SONIC REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER: THE ROLE AND PERCEPTION OF SOUND IN THE 1582 OTTOMAN IMPERIAL FESTIVAL

Inauguraldissertation
an der Philosophisch-historischen Fakultät der Universität Bern
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde
vorgelegt von

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Promotionsdatum: 22. März 2024

eingereicht bei
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Abstract

This study investigates the interrelation between power and sound, examining how sonic elements function as instruments of authority. It focuses on the festivities held in Istanbul in 1582 to celebrate the circumcision of Sultan Murad III's son, Prince Mehmed. To explore the sonic atmosphere of this event, the research first contextualizes the political, social and economic structures of Murad III's reign. It then analyzes how this background shaped the opulent and sensory character of the celebrations, evaluating various festival elements in relation to the representation of power. Sound is approached not merely as musical performance, but as part of a broader sensorial atmosphere encompassing speech, noise, and silence. Drawing on methodologies and approaches from musicology, sound studies, history, anthropology, and sensory studies, the analysis demonstrates how sound actively participated in constructing and expressing political power in early modern Ottoman culture.

Acknowledgment

Probably most PhD students would say the same: writing a thesis is often an inherently lonely experience. It can be an exhausting process in which you stand on your own, constantly fighting and reconciling with yourself. At least, that is exactly what my journey has sometimes felt like. Accordingly, this acknowledgment is being written at the end of a very long, tiring, and breathless period, yet with feelings of happiness and deep gratitude. Many people have supported the realization of this thesis in various ways, and I hope to express my sincere thanks to them as fully and accurately as possible.

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisors. I would like to mention Cristina Urchueguía's continuous care from the very first moment I stepped foot in Bern. I will never forget her empathy and thoughtfulness, especially during the pandemic. I feel fortunate to have had a mentor who offered her presence, time, and support whenever needed, while also giving me the freedom to find my own path and voice, and encouraging me to follow it. This work owes much of its progress to her guidance. I am also very thankful to Songül Karahasanoğlu, whose moral support has been with me since the beginning of my PhD, and even before. She made her presence felt, even from afar, sharing her knowledge and encouragement.

I would like to thank Margret Scharrer, with whom I collaborated closely on our joint research project over the past years. She has become a dear friend, and we have accomplished meaningful work together. It was a privilege to observe and share her passion and enthusiasm for research.

The University of Bern and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) made this project possible, and I am grateful to both institutions. I am also thankful to the Dr. Joséphine de Karman-Stiftung and the selection committee for their financial support, which allowed me to dedicate the final and most crucial months of my writing period to my research without other concerns.

Being a member of the Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies program of the Graduate School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Bern was extremely enriching for my studies. I would like to extend special thanks to Michael Toggweiler and everyone involved in organizing the seminars, workshops, and lectures. In addition, their Writing Retreat and the Schreib-Café provided excellent opportunities to meet researchers from different fields, engage in intensive writing sessions, and exchange ideas and experiences.

It has been my great fortune to be part of the Institute of Musicology at the University of Bern, a group of highly productive, open-minded, and warm-hearted academics. I have always felt welcomed here. I would like to thank all my colleagues at the Institute, especially those who attended my presentations at the *Forschungskolloquium* and influenced the development of this work with their questions, critiques, and advice.

This journey began with a question posed to me by one particular person at a café table more than four years ago. I am grateful that my dear friend and colleague Elif Damla Yavuz introduced me to this opportunity, which changed my life and broadened my horizons. Since that day, many have enriched my work with their suggestions and academic guidance. I would especially like to thank Judith I. Haug and Martin Greve. I will never forget our meeting in the former Cihangir office of the Orient-Institute Istanbul, their advice on how to begin, and their encouragement. I am particularly thankful to Judith I. Haug for reading my thesis and providing invaluable feedback, which I applied during the final editing stages, and which greatly improved the work.

Namık Sinan Turan and Gözde Çolakoğlu Sarı offered valuable guidance as members of my thesis advisory jury during my studies at Istanbul Technical University. The sharing of sources and literature recommendations by researchers I had the honor of meeting, either in person or virtually at workshops and conferences, also played a crucial role in the development of this thesis. I would like to thank Kate van Orden, Gisela Procházka-Eisl, Julia Samp, and Iain Fenlon for their valuable contributions.

Although the University of Bern and its library provide superb access to resources, my search for scholarly literature often led me to libraries, bookstores, and second-hand booksellers in Turkey. Consequently, obtaining books and articles available in Istanbul or other cities from Bern posed a challenge. I am deeply grateful to Halis and Ayşegül Meşe from Meydan Fotokopi, who digitized and delivered these physical sources that I could not access digitally. Another hero of this operation was my mother, who never hesitated to transfer materials from my personal library that I had left in her care.

I am also thankful to all the archives and staff who allowed me access to manuscripts. I would especially like to thank Derya Hanım and Esra Hanım from the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Directorate of National Palaces Research Services, for their invaluable remote support with the archival material I consulted.

I would like to thank Joanna Helms for her meticulous proofreading services and editorial feedback on some of my articles. Similarly, I deeply appreciate Stephen Ferron for the detailed and accurate proofreading he provided for another article of mine in our conference book. The

linguistically demanding nature of this study fostered valuable consultation and support. I am especially indebted to Abdulmennan Mehmet Altıntaş, whose Ottoman Turkish lessons from 2019 until my final year, our discussions on sources, and the knowledge he generously shared with me have been invaluable. Furthermore, I acknowledge Luc Vallat for French, Alberto Napoli for Italian, Ilnaz Rahbar for Persian, and Anita Martin and Margret Scharrer for German, who helped me in understanding or verifying translations of texts, primarily from the 16th century. I would also like to recognize Valeria Lucentini, who not only dedicated her time to reading and transcribing the Italian sources but also located documents for me in the State Archives of Venice; her support was crucial to this work.

My doctoral education and thesis writing process also brought new friendships. A group of colleagues I met in room 105 of the Institute of Musicology quickly became dear friends. We shared laughs, celebrated achievements, and supported each other throughout this journey. Valeria, Luc, and Alberto are among these special friends whom this journey has brought into my life. I would also like to mention Camila Cesar, Gamze İlaslan Koç, and Tin Cugelj, with whom I shared similar challenges, excitements, and transitions during the same period. I am grateful to them for their constant encouragement and thoughtful gestures that supported me throughout this time. I can also cherish the unity formed with my writing buddies. The Pomodoro technique united us, fostered friendships, and allowed us to enjoy, together, the sweet pain of creating something. I am very glad that I shared my final writing period with this lovely team: Johanna Kantuta Hilari Choque, Emmanuel Büttler, Laura Rowitz, and Nadja Rothenburger.

Fortunately, I have also received much support from beyond academia. I would like to thank all my loved ones who understood the importance of this period, showed curiosity about my work, and always wished me well. As I see it, a revolution without dancing is not a revolution worth having, likewise, a doctoral process without dancing would be unthinkable for me! Fortunately, I found Lúdico Tango and met wonderful, humorous people with whom I share my passion for dance. I am grateful for all the *tanda*s, and especially to the board for their good wishes and friendly encouragement during the final stages.

The Niggli family has been the sweetest, warmest support since I met them. I am grateful to all family members, but most especially to Marlis and Alois Niggli for their heartfelt embracement. My dear friend, *dostum* Gizem Aktepe, knows my excitement, panic, joy, and all the other moments of this journey more closely than anyone. I am thankful for her always being there for me.

I would like to thank my parents, who raised me in a house with a big library and full of enthusiasm for music and painting. They guided me towards understanding the importance of knowledge and the beauty of art from a very young age and paved the way for me to become what I am today. But most of all, I am grateful to my mother, Neş'e Evsen, for always having her hand, her warm touch on my back even from a distance, for always making an effort to understand me and my choices, and for supporting me in every step I take.

I am deeply thankful to my cats, Alis and Mişel, for helping me navigate the intensity of these last months. Their pure love and their ability to sense my every mood have always warmed my heart.

Finally, my deepest and most sincere gratitude goes to my partner, Matthias Niggli, who accompanied me through almost every moment of this journey and supported me throughout the writing process with remarkable patience and kindness. Not only did he read this thesis from beginning to end and proofread it several times, but he also supported me in reading the sources in German and French, devoted his time tirelessly discussing sultans, sources, sound, and power, and adapted his daily rhythm to mine. More importantly, with his trust and faith in me, he stepped in whenever I was overly self-critical. Above all, I am indebted to him for his unwavering emotional support.

A. Tül Demirbaş

Bern, December 2025

Contents

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

Throughout this study, all Turkish names and places are spelled according to official modern Turkish orthography. Modern Turkish transliteration is used for Persian and Arabic words when they appear within the Turkish context. Technical vocabulary with modern Turkish spellings is written in italics, with English translations added in parentheses. When exact translations are not possible, explanations are provided in footnotes (e.g. *reaya, mecmua, tezkire* etc.). In addition, I have directly used words that have entered English, such as "pasha" and "agha", or employed their English equivalents, such as "prince" for *şehzade*. The titles of books, articles and other sources cited as references are written in the bibliography as they were published (or as they appear in the archives). This rule also applies to the name of the authors of those sources.

Below is a guide to the pronunciation of Turkish words:

a, A	pronounced as the "a" in "arm"
c, C	pronounced as the "j" in "jungle"
ç, Ç	pronounced as the "ch" in "chocolate"
e, E	pronounced as the "e" in "elf"
ğ, Ğ	a silent letter, lengthens the preceding vowel
ı, I	pronounced as the second "e" in "legend"
i, İ	pronounced as the first "i" in "illusion"
j, J	pronounced as the "j" in French "déjà vu"
ö, Ö	pronounced as the "ö" in German "könig"
ş, Ş	pronounced as "sh" in "shine"
u, U	pronounced similar as "oo" in "moon"
ü, Ü	pronounced as "u" in French "menu"

All translations presented in this thesis are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

List of Abbreviations

anon.	anonymous
BOA	Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives, Istanbul.[1]
e.g.	*exempli gratia* = for example
ed(s).	editor(s)
etc.	*et cetera* = and other similar things
fig.	figure
fn.	footnote
fol(s).	folio(s)
i.e.	*id est* = that is
n.d.	no date
n.p.	no page number
no.	number
p./pp.	page(s)
para.	paragraph
pub.	publisher
r.	reign
trans.	translation
TSMA	Topkapı Palace Museum Archive, Istanbul.
vol.	volume

[1] Previously, Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*).

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A word after a word
after a word is power.

Margaret Atwood
from *Spelling*, 1981

Chapter 1: Introduction

During their long reign, the Ottoman sultans organized numerous events to celebrate important occasions. These festivals were always both political and cultural, reflecting not only the reasons for their organization but also the process of decision-making and implementation. Among these, due to its splendor, wealth, and duration, the festival organized by Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595) for his son Prince Mehmed's circumcision ceremony in 1582 at the ancient Hippodrome (Atmeydanı)[2] of Istanbul is considered unparalleled in Ottoman history. Although the exact duration varies according to the sources, it was the longest festival in Ottoman history, lasting approximately fifty days.

The celebrations of the 1582 festival were polychromic and multisensory, featuring a wide variety of performances and activities. Acrobatics, juggling, dance, music, theatrical performances, illusionism, puppetry, animal acts, and sports competitions were among the most remarkable shows that created a carnivalesque atmosphere. In this way, the festival venue, which was literally transformed into a stage, was populated by performers from different parts of the city and the Ottoman territories. One of the most important highlights of the festival was the parades of the guilds. In addition, banquets for both the upper class and the public, fireworks, and nighttime illuminations enhanced the festive atmosphere. The audience included diplomats, merchants, travelers visiting the city or other regions, invited rulers and diplomatic officials from foreign countries, state officials, members of the sultan's family, and the common people of the city. Beyond serving as a platform for the public presentation of cultural and political ideas and for asserting individual and communal identities, these festivities offered individuals and groups a means to assert their position within the Ottoman social hierarchy.

