custom*, the voivode entered the grand *divan* and the imperial *ferman* was read, in which there were many words of praise that have never been delivered in the past."[85] Thus, one can argue that the way of bridging the linguistic and literacy gaps was the oral delivery, performed by *divan efendi* – an Ottoman scribe at the employ of the voivode – followed by a translation read by one of the boyars. However, while this may seem as a perfectly, if somewhat anticlimactic, explanation, I would argue that reconceptualizing the act of reading not as akin to our modern experience of archives, but rather as a collective activity within a specific social and physical space opens the way for new interpretations of the place of *ferman*s within political and social communication. As I argue, this description corresponds with the intended mode of reading of imperial *ferman*s; not as standalone support for the sultanic order, but rather as a prop in a multimedia spectacle meant not only to convey the textual message, but also to recreate the sultan's presence in front of a collective, potentially illiterate audience.

Returning to Gheorgachi's account, it is worth noting that, whereas only the *divan efendi* reads the *ferman*, a larger group of people interacts with it on another level. The first person is of course, the boyar who brings the robe of honour (*hil'at*) and the *ferman* to the throne room; secondly, the voivode who takes the writ into his hands and kisses it before handing in over to the *divan efendi*, who proceeds to deliver the contents in Turkish. Finally, and less obviously, other participants constitute the audience of the act of reading, observing the *divan efendi* and listening to his words. While in isolation this may seem like a rather obvious remark, it actually allows us to reframe the act of reading as a more comprehensive experience, which involves visual (watching), auditive (listening) and tactile (kissing the *ferman*) stimuli. The latter is further enhanced by the other object bestowed by the sultan, the robe of honor, which is put on the voivode's shoulders, thus concluding the process of confirmation on the throne. As has been frequently pointed out, the *hil'at* was a crucial element of the Ottoman court ceremonial and has been interpreted as a powerful symbol of bestowal of power, with the garment received from the sultan bringing his servant into the same space as the ruler.[86]

What is even more interesting is when we try to recreate the point of view of the public observing the act of reading. From the description, it is clear that the *divan efendi*'s position is an elevated one, on the side of the voivodal throne, reading the document in front of his eyes. The format of the *ferman* – a vertical scroll with dense script – imposes a certain way of handling it; as the reader moves his eyes down the page, he is also forced to move his hands accordingly, increasingly shifting the equilibrium of the document downwards. In consequence, at some point of the process, the upper part of the *ferman* cedes to gravity and folds outwards, revealing to the public the ornamental *tughra* that constitutes the most striking visual element of the whole imperial writ. As Rhoads Murphey has argued:

> The tughra or royal insignia provided one of the principal means by which a new sultan placed his personal stamp on the patrimonial realm inherited from his father […] The appearance of the imperial insignia on legal

> documents and sultanic communiqués was used for practical purposes, as a means of verifying and authenticating a document's contents.[87]

While the importance of *tughra* as an individual sign of a specific Ottoman ruler is definitely valid, it is nonetheless clear that relatively few recipients would be able to decipher the intricate loops of the Ottoman ciphers on their own. Instead, a more plausible interpretation is provided by Hakan Karateke, who argued that rather than individualizing the sultan, the *tughra*s for most observers served as a dynastic visual symbol, without necessarily referencing a specific ruler.[88] The focus on the visual communication embedded within the *tughra* is even more pertinent within the spatial context described in Gheorgachi's account: rather than facing the *tughra*, the observers would rather see it upside down, with the *tuğ*s facing downwards. This spatial manipulation would effectively erase access to the textual content for the audience, but would not impede them from identifying it as a visual stand-in for the sultan himself. From this point of view, the *tughra* as observed rather than read would play an auxiliary role, enhancing the authenticity of the oral delivery by the *divan efendi*, whose reading of the *ferman*'s contents, formulated as the direct speech of the sultan, were meant to evoke the ruler's presence through multisensorial experience. At the same time, it also provides an important cue regarding the social and physical context which the *katib*s in the imperial centre had in mind: rather than intended for *reading by* the recipient of the writ, the diplomatic features of the *ferman* suggest that they were meant *to be read to* the recipient by a trained scribe who would have no difficulty deciphering the complex calligraphy.

That this was the case is confirmed by a shift to a different type of source: Ottoman illustrated manuscripts. As Emine Fetvacı pointed out, such works of art served as an important point of reference in shaping Ottoman elite culture, consumed by sultans, officials and pages receiving their education in the palace school.[89] As she points out, book reading at the imperial court was eerily reminiscent of the model of reading proposed in the context of Moldavian and Wallachian readings of the *ferman*:

> *"reading in itself was more often than not a group activity, and reading for an audience was as much a part of the norm as silent reading at the Ottoman court. Both the presentation of a text between covers and its vocal performance had their place in Ottoman book culture, and form the background against which I consider the manuscripts in this study.*

> *Books were often read in groups, aloud, and probably then discussed among those present."*[90]

This would suggest that such mode of reading, which emphasized collective activity has been the default option for the elite; however, the miniatures of the manuscripts offer us also additional piece of information that directly concerns the reading of *ferman*. Produced by the members of Ottoman elite culture and frequently focusing on the events involving the administrative activities of the empire, the manuscripts provide an idealized, but nonetheless relatively realistic depiction of the imperial institutions and practices.