The 1582 festival is also one of the most extensively documented celebrations in early Ottoman history. The archival sources analyzed in this dissertation include accounts of Ottoman chroniclers who observed the festival or transmitted it through earlier narratives, odes[3] enhanced with the sultan's embellishments, books, memoirs, reports of European observers, and miniatures (i.e., visual depictions of the festival). The primary sources of this

[2] According to the nomenclature of the period, the square was called *Atmeydanı* (= Horse Square). Although the name Hippodrome will be used in some places throughout the thesis for historical references, since this is an examination of an event that took place in the 16th century and during the Ottoman period, it is preferred to refer to this place as Atmeydanı.

[3] Eulogies, in the form of poems written to praise religious and state leaders.

study thus consist of contemporary written and visual accounts of the festival. Accordingly, this thesis presents an analysis that compares and critiques sources written in different languages and/or different versions. Additionally, later historical narratives and scholarly literature examining the festival and its participants form the reference material for this study.

The literature shows that this festival has been studied by scholars from various disciplines, with diverse perspectives focusing on the festival's detailed narratives and its social, political and cultural dimensions. While the political background, structure and layers of the festival, as well as the performances that created the carnivalesque atmosphere and their cultural implications, are frequently discussed in the literature, studies on the function of music and sound remain limited. This is notable, given that sonic performances were among the most important components of these celebrations.

This study therefore aims to provide a comprehensive musicological analysis of the sonic atmosphere of the 1582 circumcision festival. One significant challenge is that the instrumental and theoretical musical knowledge obtainable from miniatures and written descriptions does not always provide sufficient means to fully understand the meaning and context of sound in this political festival. Consequently, this dissertation also examines the political context and the sultan figure within the imperial dynasty. The sonic and sound-related examples analyzed in this study were selected according to the framework in which I contextualized the festival. Two fundamental questions guide this analysis: First, what made this imperial festival "the most magnificent Ottoman festival in history"?[4] Pursuing an answer to this question has demonstrated the necessity of an in-depth examination of the festival's background. To this end, the political and economic aspects of the period are scrutinized, along with the leading actor of the festival, Sultan Murad himself. This includes understanding the festival's connection to the representation of power and analyzing the celebrations in this context. Particular emphasis is placed on uncovering the festival's multiple layers and performance areas as examples of a "show of power", including the design and implementation of the festival, the festival space, its participants, the sultan's presence, and selected performances and elements that engage the senses beyond hearing.

The second question focuses on sound: what was the function of sound in this "glorious" festival, in this show of power? Listening to and analyzing carefully selected sounds of the festival provides insight into the relationship between power and sonic elements in an imperial

[4] STOUT, 1966, p. 44. Even though I am quoting this description from Stout, this presupposition of being "the most glorious" or "splendid" is not only from contemporary and recent researchers, but also from the Ottoman and foreign chroniclers of the period and beyond.

celebration, the purposes served by sound and silence, and how these elements were perceived. In the case of an Ottoman sultan, it is essential to specify what kind of "power" is under consideration and to define this concept in context. The examples selected in this study are grouped according to these considerations and associated with different attributes of the sultan.

1.1. Ottoman Court Celebrations 101

The name of the Ottoman court festivals, *sur-ı hümayun,* already conveys their primary perspective. The term combines two Persian words: *sur* (festival, celebration) and *hümayun* (pertaining to or belonging to the sultan), meaning "the sultan's festival". These festivities can be regarded as *rites of passage*[5] for the imperial family. The Ottomans used the term *sur-ı hitan* for circumcision festivals of the sultan's sons and *sur-ı hicaz* for the marriages of his daughters or sisters. The celebrations of *veladet-i hümayun* (the births of the sultan's children) and *bed-i besmele* (the beginning of the sultan's sons' education) also began to be held from the late of 16th century onward. These occasions included ceremonies and processions that were part of the palace routine (such as *bayram* and *surre* processions), as well as celebrations of military victories (*fetih şadumanlığı)*, and the welcoming processions of diplomats and ambassadors.[6] Sometimes, two different occasions were combined, most commonly the circumcisions and weddings of the sultan's children, and celebrated either simultaneously or consecutively, creating an extended festive period.

The first recorded festival was organized on the occasion of Orhan Gazi's (r. 1324–1362) marriage to Holophira (Nilüfer Hatun), the daughter of the Bey of Yarhisar, in 1298. This tradition continued until the final court festival, arranged by Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) for his sons' circumcision ceremony in 1899. The festival organized by Murad I (r. 1362–1389) in Bursa in 1365 for the circumcision of Prince Bayezid is considered the first major Ottoman circumcision festival. To date, researchers have identified more than fifty such festivals in Ottoman history.[7]

The main location of these celebrations was the capital of the Empire, which changed over time. The first capital was Bursa, where court ceremonies were celebrated until the 15th century. The wedding of Orhan Gazi, the circumcision celebration of 1365, and the wedding of Bayezid I in 1381 were all held in Bursa. After Edirne became the capital in the mid-14th century, the site of imperial festivals changed as well; many weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and military victory celebrations were then held in Edirne. This city was

[5] This concept was first used by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep to describe important turning points and associated rituals that play an influential role in society. Later, cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, known for his work on symbols and rituals, used this concept and he detailed the function of these *rites of passages* in social life. VAN GENNEP, 2019; TURNER, 2017.
[6] To read a detailed account of various examples of Ottoman festivities see: AND, 2020, pp. 21–53.
[7] For a list of identified Ottoman imperial festivals see: ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 28–30 and NUTKU, 1987, pp. 153–155.

eventually succeeded by Istanbul, which was made the Ottoman capital after its conquest by Sultan Mehmed II "the Conquerer" (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481) in 1453.

In general, the areas chosen for celebrations were large squares and adjoining streets, waterfront locations, gardens and palaces or mansions. In particular, festivals held around water differed from others in several ways. Such venues offered two main advantages: first, a safety measure for fireworks and other objects that were lit, and second, a sensory dimension created by the water itself. The reflection of the fireworks on the water produced an effect no less spectacular than their appearance in the air. These celebrations also featured performances on rafts and ships, as well as giant puppets, carousels, festive cabinets, swings, ferris wheels, and castles. One notable example of a water-based celebration was the circumcision festival for Bayezid and Mustafa, the sons of Sultan Mehmed II, in 1457.[8] These celebrations took place in Edirne, on an island in the Maritsa (Meriç) River, and lasted for a month.

The final capital, Istanbul, hosted numerous celebrations from the late 15th century until the end of the Empire in the 20th century.[9] According to Özdemir Nutku, the first festival held in Istanbul took place during the reign of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), in 1490, and combined circumcision and marriage celebrations.[10] However, other sources indicate that the first circumcision festival in Istanbul was organized by Sultan Mehmed II. For instance, Mehmed II reportedly celebrated the circumcision of his son Prince Cem and his grandsons Abdullah and Şehinşah in 1471, and later on his other grandsons Oğuz Han, Ahmed, Korkud, Mahmud, Alemşah and Selim in 1480, with multi-day festivities held at the Eski Saray.[11] Bayezid II later organized a circumcision festival for his son Prince Mehmed in the spring of 1490. These discrepancies raise questions about the precise timing and participants of the festival.

For a long time thereafter, until the 18th century, Atmeydanı, one of the most important squares of the capital city Istanbul, served as the main venue for imperial festivities. During the 16th century, Atmeydanı was a particularly significant space, especially for visitors to the

[8] This festival is also the first grand celebration held in Edirne according to Nutku's book: NUTKU, 1987, pp. 32–34.
[9] Only in 1675, Sultan Mehmed IV organized festivals for his son's circumcision for 15 days, and his sister's marriage for 18 days in Edirne.
[10] NUTKU, 2015, para. 1. This information has been presented differently by various researchers. Bayezid II had two daughters (Şah Sultan and Fatma Sultan) married in 1489 and one daughter (Aynışah Sultan) married in 1489 or 1490. Therefore, it is unclear whether the marriage and circumcision festivities were held simultaneously or separately. Moreover, Prince Abdullah, who is said to have been circumcised in 1490 according to Nutku, is recorded as deceased in 1483; it is therefore more likely that the prince referred to was Prince Korkut.
[11] ÖNAL, 2022, p. 95.

city, and some of the most magnificent imperial festivals were held there during this period. The celebration organized by Sultan Murad III for his sixteen-year-old son Prince Mehmed's circumcision in 1582 is regarded as the most spectacular event not only of the century but of all Ottoman court festivals.[12] Other major festivities held at Atmeydanı included the wedding of Grand Vizier İbrahim and Hatice Sultan, sister of Sultan Süleyman I "the Magnificent" (r. 1520–1566), in 1524; the circumcision ceremonies of Princes Mustafa, Mehmed, and Selim in 1530; and the circumcisions of Princes Bayezid and Cihangir together with the wedding of Mihrimah Sultan and Rüstem Pasha in 1539.[13]

The circumcision ceremonies held in Edirne in 1675 for Princes Mustafa and Ahmed, together with the wedding of Sultan Mehmed IV's (r. 1648–1687) daughter Hatice,[14] and the 1720 celebrations organized by Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730) for his sons Süleyman, Mehmed, Mustafa, and Bayezid, spread across different parts of Istanbul, in 1720 were among the other sumptuous festivals following 1582.[15] Especially with the 1720 festival organized by Ahmed III in the Okmeydanı district of Istanbul, the choice of celebration venues diversified. Later, Dolmabahçe and Yıldız Palaces and their surroundings were added to those locations.

One of the festivals planned to take in various neighborhoods of the city, including Tophane and Gümüşsuyu, as well as Dolmabahçe, was the circumcision ceremony of Sultan Abdülaziz's (r. 1861–1876) two sons, Princes Yusuf İzzeddin and Mahmud Celaleddin, in 1870.[16] Sultan Abdülhamid II later moved from Dolmabahçe Palace to Yıldız Palace, where he resided throughout his reign. It is recorded that during his time, Ramadan was celebrated with fireworks in Yıldız Square and that the palace also served as a venue for festivities.[17]

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[12] In fact, this festival was the subject of poetry and documentaries in the 20th century, demonstrating its substantial and ongoing influence throughout history. İlhan Berk's poem *Şenlikname* (1972), and the documentary *Surname* (1959) by directors Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu and Sabahattin Eyüboğlu are the examples of this: BERK, 1972; İPŞİROĞLU & EYUBOĞLU, 1959. The text of the movie script can be found here: EYUBOĞLU, 1982. I am sincerely grateful to İlknur Ulutak for her kind remote support in helping me find and access the documentary *Surname*.

[13] For scholarly studies on these, see: ŞAHİN, 2018; YELÇE, 2014; BAYAT, 1997.

[14] Hatice Sultan's name is mistakenly mentioned as "his sister" in some sources.

[15] For very comprehensive research about the 1720 Festival, see ERDOĞAN İŞKORKUTAN, 2020, and for the 1675 Festival, see: NUTKU, 1987; TUNCER, 2011.

[16] However, the festivities were also canceled due to the destruction caused by the fire in Beyoğlu during this period. See: UÇAN, 2019, pp. 239–242.

[17] KARATEKE, 2017, pp. 197–204; OSMANOĞLU, 1994, pp. 82–83.

1.2. Literature Review

In 1966, when Robert Elliott Stout submitted his comprehensive doctoral dissertation on the 1582 festival, the literature review he presented was far from exhaustive.[18] At that time, only a few studies on the subject existed, as reflected in the list included in Stout's own literature review. Stout's thesis examines the 1582 festival as an integrated whole of pageantry and celebration, which is significant for understanding the cultural aspects of Ottoman court festivities, particularly when compared with other European festivals of the same period. In his thesis, Stout argued that the legitimization of entertainment and theatrical performances in 16th–17th century festivities was already an established topic among European scholars, whereas interest in theatrical activities within Ottoman court celebrations had only recently begun to emerge. Stout's research focus naturally shaped his treatment of earlier scholarship. Consequently, he primarily cited Metin And's book *Kırk Gün Kırk Gece* (Forty Days Forty Nights), published in 1959, only a few years before Stout's work, which became a foundational reference book emphasizing the theatrical dimension of Ottoman festivities.[19] And's books and articles, in which he analyzed the 1582 festivities and the circumcision ceremony by using primary sources, remain significant contributions today. Concentrating on the entertainment function of celebrations, And categorized and analyzed the artistic and spectacle-based performances of the 1582 festivals. In doing so, he presented a holistic approach, offering comparisons with examples from early modern European festivals.[20]

And's work was complemented by the contributions of Özdemir Nutku from the 1980s onwards, another scholar well known for his works in performance studies. Nutku, himself a theater artist, educator, and critic, published numerous newspaper and journal articles on the performances (such as clowns, dramatic acts, and light shows) and on the meanings and functions of symbolic elements in the 1582 festival.[21]

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[18] STOUT, 1966, pp. 1–6.

[19] This book was expanded and published three more times: *Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Türk Sanatları*, 1982, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları; *40 Gün 40 Gece*, 2000, Toprakbank, and *Kırk Gün Kırk Gece*, 2020, YKY. In this study, the latest edition of the book is referenced.

[20] Today, Metin And is the primary reference for the history of Ottoman and Republican period theater in Turkey—including illusionism, *Karagöz* (Turkish shadow theater) within the scope of theatrical performance and entertainment arts—and dance, as well as for his detailed studies on miniature art, mythology and folklore in general, making him the starting point for anyone researching Ottoman court festivities. While his numerous articles and books are not listed here, his works will of course be referenced whenever they are used throughout this study.

[21] For example: NUTKU, 1981a; 1981b.

Another pioneering line of research on Ottoman festivals that emerged around the same period was the linguistic approach, based on the written sources of the festivities. Accounts of the festival, both by local and foreign observers, have attracted the attention of linguists, historians, and art historians alike. Scholars from various departments of Turkish language and literature have extensively studied the festival books (*surname*s), written in prose or verse, and analyzed their literary features. The transliteration and transcription of these sources have contributed greatly to our understanding of an imperial festival that took place almost five centuries ago. A large number of students have also written master's theses or doctoral dissertations that provide critical editions accompanied by textual analysis, and a complete transliteration of the original manuscripts.

Mehmet Arslan is undoubtedly the most prominent figure in this field. In 1990, he completed his doctoral dissertation analyzing the *surname* genre in terms of function, content, composition, style, and rhythm, and presented transcribed versions of several *surname* manuscripts. In subsequent years, he expanded these studies and published them in a series of eight volumes. Furthermore, for understanding the Ottoman-Turkish language, the transcription of two detailed narratives describing the 1582 festival constitutes one of the key supports of this thesis. The first of these is the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* by İntizami, based on the copies held at Topkapı Palace and Süleymaniye Library, which will be introduced later in the relevant chapter of this dissertation. The second is the transcribed text of Mustafa Ali's *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr*, based on the copies at Topkapı Palace, Nuruosmaniye Library, and the Bayezid Library (Veliyüddin Efendi Collection).[22]

When it comes to the transcription of these two festival books, it is important to mention the work of three other researchers, which is also useful for comparing different copies. The only transcription of the edition of İntizami's book in the Öterreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Vienna was carried out by Gisela Procházka-Eisl. Procházka-Eisl, who has also published articles on this subject, has made a very important contribution to the comparison of this version with the Topkapı Palace copy, especially in the field of guilds, dervishes, and their performances in the festival.[23]

Şeref Boyraz's master's thesis also contains the transcribed text of the copy of İntizami's manuscript in the Süleymaniye Library.[24] Under the title *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn'da Folklorik*

[22] ARSLAN, 2009; 2008.
[23] For her book on İntizami's account, see: PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995. For other selected works: PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1994; 2005.
[24] BOYRAZ, 1994.

Unsurlar (Folkloric Elements in *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, 1994), he analyzed the 1582 festival in terms of folkloric aspects.

In addition, there is a transcription by Ali Öztekin of the Topkapı copy of Mustafa Ali's book, which he identified as written by Ali himself.[25] Öztekin adopts the narrative style of the manuscript he analyzes and presents a thematic analysis in the same way.

Contributions from the field of linguistics include Arslan's book (the last volume of the aforementioned series), in which he published the transcription of the odes about the festival of 1582; Mehmet Özdemir's published doctoral dissertation, which includes the transcription and analysis of another example of a *surname* written under the pseudonym Ferahi; and finally, Türkan Alvan's article, which contains the transcription into Latin alphabet of a text written by a poet named Kadimi.[26] Alvan categorizes this source, only part of which describes the 1582 festival, as a *surname*. However, due to its structure and narrative features, one can argue that it has more characteristics of an ode.

Moreover, there is Tâhir Olgun's *Şâir Nev'î ve Sûriye Kasîdesi* (Poet Nev'î and his Ode), which is one of the first studies on the 1582 festival.[27] In this study, the life of Nev'î, the author of the ode depicting the circumcision festival, is presented first, followed by a commentary of the text. In addition, Olgun has provided the reader with the translation of the couplets he used to explain the text into Latin alphabet. The original text, which is today archived on microfilm at the National Library in Ankara, has not been translated further to the best of our knowledge.

In addition, there are Nevin Özkan's translations and facsimiles of documents related to the Ottoman state in the Modena State Archives, including a detailed report on the 1582 festival; Tülay Reyhanlı's book on Istanbul through the eyes of British travelers, which includes a translation of an Italian document about the festival in the British State Archives; and Zehra Toska's article on the transcription and annotated translation of a Persian ode, *Zübdet'ül-eş'âr*, about the festival.[28]

Two works focusing on the explanatory narrative of the festival should also be mentioned here. One is Hilmi Uran's *Sultan Üçüncü Mehmed'in Sünnet Düğünü* (Circumcision Festival of Sultan Mehmed III), which draws on a variety of historical and literary sources to provide information about the celebrations and also touches on issues such as the dress practices of the

[25] ÖZTEKİN, 1996.
[26] ARSLAN, 2011; ÖZDEMİR, 2016; ALVAN, 2020.
[27] OLGUN, 1937.
[28] ÖZKAN, 2004; REYHANLI, 1983; TOSKA, 1999.

period.[29] Another is an article by Orhan Şaik Gökyay, a literary historian, linguist, and poet, in which he analyzes the festival under the headings of guests, entertainment, banquet, events, etc., based on his research on examining two detailed manuscripts from the aforementioned books by İntizami and Mustafa Ali.[30]

A particular feature of these manuscripts is that they sometimes provide visual depictions of the festivities. As interest in books describing the festival of 1582 grew, so did the attention of art historians, since the illustrated *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* and the *Şehinşahnâme-i Murad-i Sâlis* dedicated to Murad III were also important sources for understanding Ottoman miniature art.

Sezer Tansuğ, the first researcher to examine the miniatures of festivals, analyzed the miniatures of *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* and *Surnâme-i Vehbî,*[31] discussing the development of miniature art through comparisons. His book *Şenlikname Düzeni* (The Structure of the Book of Imperial Festivity) is also important for revealing the similarities in practice between the Byzantine festivities organized in the Hippodrome and the Ottoman court celebrations.[32]

Nurhan Atasoy has published some of the miniatures in color at the original size of the book, *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, which is another contribution to the field of art history.[33] Atasoy presented detailed information about the author of the book, its illustrator, the political background of the period in which it was written, as well as an analysis and interpretation of the miniatures. She also identified the two pages with miniatures in the Philadelphia Free Library as having been torn from another visual source of the festival, the *Şehinşahnâme*.[34]

In this context, Nazlı Miraç Ümit, with her short article on miniatures in the context of performing arts, is among the researchers who follow the path paved by Metin And.[35] In the field of art history, the direct and indirect contributions of Emine Fetvacı, who has written numerous articles and published books on Ottoman art, are also worth mentioning. Her book *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*, in which she investigates how and through which processes illustrated chronicles were produced, how they were perceived in their time, and what kinds of messages they contained, examines a large number of illustrated chronicles

[29] URAN, 1942.
[30] GÖKYAY, 1986.
[31] This refers to a manuscript written by Vehbi and illuminated by Levni, describing the circumcision festival held in Istanbul in 1720.
[32] This book was first published in 1961 by De, then expanded and published in 1993 by YKY and again in 2018 by Everest. References in this study are to the 2018 publication: TANSUĞ, 2018.
[33] ATASOY, 1997.
[34] ATASOY, 1973.
[35] ÜMİT, 2014.

produced in the Ottoman court in the late 16th century. In this regard, Fetvacı analyzed in great detail the process of preparing the two miniature manuscripts describing the 1582 festival, the actors involved, and their contributions to the work.[36]

The last quarter of the 20th century marks a fertile period for research on the 1582 festival, expanding the scope, approach and focus of previous preliminary studies. During this period, the festival became the subject of numerous studies from different fields. Researchers have focused on topics such as entertainment and performance aspects, with attention on theater, dance, music, light and other shows; political aspects, masculinity, and manhood in the context of Sultan Murad and the circumcision; artisan processions with their cultural, historical, and social aspects; as well as the Hippodrome, with its public space and architectural features. These studies particularly examine the different aspects of the 1582 festival in its historical context. By referring to the same primary sources, and this time focusing on understanding the political, economic, and social structure of the period, researchers have made important contributions to the field through the articles and books they have produced. Likewise, they have been great pioneers in determining both the direction and the content of this dissertation.

Derin Terzioğlu's article "The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation", in which she undertook a critical reading of *surname*s and other written sources, was one of the first and most striking examples in this field.[37] Using Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque elements in medieval European festivals, this study aimed to better understand the functions and meanings of Ottoman court festivals and, as mentioned above, to reveal the effectiveness of court festivals in political and social contexts.

In this regard, Zeynep Nevin Yelçe is another researcher who analyzes the political atmosphere underlying the grandiose events and their motivations beyond the visible. Her first contribution in this field is her article in which she compares three court festivals organized in 1524, 1530, and 1539, demonstrating the performative aspect of these festivals.[38] The recently published book chapter "Palace and City Ceremonials" offers a more comprehensive framework, as the title suggests.[39] In this study, she analyzed Ottoman court ceremonies and rituals in terms of two parameters: "order" or "sense of order" and "ancient tradition". This research also examines the celebrations in a spatial context, as the article discusses the rituals

[36] FETVACI, 2013. Among art historians, Esin Atıl, Filiz Çağman, Zeren Tanındı, Günsel Renda and Metin And, who worked on Ottoman depiction, miniatures, and illustrated manuscripts, and who have indirectly contributed to the field, should also be mentioned.
[37] TERZİOĞLU, 1995.
[38] YELÇE, 2014.
[39] YELÇE, 2022.

and festivities organized on the street, in the palace and at the Hippodrome under separate sub-chapters. Thus, it analyzes in detail circumcision and wedding celebrations, as well as processions for various purposes, such as imperial campaign departure or return, funerals, and the enthronement ceremonies. Image creation in the context of the Ottoman sultan and the role of organized celebrations in this process constitute the core of her studies.