NOTES

1 Douglas A. Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Asian History* 22 (1988): 52–77; Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4, no. 2 (1997-1998): 30–75.

2 On the Turkish yoke narrative, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "The "Turkish Yoke" Revisited: The Ottoman Non-Muslim Subjects Between Loyalty, Alienation and Riot," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 93 (2006) See also Olga Todorova, "The Ottoman State and Its Orthodox Christian Subjects: The Legitimistic Discourse in the Seventeenth-Century 'Chronicle of Serres' in a New Perspective," *Turkish Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1163/187754610X494996 For a different perspective, focusing on intellectual medium in the Balkan provinces, Aleksandar Fotić, "Belgrade: A Muslim and Non-Muslim Cultural Centre (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005).

3 By this point, the amount of scholarship within this framework is massive. To name a few contributions: Hakan T. Karateke, "Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate: A Framework for Historical Analysis," in Karateke; Reinkowski, *Legitimizing the Order*, 13–54; Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012); Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire* (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005); Suraiya Faroqhi, "Political Activity Among Ottoman Taxpayers and the Problem of Sultanic Legitimation (1570-1650)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35, no. 1 (1992); Suraiya Faroqhi, "Empires Before and After the Post-Colonial Turn: The Ottomans," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 36 (2010) Useful overviews of this major paradigm shift are: Linda T. Darling, "Another Look at Periodization in Ottoman History," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (2002); Jane Hathaway, "Problems of Periodization in Ottoman History: The Fifteenth Through the Eighteenth Centuries," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (1996).

4 The level of detail in delimitation of individual *mukata'a* is sometimes higher than in nineteenth century cadastral records, down to a single linden tree near a village of Lastivci mentioned in the 1681 register of Podolia, Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, ed., *The Ottoman Survey Register of Podolia (Ca. 1681)*: *Defter-I Mufassal-I Eyalet-I Kamaniçe* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2004), 471.

5 A similar argument has recently been raised by Charles Argo with regard to notorious practice of child levy into the janissary corps (*devşirme*), Charles H. Argo, "Ottoman Political Spectacle: Reconsidering the Devşirme in the Ottoman Balkans, 1400-1700" (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2005).

6 Ṣaʿbānzāde' Mehmed Efendi, *Münāẓara-ı Ṭıġ u Ḳalem*, Istanbul, Istanbul University Library, MS 895/1, 39r. I have used the translation of Ekin Atiyas, comparing it with the original manuscript, Ekin E. T. Atiyas, "Eloquence in Context: Ṣa'bānzāde Mehmed Efendi's (D. 1708-1709) *Münāẓara-i* Tıġ *u Kalem* and "The People of the Pen" in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Turcica* 48 (2017): 127.

7 For the study of Ṣaʿbānzāde's intellectual and social milieu, see Ekin E. T. Atiyas, "Political Literacy and the Politics of Eloquence: Ottoman Scribal Community in the Seventeenth Century" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013) On *inṣa* and its role, see Christine Woodhead, "Circles of Correspondence: Ottoman Letter-Writing in the Early Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Turkish Literature* 4 (2007): 53–68 Particularly important is also Colin Mitchell study on official correspondence under the Safavids, Colin Mitchell, "To Preserve and Protect: Husayn Va'iz-I Kashifi and Perso-Islamic Chancellery Culture," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 485–507; Colin Paul Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*: *Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009).

8 Mehmet Ș. Yılmaz, ""Koca Nișancı" of Kanuni: Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Bureaucracy and "Kanun" in the Reign of Suleyman the Magnificient (1520-1566)" (PhD diss., Bilkent University, 2006); Cornell H. Fleischer, "Scribal Training and Medrese Education in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (1984): 27–29.

9 See for instance, Mustafa 'Ali, *Mustafâ Ali's Epic Deeds of Artists*: *A Critical Edition of the Earliest Ottoman Text About the Calligraphers and Painters of the Islamic World*, ed. Esra Akın-Kıvanç (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011); Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*: *The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

10 For an inspiring way to tackle this issue, since Konrad Petrovszky's concept of *osmanisch-orthodoxer Kommunikationsraum*, Konrad Petrovszky, *Geschichte Schreiben im Osmanischen Südosteuropa*: *Eine Kulturgeschichte Orthodoxer Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,* Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen 60 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 20.

11 Kerima Filan, "Turski jezik u Bosni u osmansko doba," *Anali Gazi Husrev-begovoj biblioteci* 43 (2014): 151–78; Selma Zecevic, "On the Margin of Text, On the Margin of Empire: Geography, Identity and Fatwa-Text in Ottoman Bosnia" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007), 22–23.

12 Simon Franklin, *The Russian Graphosphere, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–2.

13 Graham Barrett, "The Written and the World in Early Medieval Iberia" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2015), 269 I have been unable to consult Barrett's book, which was published only in July 2023.

14 Mustafa 'Ali, *Mustafâ Ali's Epic Deeds of Artists*, 163–64.

15 On *siyakat* script, see a classic study Lajos Fekete, *Die Siyāqat-Schrift in der türkischen Finanzverwaltung,* Bibliotheca orientalis Hungarica v. 7 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1955).

16 For the status of the Danubian principalities, see Viorel Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace*: *The Ottoman Empire and Its Tribute-Payers from the North of the Danube*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019); Viorel Panaite, "The Legal and Political Status of Wallachia and Moldavia in Relation to the Ottoman Porte," in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2013), 9–42.

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