Çiğdem Kafescioğlu also contributed to the study of spatial and public space with a very in-depth analysis. Kafescioğlu used İntizami's book to examine how Atmeydanı was portrayed in Ottoman historical narratives and explored the connections between urban spaces, spatial practices, and representations of urbanity. In this context, she presented a comprehensive analysis of this manuscript and revealed the impact of the political structure of the period on spaces, specifically Atmeydanı, and its reflections in visual representation.[40]

The social and economic historian Suraiya Faroqhi wrote wide-ranging works on Ottoman material culture and the social aspects of court celebrations. These studies draw attention to the participation of people from different social strata in events organized by the court. *Subjects of the Sultan. Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* is her comprehensive study, in which she highlights Ottoman festivities, including the festival organized by Murad III in 1582. In this book, especially under the title "Ceremonies, Festivals and Decorative Arts", she addresses specific topics such as dervish ceremonies, artisan parades, and the reflection of the relationship between the sultan and the people.[41]

Her work on artisans, a very important component of urban society, is particularly groundbreaking. A researcher interested in the artisans' procession during Ottoman imperial celebrations would benefit from reviewing Faroqhi's studies as well as Eunjeong Yi's analysis of guild organization in 17th-century Istanbul.[42]

Another important contribution to the topic is the book *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World* (2014), which Faroqhi prepared together with Arzu Öztürkmen. The book combines essays by various scholars focused on entertainments in different periods of the Ottoman Empire. Faroqhi also contributed to this book with her chapter, "When the Sultan Planned a Great Feast, Was Everyone in a Festive Mood? Or, Who Worked on the Preparation of Sultanic Festivals and Who Paid for Them?"[43] In this context, she drew attention to the destruction caused by the long-lasting celebrations, which are always mentioned for their

[40] KAFESCİOĞLU, 2019.
[41] FAROQHI, 2005a, for the mentioned chapter see pp. 162–184.
[42] FAROQHI, 2005b; YI, 2005.
[43] FAROQHI, 2014a.

splendor. She also discussed the financial aspects of the sultans' sumptuous festivities and the figures involved in them. Mihoko Oku's article on the personnel and material necessities similarly deals with the financial aspects of the festival.[44] His doctoral dissertation, completed in 2013, is also of great value, as it examines the festival as a holistic historical event within the context of the governing system.[45]

Suraiya Faroqhi's work, based on historical sources and at the same time examining a single material, folkloric item, or performance in detail, continues to provide a rich resource for researchers in performance studies. An example of this is her article "Fireworks in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul", in which she provides a history of fireworks and conveys their effectiveness as an element of legitimization not only in festivals but also in other imperial contexts.[46] It is also appropriate here to further recall cultural historian Hakan Karateke's research on fireworks and explosions, which focuses more on Ottoman ceremonies. Karateke has described pyrotechnic explosions in detail, providing examples from different festivals.[47]

Many other studies, with different perspectives and focuses, deal with the performative aspect of the festival. For instance, Şehsuvar Aktaş's doctoral dissertation, prepared under the supervision of Metin And, examines the *ludic* nature of 16th-century festivals in comparison with European examples and discusses the 1582 festival in this context. In the thesis, the 1582 festival and 16th century European festivals are analyzed in terms of the activities that took place during the celebrations and the element of "play" inherent in these activities.[48]

Arzu Öztürkmen, a leading researcher in the field of dance studies, is an active contributor to the historical and performance-based analysis of the festivities. The book *Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean* (2014), which she edited together with Evelyn Birge Vitz, features contributions from many researchers and consists entirely of studies focusing on performance, while also including articles that analyze festivals (one of which, Faroqhi's work on fireworks, was mentioned above). Öztürkmen has published numerous articles in which she interprets the iconography and narrative aspects of the festivities through the lens of dance and performance. For example, in her article "Performance, Iconography, and Narrative in Ottoman Imperial Festivals", she analyzed miniatures located in the Topkapı Palace Library and drawings by European travelers to

[44] OKU, 2017.
[45] Despite all my efforts, I was unable to access this thesis. This study is therefore limited to his article and the English abstract of his thesis. See: OKU, 2013.
[46] FAROQHI, 2014b.
[47] KARATEKE, 2015.
[48] AKTAŞ, 1996. I would like to thank him for his generosity in sharing his work with me.

examine dance in Ottoman court festivals. While analyzing these dance genres from a choreological perspective, she highlighted how dance and performance were represented visually and narratively.[49]

Ido Ben-Ami, who has contributed to the and study of emotions, a relatively new field, focused on the emotional atmosphere in his article "Emotions and the Sixteenth-century Ottoman Carnival of Animals", analyzing the performances with animals in the 1582 festival.[50] Hedda Reind-Kiel is another name who treats animals as central research subjects. Her work on the importance of animals as diplomatic gifts, especially from the 16th century onwards, is also significant.[51] She examined the shifts and continuities in the quantity and quality of gifts that were offered to the Sultan by Ottoman officials of various ranks or foreign envoys. Her article "Power and Submission: Gifting at Royal Circumcision Festivals in the Ottoman Empire (16th-18th Centuries)", which examines the diplomatic effects of gift-giving, directly addresses the 1582 festival.[52] This study draws on historical records such as festival registers, Ottoman chronicles, and notably, the gift registers of major Ottoman imperial celebrations in 1582, 1675, and 1720.[53]

When it comes to the performative aspect of the festival, as well as its descriptive and narrative features in the sources, it is crucial to mention an important contribution from the field of music. Ersu Pekin's "Surnamenin Müziği" (Music of the Surname) analyzes the instruments mentioned and described in the *Sûrnâme*, the *Şehinşahnâme* and other miniaturized books of the earlier period.[54] In this article, Pekin drew attention to the practice-centered character of Ottoman music and the methodological problems in analyzing both the music itself and the instruments performed. In this context, he argued that illustrated manuscripts can serve as a tool for studying the development of Ottoman music history, especially through instruments. Indeed, this research, particularly in the field of organology, is an important contribution not only to the study of the 1582 festival but also to the history of Ottoman period music practices.

Considering recent historical research on the 1582 festival, the work of additional researchers who have made substantial contributions by examining the political and economic background of the event should be emphasized. The early Ottoman historian Kaya Şahin's

[49] ÖZTÜRKMEN, 2011.
[50] BEN-AMI, 2017.
[51] REINDL-KIEL, 2010.
[52] REINDL-KIEL, 2009.
[53] REINDL-KIEL, 2007.
[54] PEKİN, 2003.

works in this field are noteworthy. Especially when examining the process of transcribing the 1582 festival, he focused on the multiplicity of approaches to writing and recording of history, as well as the concept of authorial agency.[55]

It is also essential to mention recent thought-provoking and pioneering studies that have been particularly helpful in the sonic analysis and contextualization of the festival in this dissertation. The first example of this is Tamás Kiss' analysis of the differences in the historical narratives of the 1582 festival, using the re-enactment of the War of Cyprus as a case study. This analysis, which was part of his PhD in history, *Cyprus in Ottoman and Venetian Political Imagination, c. 1489-1582*, was published as a book chapter in 2015.[56]

In this regard, Fariba Zarinebaf's article "Asserting Military Power in a World Turned Upside Down" is one of the notable contributions. This study drew parallels between the Ottoman festivities, Renaissance Europe, and Iranian court celebrations.[57] Another researcher is Özgen Felek, especially known for her work on Murad III's dream letters, spirituality, and personality. Felek has made a new and extremely valuable contribution to this field with her article analyzing the gender codes depicted in the narratives dedicated to the 1582 festival.[58] She argued that the festival functioned as a stage on which Sultan Murad, in particular, and the various groups and institutions involved in the event more broadly, displayed their understanding of masculinity and manhood.

This literature review was restricted to the 1582 festival to present the research specifically in relation to the subject. For this reason, Sinem Erdoğan İşkorkutan's published thesis on the 1720 festival, Hakan Karateke's book on ceremonies in the late Ottoman period, Zeynep Tarım Ertuğ's article on the entertainment and *meclis* gatherings organized in the Ottoman palace in the 16th century, Stephen P. Blake's work on the concept of time and his analysis of celebrations in the Safavid, Mongolian and Ottoman Empires, Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet's studies on entertainment and Ottoman society, Suna Süner's book chapter on early opera performances and their impact on diplomacy, and Gülru Necipoğlu's analysis of ceremonies and architecture, particularly in relation to diplomacy, can be briefly presented as additional sources.[59]

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[55] ŞAHİN, 2017; 2018; 2019.
[56] KISS, 2015; 2016.
[57] ZARINEBAF, 2014.
[58] FELEK, 2019.
[59] Some of these works will already be cited in this study. For others, see: TARIM ERTUĞ, 2007; BOYAR & FLEET, 2019; SUNER, 2013.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Festivals, which Alessandro Falassi defines as "time out of time", are occasions when people break away from the ordinary. Ottoman court celebrations revolved around the court and its entourage. With their carnivalesque atmosphere, they created this "extraordinary" timeframe and served as a means of escape from the mundane and from the everyday life.[60] Through various forms of entertainment, such as plays, games, music, dances, and sumptuous foods, festivals offered individuals an opportunity to unwind, rejuvenate, and enjoy themselves.

There are other examples that reveal this "detachment from reality" aspect of Ottoman festivities. For instance, prisoners were pardoned by the sultan and state affairs were suspended during celebrations. Diplomat and historian Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall provides the example of the wedding of Halil Pasha and Sultan Murad III's daughter Fatma in 1593, noting that for a full week, both court and governmental affairs were put on hold.[61]

Notably, while these festivals served as a form of entertainment for the sultan, his family, statesmen, and guests, they also acted as a means of alleviating political tension or mitigating failure during periods of social and political turmoil. For example, regarding the wedding organized in 1524 by Sultan Süleyman I, the ruler demonstrated his trust and support for İbrahim Pasha, who had been appointed grand vizier in 1523, following the revolt of the second vizier, Ahmed Pasha.[62] Similarly, Hammer-Purgstall linked the decision to host the circumcision festival in 1530 to the Ottomans' unsuccessful attempt to conquer Vienna, as well as to the strengthening of the Habsburg Empire and Charles V's (r. 1519–1556) coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in the same year.[63]

The festivals brought together the sultan, who was also referred to as "the Shadow of God on Earth" (*Padişâh-ı ruy-ı zemin zillullahi fi'l-arz*), his family, and his subjects in one location. As such they played a crucial role in reinforcing the obedience of the people and in forming new or strengthening existing bonds and connections.

[60] FALASSI, 1987, pp. 6–7.
[61] HAMMER-PUGRSTALL, 1840, p. 589.
[62] YELÇE, 2014, pp. 73–74.
[63] HAMMER-PUGRSTALL, 1840, pp. 79–82; ŞAHİN, 2018, pp. 467–468.

1.3.1. The Concept of Power in the Context of the Ottoman Empire

In order to grasp and better understand the versatility of Ottoman court festivities, as well as the motivations behind their planning, organization, and subsequent historical transmission, a brief reflection on concepts of power is essential. "What is 'power'?" asked Robert A. Dahl in his article "The Concept of Power", adding: "Most people have an intuitive notion of what it means. But scientists have not yet formulated a statement of the concept of power that is rigorous enough to be of use in the systematic study of this important social phenomenon."[64] Numerous contributions from sociology, economics, and political science have shaped the theorization of political power. However, the general applicability of such theoretical approaches depends on a careful consideration of the context's geography, cultural, and social background, as these factors significantly influence the perception of power. Similarly, the period or timeframe under analysis plays a crucial role in understanding power dynamics.

These parameters are particularly relevant when examining the concept of power in the context of the Ottoman Empire, as the empire cannot be considered an entity with uniform and unchanging structural characteristics. In this regard, I will focus on two specific issues related to the notion of power, organized under separate sub-headings, which together form a theoretical framework for the remainder of this section. The first part addresses the concept of the empire and the way it functioned during the period under study. The second part explores what "power" meant in this period, with particular attention to the position of the sultan as the ruler within the system. While the first section aims to illuminate the relationship between the empire and power in a general sense, the second focuses on the sultan's role and authority within this framework.

Imperial Power

Karen Barkey begins her article on the changes in the structure of authority and administration in the Ottoman Empire over time by summarizing the period including the reign of Murad III as follows:

> At its height in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman empire linked three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. The empire stretched from the southern borders of the Holy Roman Empire through Hungary and the Balkans to Yemen and Eritrea in the

[64] DAHL, 1957, p. 201.

> south, controlling much of North Africa and western Asia, and encompassing an array of cultures, languages, peoples, climates and social and political structures.[65]

The Ottoman Empire was the largest and most powerful state in the world, surpassing even ancient Rome as the biggest empire in the Mediterranean. It was also considered the most long-lasting empire in the history of Islam. By the 1500s, the Ottomans had achieved unprecedented levels of territorial control and domination, surpassing all other global powers in terms of both land and population under their rule. Alan Mikhail describes the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the late 15th and 16th centuries, noting that its power was present in almost all major events of the period and shaped both the old and new worlds.[66]

The political power of the Ottoman Empire, on its way to becoming a "world power",[67] stemmed from the combination of authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty, supported by its vast territorial, multinational, linguistic and religious structure. Remarkably, the Ottoman dynasty and its empire ruled for more than 600 years. Karl K. Barbir attributes this longevity to three parameters, one of which is plurality, highlighting the empire's ability to manage difficult communications, varying population densities, diverse methods of rule, and acceptance of pluralism as a governing norm.[68]

Another noteworthy aspect of the empire was the interplay between patrimonialism and feudalism. Several scholars have discussed the differences between the two in the Ottoman context, suggesting that patrimonialism had a stronger influence than feudalism, which was more prevalent in medieval Western societies. The Ottoman state thus relied more heavily on patrimonial structures, with a complex and layered system of direct and indirect rule that produced regional variations in the application of patrimonial authority.[69]

Additionally, Ottoman bureaucracy was patriarchal, with the sultan at the center of the patrimonial system. As the case of Ottomans illustrates, patriarchy was always at the center of patrimonialism. Following Max Weber, patrimonialism can be understood as a modernized form of patriarchal authority. Quoting Weber, Robert A. Dahl notes: "'Herrschaft ist … ein Sonderfall von Macht' (Dominance is ... a special case of power), Authority is a special case of the first, and Legitimate Authority a subtype of cardinal significance."[70] Weber classified

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[65] BARKEY, 2016, p. 102.
[66] MIKHAIL, 2020, pp. 2–3.
[67] İNALCIK, 1995, pp. 35–40.
[68] BARBIR, 2021, p. 446.
[69] MARDİN, 1969, p. 259.
[70] DAHL, 1957, p. 202.

patrimonialism as a type of domination constituting legitimate authority under the category of "traditional authority".[71] George Ritzer further identifies three characteristics of traditional authority: it is based on the claim of leaders, the belief of followers, and the sanctity of age-old rules and powers,[72] all of which can be traced in the Ottoman case.

The Ottoman Empire's bureaucratic and patrimonial features were particularly strong at the height of its power. Halil İnalcık described the ruling system as divided into two major classes:

> The first one, called *askerî*, literally the 'military', included those to whom the Sultan had delegated religious or executive power through an imperial diploma, namely officers of the court and the army, civil servants, and *Ulema* [Doctors of Islamic law]. The second included the *reaya*, comprising all Muslim and non-Muslim subjects who paid taxes but had no part in the government. It was a fundamental rule of the Empire to exclude its subjects from the privileges of the 'military'. Only those who were actually fighters on the frontiers and those who had entered the *ulema* class after a regular course of study in a religious seminary could obtain the Sultan's diploma and thus become members of the 'military' class.[73]

This structure confirms Weber's perception of patrimonialism: the patriarch, in this case, the sultan, holds mostly unlimited power, yet administrative forms are necessary to maintain the system and, to some extent, limit the patriarch's power.[74] Barkey's definition of empire aligns with this structure:

> My particular definition of empire is adapted well to a particular group of premodern, traditional political formations with contiguous territories: a large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a variety of direct and indirect relations, where the center exercises political control through hierarchical and quasi-monopolistic relations over groups ethnically different from itself.[75]

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[71] WEBER, 2019, pp. 354–374. Nonetheless, there are sources that suggest variations or complexities in the nature and degree of patrimonialism during the Ottoman era. It is worth noting that the use of patrimonialism as a concept to understand the Ottoman Empire is not without debate, and different scholars may have different interpretations. Hakan T. Karateke, who examines the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the Ottoman State and to addresses the question "How did they stay in power for so long?", emphasizes that Weber's classification of "traditional authority" can never be fully exist "in their pure sense in the real world", yet it remains useful as a framework for understanding Ottoman governance. See: KARATEKE, 2005a, pp. 14–15.
[72] RITZER, 2011, p. 132.
[73] İNALCIK, 2017, p. 38.
[74] WEBER, 2019, pp. 361–362.
[75] BARKEY, 2016, p. 105.

Here, the bureaucratic structure positions the sultan at the center, ensuring the continuity of his patrimonial authority while maintaining an active role in administration.[76] The Ottoman example illustrates that key features for a large, long-lasting empire include pluralism and legitimization of rule. In the Ottoman context, legitimacy was closely tied to patrimonial authority, following Weber's concept of traditional power. Consequently, the sultan's central role remains the focus of the following subsection.

Sultanic Power

The question of how the Ottoman Empire maintained its power for so long remains one of the most intriguing topics for scholars. As will be discussed later in the chapter on the festival's historical background, which, for the purposes of this study, primarily focuses on the 16th century, the empire's history and power were far from static. A stabilizing and crucial factor in the continuity of the empire was the source of its legitimacy, as noted earlier in this chapter. To sustain this legitimacy, it was essential for political authority (or "traditional authority", following Weber's classification) to maintain a consistent self-presentation.

In this context, the figure of the sultan played a critical role in the functioning of the system. The structure of the Ottomans' patrimonial governance clearly demonstrates that the sultan was one of the most important actors within the framework. While this specific function of the sultan naturally evolved over time, the core of his role remained relatively constant.

One of the constants in this system was that the legitimacy is a faith-based one, as Hakan Karateke carefully emphasizes. Accordingly, even if there is an inherited right to rule, what ultimately matters is what the subjects believe. The notion that one lineage is inherently superior to others is rooted in social norms and expectations. In other words, "legitimacy is not something that the political authority possesses concretely but something that its subjects assume it to possess".[77]

What, then, is the role of the sultan in preserving this belief - and thus maintaining legitimacy? One aspect refers to what a sultan represents. Although individual Ottoman rulers naturally differed in character, there existed a broader idealization of the status of "sultan".

[76] BARKEY, 2016, pp. 107–109.
[77] KARATEKE, 2005a, pp. 15–18.

Certain characteristics were inherent to "hereditary authority",[78] and there were specific qualities that the ideal sultan was expected to embody. The first and foremost of these components is the hereditary and divine right to rule.

A ruler who is connected to the past, both historically and traditionally, and, more importantly, to a lineage, especially a divine lineage, holds a significant advantage in establishing and maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of subjects. The most effective method for Islamic rulers was to base their authority on the Prophet Muhammed's lineage. This notion of the "divine right to rule" gained particular importance in the 16th century, following the conquest of the Arab principalities.[79]

Accordingly, the Ottomans first defined themselves as the "successor of the Prophet" and assumed the status of caliph.[80] Later, they adopted the title *zillullah* or "the shadow of God", thus terminologically emphasizing their direct connection to the divine.[81] During the 16th century, the Ottoman caliph was regarded as a mystical figure with authority over both spiritual and earthly domains. The dynasty was believed to be divinely appointed to fulfil God's objectives, and the sultan (as caliph) was referred to as God's friend and representative on earth. In this way, he was perceived as "the embodiment of God's representation on earth."[82]

Religiosity was a key component of the Ottoman sultan's legitimacy and, consequently, of his sanctity. The sultan's adherence to both religious and traditional practices and rituals, and thus to the sanctity of the past, was instrumental in ensuring the obedience of his subjects.[83] The ruler's piety contributed to the imagined bond between the subjects and the sultan. Of great importance was how the sultan presented himself, rather than whether he was genuinely

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[78] KARATEKE, 2005a, p. 19. At this point, I would like to highlight Karateke's extensive research on the Ottoman Sultanate and governance system, with a particular focus on legitimization. In particular, his article "Legitimization of the Ottoman Sultanate" had had a significant impact on the development of this chapter.

[79] Although, as Karateke examines in detail, the Ottoman sultans faced contradictions when attempting to connect with the past and affirm their nobility. The main issue was that the Turkish heritage, which the Ottomans had previously proudly defended, posed a problem for claiming this religious title. Because the caliphate was an Arab institution, their ethnic identity complicated their assumption of this divine status. See: KARATEKE, 2005a, 23–27. It is clear that the issue of the Ottoman sultan's caliphate was particularly controversial in the 16th century. Similarly, in 1544, Süleyman I's grand vizier, Lütfi Pasha, published a treatise in Arabic discussing the validity of prophetic succession and arguing that the Prophet's statement that those not belonging to the Qurayshi clan could not be caliphs had been misinterpreted. See: YILMAZ, 2018, pp. 1–4.

[80] The title of caliph, previously reserved solely for the ruler of Mecca and Medina and never held by any Ottoman sultan before him, was conferred on Selim I (r. 1512–1520) during a public ceremony in Cairo in 1517, following his conquest of the sacred lands from the Mamluks. For a detailed discussion of the acquisition of these sacred territories and Selim I's unprecedented unification of the lineage of Osman with the lineage of the Prophet—thereby combining religious and political power, see: MIKHAIL, 2020, pp. 283–310.

[81] KARATEKE, 2005a, p. 21.

[82] YILMAZ, 2018, pp. 1–4, 8–10.

[83] KARATEKE, 2005a, p. 41.

devout. A series of rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies with religious content, which Karateke terms the "religious theatrics of sovereignty", should be understood in this context.[84]

Another characteristic of the ideal sultan was his role as a warrior and conqueror. Accordingly, Ottoman sultans were expected to expand their territories, particularly within the Islamic world, and to become rulers or conquerors of the known world—an integral part of the ideal image. Here again, the presence of a religious dimension is evident. Indeed, warfare itself was considered a "holy war", as the 18th century historian Mustafa Naima described it, a sacred act carried out to glorify God.[85] Ottoman sultans were thus depicted as *gazi*s, warriors of the faith against all "infidels": Christians at times, Safavids at others.[86]

However, territorial expansion and the enlargement of sovereignty were nor sufficient on their own; it was equally important that the sultan's victorious presence be visible on the battlefield. As will be discussed later in the chapter on Murad III's sultanate, this aspect was critical to the persistence of the sultan's legitimacy, particularly until the end of the 16th century. In connection with this victorious image, the ideal sultan was also envisioned as a masculine and heroic figure. His masculinity, both in warfare and in private life, was constantly scrutinized. Indeed, a sultan's relationship with women, his sexual potency, and his ability to produce male heirs played a significant role in sustaining the perception of his masculine authority.

The fairness of the administration, as well as the ruler's role as a competent authority who defended the rights of the people, listened to their concerns, and provided solutions, was one of the most important pillars of the Ottoman system. This practice, which Halil İnalcık terms the "right to complain",[87] granted everyone, regardless of social class, profession, or religion, the entitlement to voice grievances and seek justice. Consequently, this system envisioned the ruler as a figure who maintained balance among different classes and social groups.[88] In this way, the trust of the subjects in the sultan as their protector was established and preserved, serving as a key mechanism for the continuity of legitimacy. Moreover, the sultan became "the very source of law",[89] with the authority to legislate. Within the dual

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[84] KARATEKE, 2005b, pp. 113, 118.
[85] Quoted from Naima in KARATEKE, 2005a, pp. 43–44.
[86] For Colin Imber's analysis of this figure of the "holy-heroic veteran" see: IMBER, 1995, pp. 138–153.
[87] İNALCIK, 1988, pp. 33–54. Saliha Okur Gümüşçüoğlu's analysis of archival sources and book of complaints is an example of one of the studies on this subject: OKUR GÜMÜŞÇÜOĞLU, 2012.
[88] HAGEN, 2005, p. 68. This article by Gottfried Hagen analyzes the regulation of state law—the "world order" (*nizam-ı alem*)—on which the Ottoman framework of legitimacy was based and discusses the concept by engaging with literature from the 15th to the 18th centuries.
[89] KARATEKE, 2005a, p. 38.

structure of the Ottoman justice system, sultanic law (*kanun*) and religious law (*şeriat*), sultanic law was based on non-religious, rational principles, particularly in public and administrative matters.[90]

The sultan's protection of his subjects' rights was closely linked to his concern for the people entrusted to his care. A common thread running through all studies of court-related public celebrations is the sultan's generosity. It was important for the people to enjoy prosperity during these lavishly organized festivities and to experience a celebratory atmosphere, even if only temporarily. This practice not only kept the ostentatious life of the dynasty members from public scrutiny,[91] but also served as an indication of the sultan's benevolence and care for his subjects. He was seen as the protector of the realm, capable of providing for all.

In his book analyzing the global influence of the Ottoman Empire on both the old and new worlds, Mikhail presents Sultan Selim I as the origin point of this "global power". He highlights Selim's life as an example of how the Ottoman Empire shaped the modern world, emphasizing his military initiatives, administrative techniques, personal charisma, and piety.[92] Considering all of these aspects, it becomes evident that the ideal sultan embodies a multifaceted structure. His charismatic power derived from both personal traits and capabilities. In this respect, and recalling that legitimacy is directly linked to faith, it is clear that the sultan must be active and interactive with his subjects to maintain his authority.

The legitimacy of Ottoman power was a cornerstone for the empire's longevity and success. Its functioning was rooted in patrimonialism, which can be understood through Max Weber's concept of "traditional authority". Another defining feature was the sultan's dominant role as "the shadow of God" and embodiment of power. Yet, sultans had to display and possess certain characteristics to preserve this legitimacy. Festivals, such as the one examined in this dissertation, served as natural instruments to reinforce and cultivate the sultan's image. The concepts of power, legitimacy, and their representation thus provide the theoretical framework and motivation for all the subsequent analytical sections of this dissertation.

[90] İNALCIK, 1995, pp. 70–75.
[91] KARATEKE, 2005a, p. 47.
[92] MIKHAIL, 2020, pp. 10–11.

1.3.2. Sensorial Aspects and the Sonic Atmosphere of the Festival 1582

There is a well-known, fundamental problem in writing the history of "Ottoman music"[93] and constructing a corresponding historical narrative: the lack of written sources, especially musical notation. Such primary materials are generally available only from the mid-16th century onwards, a period that, according to most researchers, is not extensive enough to support a fully musicological study. In his article on musical changes in the 17th century, Walter Feldman extends this "problem" to the broader "Islamic civilization", identifying the early 17th century as the earliest point from which a genuinely historical musicological study can be undertaken. In this regard, Feldman adds: "For earlier centuries and other regions of the Middle East, the researcher must be content to study the history of musical theory, with some reference to the social position of music".[94] The question of how to study early Ottoman music historically has therefore been opened repeatedly by the most prominent researchers in the field.[95]

While Feldman's statement accurately reflects the methodological limitations faced by earlier scholarship, more recent studies—including this one—demonstrate that the sonic and musical histories of the Ottoman world can in fact be reconstructed through a broader range of sources. Miniatures, festival books, travel accounts, and archival documents all provide valuable sonic evidence when approached with interdisciplinary tools. Thus, instead of reiterating the "lack" narrative, this thesis adopts an expanded historiographical view that foregrounds the possibilities inherent in non-notational materials.

Since the circumcision festival of 1582 coincided precisely with this "hard-to-study" period,[96] I will explain in the following how this study can nevertheless take its place in the historiography. I will further outline the approach in this research and subsequently provide detailed information on the various sources used for the analysis in the next section.

This study primarily analyzes the sonic atmosphere of a festival that took place in 1582 in one of the most significant squares of Istanbul. To approach it, the first step is to reflect on the very nature of the festival itself. As discussed in the previous sections, it was organized by

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[93] By placing "Ottoman music" in quotation marks here, I borrow Martin Greve's solution for this term, which seeks to keep the term open for debate among scholars with different perspectives. See: GREVE, 2015, p. 9.
[94] FELDMAN, 2015, p. 87.
[95] Here I would especially like to refer to the book *Writing the History of "Ottoman Music"* edited by Martin Greve. It contains very valuable discussions on the periodization, historical narrative, sources, interpretation, and reconstruction of Turkish-Ottoman music. See: GREVE, 2015.
[96] This caution regarding the scarcity of sources in early Ottoman music was also emphasized during my doctoral training at Istanbul Technical University and has guided my approach throughout this study.

the ruler of the time on the occasion of his son's circumcision, and as such, it was a purely political event. However, although this *sur-ı hümayun* is referred to as a *şenlik* (festival), its connection to the imperial court - and the fact that the people of the city participated mostly as observers and/or performers - makes it controversial to consider it a festival in the full sense of the term.[97] While this contradiction calls into question the sociality and publicness of the celebrations, the festivities nonetheless took place over a long period, involving the participation of many diverse individuals and communities from both Istanbul and other cities. Indeed, in her description of Istanbul's urban life, Fariba Zarinebaf emphasizes this diverse and multi-faceted atmosphere that also defines the structure of this festival: "The fusion of different genres and traditions also took place in Istanbul, where the Palace, Sufi lodges, churches, salons of Ottoman princesses, taverns and coffee houses became centers of performance as well as patronage".[98] Given this context, I particularly consider this political and multi-layered aspect of the festival for my analysis. To understand it's political nature, I therefore draw upon the concept of power and interpret it in relation to certain sonic aspects, which will be discussed in detail below.

Naturally, there is existing research that addresses the concept of sound in early Ottoman historical studies.[99] However, as mentioned in the literature review, it is evident that the circumcision celebrations of 1582 still require further investigation in this regard. In addition, it is important to examine the festival as a sensorial meeting place. As a "sound student" reflecting on historical sounds, I consider this festival to be a "sonic-social event",[100] consciously designed to engage multiple senses and emotions. This intention was particularly shaped by the ruling authority's efforts to create a deliberate festival atmosphere, influenced by the political and economic contexts that will be discussed later.[101] The various sensorial dimensions of the festivity together produced specific olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and, of course, visual effects. Sound occupied a crucial place within this atmosphere as a mediator inseparable from other sensory experiences. Eckehard Pistrick and Cyril Isnart describe this

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[97] TANYELİ, 2022, p. 46.
[98] ZARINEBAF, 2017, pp. 9–10.
[99] In this regard, Nina Ergin's work is particularly noteworthy for understanding the sonic world of the period. Additionally, the research of Judith I. Haug, Peter McMurray, Salih Demirtaş, and Martin Greve greatly contributes to the study of Ottoman and Islamic auralities. Furthermore, when not limiting the scope to Ottoman festivities or even Ottoman history, Patrick Eisenlohr's *Sounding Islam* can also be considered a relevant example: EISENLOHR, 2018a. Moreover, the volume *Sounds of Power* book, which includes contributions from scholars of various disciplines examining court rituals, festivities, and diplomatic encounters as sonic events, further enriches this field: DEMİRBAŞ & SCHARRER, 2024.
[100] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 18.
[101] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 2.

interconnectedness as follows: “Spatially- (and temporally-) bound sounds are demarcation and commenting on our environment. They, beside vision and smell, charge space with meanings and affectivity.”[102] Indeed, these factors interact so closely and overlap so significantly that it is impossible to separate their individual contributions to the overall atmosphere.[103]

Focusing on a festive setting, I examine sound through various performances, treating it as an important tool in the representation of power. The question of how to conceptualize sound within this overall structure is particularly critical. As one source emphasizes: “If we want to “read” spaces through listening to them, if we want to experience space sonically, we must focus on the moment of performance. This is where social interaction, the interconnection between space, sounds and memories becomes evident”.[104] Therefore, I study the sonic atmosphere of the festival as a combination of different, specific aspects, refusing to strictly distinguish between the categories of music, sound, noise, and silence, or to focus on only one of them. Analyzing all the sonic moments of this festival within a single thesis would be impossible, which further justifies this selective approach.

The first case study for a manifestation of the festival’s sonic atmosphere that I have chosen to analyze is a musical act that dominated many moments of the celebrations: the performance of the *mehter*, the military band. Its historical character and connection to the figure of the sultan, the head of power, are central to this analysis. The second case study focuses on fireworks and other explosives, considered as wonders of the historical period under investigation. Through a comparison of different narratives, I examine a model of a mountain equipped with fireworks and other explosives on a gigantic scale, as well as the accompanying performance at the festival, which also engages the concept of noise. The third case study focuses on silence. Here, I first examine silence in the festival environment and then draw attention to its representation in archival material, which provides an additional dimension for analysis.

For studying all these different cases, I adopt an analytical framework that considers sound not only as a musical representation but also as a sonic structure of the event. In this regard, the analyses are informed by composer R. Murray Schafer’s concept of *soundscape*, one of the foundational approaches in sound studies.[105] Schafer’s work highlights the

[102] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 506.
[103] INGOLD, 2007, p. 10.
[104] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 508.
[105] SCHAFER, 1994.

interconnectedness between listeners and their surrounding environment, drawing attention to a sensory category often neglected compared to vision.[106] In my analysis, I utilize Schafer's notion of *soundmark* within the cultural and historical specificity of sound signs. This is particularly helpful for narrating the musical performance associated with the model of the mountain full of explosives. Furthermore, focusing on sound and its significance requires considering the audience, their perception and preferences, because analyzing the sonic environment of a historical event is inherently dependent on contemporary narratives.

While the concept of *soundscape* has many merits it also presents limitations. It is insufficient for fully understanding perceptual experience. According to anthropologist Tim Ingold, sound should be understood neither as purely mental nor material, but as a means of perception—a "phenomenon of experience" in which we are immersed. Ingold critiques the *soundscape* concept by likening it to the light-visual relationship: "Listening to our surroundings, we do not hear a *soundscape*. For sound, I would argue, is not the object but the medium of our perception. It is what we hear *in*. Similarly, we do not see light but see in it."[107] He further emphasizes sound's connection to the concept of landscape, arguing that its power lies in its independence from any particular sensory register, whether sight, hearing, touch, or smell. According to him, "Sound, like light, is neither physical nor psychic, but atmospheric", and it is "a phenomenon of the atmosphere".[108]

The majority of the accounts of the 1582 festival describe not only the listening experience and musical elements but also the multisensory atmospheric environment of the performance.[109] This underscores the necessity of considering the festival's sonic dimension as part of its broader atmosphere, rather than merely an extension (*-scape*) of it.[110] In line with this, I incorporate perspectives from sense studies, following anthropologist David Howes' approach.[111] Howes' concept of *sensescape* frames the idea that perception of the world is influenced by the cultural context. Comparing sources, analyzing their authors, and considering the motivations are therefore crucial. Additionally, composer Pauline Olivero's concept of *sonic awareness*[112] and human geography professor Paul Rodaways' *cultural sonic*

[106] INGOLD, 2007, p. 10.
[107] INGOLD, 2007, pp. 10–11.
[108] INGOLD, 2015, pp. 108–111.
[109] HOLZMÜLLER, 2019, p. 226.
[110] INGOLD, 2007.
[111] HOWES, 2005, pp. 1–17, 143–146.
[112] A perceptual theory concerning how humans perceive and produce sounds, based on two modes of information processing: attention and awareness. See: OLIVEROS, 1971, "Introduction I-II".

sensitivity[113] inform my understanding of perception, interpretation, and transmission by witnesses.

In sum, my analysis moves beyond the pure notion of *soundscape*, adopting a sensory-based approach that considers how musical and sonic events affect individuals and transform environments.[114] Building on these concepts, I interpret the 1582 circumcision festival as an intentionally produced atmospheric display of power.[115] I focus on understanding, interpreting, and making sense of descriptions of sounds rather than the sound itself.[116] This approach aligns with philosopher Gernot Böhme's notion of *atmosphere*, which emphasizes the shared reality of the perceiver and perceived.[117] Drawing on Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld's theory of garden art, Böhme also reminds us that music and sound are integral to the creation of atmospheric" scenes" with specific emotional qualities.[118] In a similar vein, Gregor Herzfeld discusses game music through the concept of atmosphere, emphasizing music's function as a medium that carries and generates atmospheric experience.[119] Considering sound in terms of atmosphere allows for a proper analysis of the musical and sonic parameters that shaped the orchestrated display of power at the 1582 imperial festival.[120]

Thus, I follow the concepts outlined above, emphasizing the narrators' "experiences, and in particular sensuous experiences" regarding the 1582 festival, as proposed by Böhme. I also highlight the extensive atmospheric planning intended to affect senses and emotions. In summary, this thesis combines perspectives from sound studies and anthropology to analyze the sonic dimensions and representation of power, taking into account the specific political, economic, and social structures of the period.

[113] RODAWAY, 1994.
[114] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 3.
[115] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 16.
[116] STERNE, 2012, p. 2.
[117] BÖHME, 1993, pp. 113–114, 122.
[118] Hirschfeld thus refers to the creation of natural arrangements featuring scenes in which a specific atmosphere prevails—such as serene, heroic, slightly melancholic, or serious. See: BÖHME, 1993, p. 123.
[119] HERZFELD, 2013, pp. 147–148.
[120] RIEDEL, 2019, pp. 5, 12.

1.4. Methodology and Sources

The 1582 festival holds a prominent place in the annals of early Ottoman history due to its extensive documentation. To analyze it in terms of the relationship between power and performance, and more specifically in the context of the surrounding sonic atmosphere, archival research is indispensable. The sources collected to shed light on this grand celebration include eyewitness narratives, accounts transmitted orally or in writing, eloquent odes praising the sultan and his reign, exquisite miniatures capturing the festivities, and the observations of European visitors. All these sources provide valuable material for examining this historical event and its multifaceted dimensions when interpreted critically and appropriately. Methodologically, the analytical sections of this thesis are grounded in source studies, particularly manuscript studies and iconographic analysis.

When considering the motivation and purpose behind these sources, they can be grouped into two main categories. The first comprises accounts produced by Ottoman individuals, often driven by their desire to gain favor with the sultan. These narratives were carefully composed to highlight the magnificence of the festival and to secure the ruler's appreciation. The second category consists of reports by foreigners, whose primary aim was to document the history, traditions, social life, and cultural aspects of the Ottoman Empire during their visits. Such accounts provide valuable insights into the multinational guests who attended the festival and offer a wealth of multilingual material for this case study.

This study does not seek to introduce previously unpublished archival sources but rather to analyze existing sources through the lens of sound. The chosen approach focuses on interpreting how and why these sources were produced, reflecting on the tendencies and preferences shaping the narrations. In particular, comparing the different festival narratives is critical to obtain a nuanced perspective onto the event. Without such comparison, one might wrongly assume that the depiction of the festival in the *surname*s, the imperial festival books, is entirely accurate. Thus, employing a variety of sources is essential for analyzing the function, scope, and impact of sound within the festival.

Historical sources dealing with this festival are presented below, grouped into Ottoman and foreign narratives according to their approach, language, and narrative features. This categorization allows for the identification of both differences and commonalities among the accounts of various observers. Due to their production style, narrative features, and scope, sources in the *surname* genre will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections,

particularly in the context of power, performance, and production. Additionally, a comparison is made between different copies of one manuscript in particular: İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, which serves as the most important and comprehensive source for the festival. As part of *textual critism*,[121] the *variant readings* observed are presented in relation to the analysis of the festival's sonic aspects.

As Ruhi Ayangil emphasizes in his discussion of the requirements for researchers interpreting sources on Ottoman music, a command of multiple languages is crucial.[122] This study encountered the challenges of working with 16th-century Ottoman texts, particularly court writings, and similar difficulties arise with sources in other languages. Nonetheless, the linguistic diversity of these sources proves highly rewarding, offering rich insights into the period.

1.4.1. Sources from Ottomans

*Festival Books (Surname**s**)*

The *surnames*, or festival books, constitute the primary reference sources for Ottoman court festivities. They provide detailed accounts of historical events, including the preparation and staging of the celebrations, daily programs, guests, banquets, and artistic performances. Three festival books, written by Ferahi, İntizami, and Mustafa Ali, provide extensive narratives of the 1582 festival. Among these, İntizami's work, recorded as *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* (Imperial Festival Book, 1584–1588), is the most widely known and frequently cited source for the 1582 celebrations.[123] Following this, Mustafa Ali's *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr* (The Gathering of the Poetic Meters upon the Scenes of the Festivity,[124] 1583) offers another significant historical account.[125] Ali's work was previously considered the earliest *surname* documenting this festival and the inception of the *surname* tradition.[126] However, a later study by Mehmet Özdemir revealed the existence of another festival book prepared even before Mustafa Ali's account. The year of completion of this detailed narrative written under the pen

[121] MAAS, 1958.
[122] AYANGİL, 2015, p. 55.
[123] Later, copies of this manuscript will be presented in detail. The version most frequently used in this study is the Topkapı Palace Museum Library copy: İntizami (T), 1588. For ease of reference, all manuscripts are identified throughout the thesis by the initials of the archive which they are held, as exemplified here.
[124] The translation is from ŞAHİN, 2019, p. 52.
[125] In this study, the copy of the manuscript in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library was used.: ALİ, 1586.
[126] ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. XII.

name Ferahi is known because the author is mentioned in the text. Özdemir argues that this work, which was written in 1582, is the first work describing the festival in question.[127] Among these three sources, İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* holds a special status because it includes miniatures that visually depict and transmit the festivities.[128]

Odes (Suriyye Kasidesi)

Another literary genre documenting court festivities is the odes, or *suriyye kasidesi*. These odes are typically found in *divan*s, *mecmua*s,[129] and anthologies, and they can describe not only celebrations organized within the palace or by the court, but also festivities arranged outside this specific circle.[130] In other words, in addition to events marking the birth of the sultan's children, the wedding of his daughters and sisters, and the circumcision of his sons, they can also commemorate celebrations hosted by high-ranking but non-dynastic figures and their families.[131] These odes generally adopt a more literary, artistic and ornate narrative than *surname*s, placing particular emphasis on glorifying the sultan. Describing events with praise and exaggeration is a common feature of this poetic form.

When listing the *suriyye*s of the 1582 festival, Mehmet Arslan's study is particularly noteworthy. In his eight-volume work on the sources of Ottoman court festivities, Arslan provides detailed information on this literary form and notes that it is impossible to determine the exact number of these poems, as they are included in numerous other books, collections, and anthologies.[132] Among these works written in verse, the most well-known is the 49-verse *suriyye* written by Nev'i, teacher of Murad III's princes.[133] Other notable examples include Mustafa Ali's 55-couplet ode,[134] Bali Çelebi's 37-couplet ode,[135] and Derzizade Ulvi's 50-

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[127] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 23–27. Özdemir's study provides information about this newly identified manuscript. However, the archival details cited by the author are no longer current, and the manuscript has therefore been inaccessible. Özdemir both stated in his book and confirmed personally that, at the time of publication, the manuscript was registered as "Yeni Yazmalar No. 2921" in the Süleymaniye Library. Despite inquiries at the mentioned archive and other potential libraries in Istanbul, the manuscript could not be located. Consequently, references to Ferahi throughout this study are rely on Özdemir's account.
[128] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588; ARSLAN, 2009.
[129] *Divan*: An anthological work collecting the works of *divan* literature poets. *Mecmua*: Compilation of different types of literary work.
[130] AYNUR, 2009.
[131] ARSLAN, 2011, p. 19.
[132] ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 90–91.
[133] NEV'İ, (n.d.); TULUM & TANYERİ, 1977, pp. 42–46; ARSLAN, 2011, pp. 302–305; OLGUN, 1937.
[134] AKSOYAK, 2018, pp. 174–178; ARSLAN, 2011, pp. 23–27.
[135] SİNAN, 2004, pp. 110–114.

couplet odes,[136] all describing the festival held in Atmeydanı in 1582. These odes share the characteristic of being included in the authors' *divan*s. Additionally, Sadeddin Nüzhet Ergun's *Türk Şairleri* mentions an ode by the 16th century poet İskender Paşazade Ahmed Pasha, including an excerpt from the verse in question.[137]

Other Literary Sources

Further important written sources are the so-called *şehnames*, which are considered not only literary works but also historical sources due to their content. In the 16th century, the name *şehnameci*, given to "the person who wrote the sultan's book",[138] originates from these works. The *Şehinşahnâme* (The Book of the King of Kings), prepared in Persian by Seyyid Lokman—the longest-serving official court historian of the Ottoman palace—was presented to Sultan Murad III and narrates historical events in two volumes covering the years 1574–1581 and 1582–1588. The circumcision festival is described in the second volume, published in 1592. This narrative is supported by illuminated folios, with 42 of the 95 miniatures in the book dedicated to the festival.[139]

Derviş Pasha's *Zübdetü'l-eş'âr* (1582), also written in Persian, is often regarded by scholars as a *surname* or "a work containing sections that have the characteristics of a *surname*".[140] As Zehra Toska demonstrates in her analysis and transcription of the work, the festival preparations and entertainments are depicted with exaggerations, following the eulogy to Murad III.[141] This source is particularly noteworthy as it includes three miniatures, one of which depicts the festival. When considering visual depictions of the 1582 festival, *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* and *Şehinşahnâme* are the primary references; however, the miniature in Derviş Pasha's *Zübdetü'l-eş'âr* holds a special place due to its distinctive composition.[142]

Recently, Türkan Alvan identified another literary source written by a poet named Kadimi.[143] Although shorter than the previously mentioned works, Alvan includes it in the *surname* genre, since it is longer than the *suriyye odes*. Kadimi's work consists of 22 chapters,

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[136] ÇETİN, 1993, pp. 93–97.
[137] ERGUN, 1936, p. 321. İdris Kadıoğlu also confirms this information: KADIOĞLU, 2018. p. 29.
[138] WOODHEAD, 2010.
[139] LOKMAN, 1597.
[140] ARSLAN, 2008, p. 126; ALVAN, 2020, p. 7.
[141] DERVİŞ, 1582; TOSKA, 1999.
[142] This miniature will be referenced later in this study.
[143] According to Alvan's study, the only copy of this work is registered in Paris, Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations (BULAC), MS TURC 41.

mostly composed of eulogies and odes dedicated to Sultan Murad III and Prince Mehmed, with only a few sections addressing the 1582 festival. Furthermore, the observational information in the festival-related sections is limited and conveyed without detail,[144] making this work comparable to a *suriyye*.

Chronicles and History Books

In addition to literary sources, there are chronicles and historical narratives documenting the period. Two contemporaneous works that mention the festival are Mustafa Ali's *Künhü'l-ahbâr* (The Essence of Histories, 1598) and Mustafa Selanikî's *Târih-i Selânikî* (History of Selaniki, 1563–1600).[145] In *Künhü'l-ahbâr*, Mustafa Ali briefly refers to the preparations, performances, and banquets of the circumcision celebrations, while directing readers to his earlier work, *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr*, which provides a more detailed account of the festivities.[146]

Bostanzade Yahya's *Tuhfetü'l-ahbâb* (*Târîh-i Sâf*), a short history of dynasties and nearly 300 Muslim rulers, briefly summarizes the 1582 festival under the title of Murad III. Completed around 1616, it remains unclear whether Bostanzade witnessed the festival personally. As a matter of fact, he notes only in a paragraph that "Each of the marvelous events that took place was remarkable enough to constitute a book on its own.".[147]

17th-century authors Mehmed Hemdemi Çelebi Solakzade and İbrahim Peçevi continued the practice of documenting the festival by drawing on earlier narratives.[148] Solakzade provides detailed information on the previous history books he used while writing his *Târîh-i Solakzâde* (History of Solakzade), which covers the foundation of the Ottoman state until 1657. Among these, we can assume that Mustafa Ali's *Künhü'l-ahbâr* was the source Solakzade used to describe the 1582 festival.[149] Similarly, Peçevi's history of 1520–1640 (1641) draws upon previous sources and briefly mentions the festival. In his account, he describes the preparatory process and beginning of the 1582 festivities, while also comparing it with the circumcision

[144] ALVAN, 2020, pp. 26–29, 76.
[145] ALİ, 2019; SELANİKİ, 1989.
[146] ALİ, 2019, p. 1024.
[147] BOSTANZADE, 1870, p. 85. The work survives only in its printed edition (Istanbul, 1287 [Hijri]); the manuscript on which it was based has not survived. The present study also refers to this printed edition as its source.
[148] SOLAKZADE, 1989.
[149] LOKMACI, 2018, p. 520.

celebrations of Sultan Süleyman I's sons (1530 and 1539) and the marriage of his sister Hatice Sultan to Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha (1524).[150]

Official Documents

Official archival documents include lists of materials or components ordered for use in shows or banquets, records of expenditures, lists of attendants, and sultanic decrees regulating the organization of the festival. Some of these documents were consulted at the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives (BOA) Ottoman Archives and at the library of the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive (TSMA).

1.4.2. Sources from Foreigners

The accounts of foreign travelers, merchants, ambassadors, and visitors present in Istanbul at the time of the festival constitute the non-Ottoman narratives. Most of these works were written for the authors' patrons, intending to report or convey what they observed in the capital. Indeed, recording observations and experiences was part of the travelers' routine. These foreign accounts played a pivotal role in shaping the perception of the sultan beyond the Ottoman territories.[151] Accordingly, they will be analyzed later in comparison with Ottoman sources to examine the function of sound during the festival and its role in the representation of power. In this context, differences revealed through such source comparisons will also be assessed in terms of "cultural sonic sensitivity", as outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

As noted previously, foreign accounts were mostly produced by visitors who were already in Istanbul at the time of the festivities on specific missions. A corresponding example is Jean Palerne's *Peregrinations dv S. Iean Palerne* (1606).[152] Palerne, who attended the festival as secretary to the Duke of Anjou, preferred a thematic rather than chronological approach, describing many performances in detail, including figures made of sugar, animal acts, artisan processions, and fireworks. Another firsthand narrative is George Lebelski's *Descriptio Ludorum Variorumq[ue] & Spectaculorum* (1582).[153] Lebelski, a member of the Polish delegation, wrote in Latin about the festival program, performances, and ceremonies.

[150] PEÇEVİ, 1992.
[151] YELÇE, 2022, p. 156.
[152] PALERNE, 1606. To see the transcribed text: PALERNE, 1991.
[153] LEBELSKI[1], 1582.

An English translation of this detailed record was later published by Franciscus de Billerberg in London in 1584.[154] Nicholas von Haunolth, representing the Holy Roman Empire, produced the most detailed Western account in *Particular Verzeichnuss mit was Cerimonien Geprang und Pracht des Fest der Beschneidung des jetzt regierenden Türkischen Keisers Sultan Murath* (1590), following a chronological narration.[155] Additionally, although not entirely devoted to the festival, Edward Webbe's *The rare and most wonderfull things vvhich Edw. Webbe an Englishman borne, hath seen and passed in his troublesome travailes* (1590)[156] also includes details of the 1582 festival.

These sources are further supplemented by reports and narratives written during or shortly after the festival, whose authors remain unidentified. The first of these is *Particular Beschreybung, der Ordnung unnd Herrlichkeyt, so in dem Fest der Beschneydung des Sultan Machmet yetzigen Türckischen Kaysers Sultan Amuraths Son, zu Constantinople im 1582. Jar ist gehalten den andern Junij vollendt worden*, written in German and published by Michael Manger in 1583. Its content and chronological narrative style closely resemble Haunolth's account.[157] Two additional anonymous German sources also merit mention: *Türkische Beshneidung. Warhaffte Kurtze Beschreibung, wie Amurath, der jetzt Kaiser, your Son Mahometen.... Beschneiden lassen*, published by Leonhard Heußler in Nürnberg in 1582, and the text published in *Fugger Zeitungen* by Victor Klarwill, also dated 1582.[158] These accounts have received less attention from researchers, likely because other German-language sources offer more detailed descriptions of the festivities. Nevertheless, they are included in this study.

Another valuable source is the report signed as "Delle vigne di Pera à 21 di Luglio 1582",[159] held in the Modena State Archive. Its anonymous author appears to have witnessed the festival firsthand.[160] This 7-page manuscript (file no. 193) was discovered by Nevin Özkan, first included in her article (2003) and later published with its transcription in her book (2004).[161] Özkan attributes the report to the Duke of Ferrera.[162] The author's note at the beginning, "I told what happened in the square until last Saturday", suggests that the report

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[154] The English translation of the text can be found here: LEBELSKI[2], 1584. This version will be used mostly during this study, and the Latin version will be referred only if needed.
[155] HAUNOLTH, 1595.
[156] WEBBE, 1590, para. 32.
[157] MANGER, 1583.
[158] TURKISCHE BESCHNEIDUNG, 1582; FUGGER, 1923.
[159] "Delle vigne di Pera" ("from the Vineyards of Pera") refers to the Western embassies' quarter in Pera (modern Beyoğlu), Istanbul. See, DURSTELER, 2006, p. 25; HAUG, 2019, p. 48.
[160] LA VIGNE[1], 1582.
[161] ÖZKAN, 2003; ÖZKAN, 2004, pp. 48–61.
[162] ÖZKAN-SPEELMAN, 2014, pp. 110–111.

was composed in two stages, with this manuscript representing the second half. An identical manuscript copy is preserved at The National Archives in the United Kingdom. This 6.5-page handwritten document, despite some damage, also ends with the signature "Delle vigne di Pera à 21 di Luglio 1582".[163] Tülay Reyhanlı proposes that the author of this report was in contact with Francis Walsingham, the English court's foreign minister at the time of the festival, while Derin Terzioglu suggests that the writer may have been an official reporter for the British court.[164]

Finally, it is worth mentioning sources whose authors did not attend the festival in person but whose narratives provide valuable information on the 1582 event. Reinhard Lubenau, a pharmacist who stayed in Istanbul as part of the ambassador Bartolomeo dei Pezzen's entourage between 1587 and 1589, shared his memories of Istanbul in his book, including information he had obtained about the 1582 festival.[165] Michel Baudier, historian of the French court during the reign of Louis XIII (r. 1610–1643) and author of several works on the Ottoman Empire, is particularly notable for his writings on administrative and military history. There is no evidence that Baudier even travelled to Ottoman lands; therefore, it is highly likely that his *Histoire Generale du Serrail et de la Cour du Grand Seigneur*, first published in 1626, relied on consultation of primary sources when describing the 1582 festival.[166]

The final source to be mentioned is the historian and diplomat Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (1827–1835), which remains one of the earliest reference works on Ottoman history. Appointed to the Austrian embassy in Istanbul in 1799, Hammer-Purgstall had access to Ottoman manuscripts, and his fluency in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (among other languages) facilitated this work. The circumcision festival organized by Sultan Murad III is included in second volume of this series, published in 1840,[167] with references to Selaniki, Mustafa Ali, and Haunolth.

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[163] LA VIGNE[2], 1582. The English translation of this letter is included in a book published by His Majesty's Stationery Office: BUTLER, 1909.
[164] REYHANLI, 1983, p. 82, fn. 167; TERZİOĞLU, 1995, p. 88.
[165] LUBENAU, 1995.
[166] BAUDIER[1], 1659. For the English translation, see: BAUDIER[2], 1635.
[167] HAMMER-PURGSTALL, 1840, pp. 516–527.

Chapter 2: The Background of the Ottoman Imperial Festival of 1582

In mainstream historiography, the 16th century is considered a remarkable era of military triumphs, marking the culmination of the Ottoman government's classical institutions and the emergence of a distinctive Ottoman literary and artistic prowess.[168] In the first half of the century, the reign of Sultan Süleyman I is often referred to as the "golden age" of the Ottoman Empire.[169] Following Mehmet II's conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the dynasty's military power increased significantly, establishing the Ottoman Empire as one of the major states of the period. This era is called the "golden era" due to the political and economic strength acquired by the Ottomans. With Selim I's conquest of Egypt and the unification of Muslim lands, Ottoman sultans assumed the role of defenders of the holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and became the caliphs of Islam, thereby taking on the protection of the entire Islamic world. The Ottomans achieved military victories from Eastern Europe to the Indian Ocean, expanding their territories substantially under Süleyman I's reign. These accomplishments strengthened their sovereignty and facilitated a wide commerce network, fostering trade with both Western and Eastern countries, which became an important source of economic power.

Suraiya Faroqhi also emphasizes the cultural developments and transformations alongside the political and economic changes. She notes that the 16th century was a pivotal period for Ottoman historiography, during which different types of written sources emerged or were refined. Ottoman historians produced numerous works, including *divan* poetry, collections of poet biographies and poetry samples (*tezkire*),[170] chronicles (*vakayiname*), and heroic narratives, which continue to inform our understanding of the Ottoman world today.[171] Additionally, written sources from other countries were acquired and preserved by the Ottomans, for example, books transported from Cairo after the conquest of Egypt. Further military victories enabled the Ottoman sultans to expand these collections even more.[172] The language of the period also evolved, incorporating an increasing number of Persian and Arabic words, reflecting broader cultural influences.

Against this background of accumulated political, economic, and cultural power, it becomes evident why the period leading up to the Imperial Festival of 1582 is often regarded

[168] WOODHEAD, 1995a, p. 118.
[169] For an interesting study on the concept of "golden era" see BURKE, 1995.
[170] It serves as a literary anthology covering the poems and lives of poets and writers of classical Turkish literature.
[171] FAROQHI, 2016a, pp. 28–30.
[172] HAGEN, 2016, p. 493.

as the Ottomans' "golden era". Yet, interestingly, this same period also represents a significant turning point in Ottoman history.[173]

Fig. 1: Territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1700. YAPP & SHAW, 2023.

[173] A preliminary version of this chapter can be found in DEMİRBAŞ, 2024.

2.1. The Reign of Murad III: From the "Golden Age" to "Decline"

After the death of his father, Sultan Selim II's (r. 1566–1574), Murad III ascended the throne in 1574 as the eldest son. His reign roughly coincided with the onset of a development later characterized as the "decline" of the Ottoman Empire. It is frequently asserted that the Ottoman Empire reached its peak in the 16th century, often follower by the general assumption that its "decline and collapse" began shortly thereafter.[174] This periodization stems from historians of the late 16th century, who, reflecting on an idealized era, particularly the reign of Süleyman I, formed their conclusions by comparison. The foundation of this historical periodization relies both on internal comparison with the empire's own preceding "golden age" and on external comparison with contemporary Western powers such as France and Spain.

A key basis for the theory of "decline" is the evaluation of Ottoman military performance in the West. From the 14th century onwards, the Ottomans transformed a small principality into a vast empire through successive territorial expansions. During the so-called period of "decline", military campaigns lasted longer than in the 15th century, and the Ottomans faced formidable powers on both eastern and western fronts. Notably, the war against the Safavids lasted twelve years (1578–1590), followed shortly by the longest Ottoman-Habsburg conflict, the Thirteen Years' War, or Long Turkish War (1593–1606).

In fact, the effects of military conflict began even earlier. In 1571, the fleets of the Holy League and the Ottomans clashed off the west coast of Greece, in what became known in European sources as the Battle of Lepanto and in Ottoman sources as the Battle of İnebahtı.[175] The outcome was a decisive Ottoman defeat. While the significance of this encounter varies across different narratives, it played a role in undermining Ottoman power and dispelling the European perception of the "invincibility of the Turks". Consequently, this battle contributed to the widespread belief that "the Ottomans had entered a long period of decline".[176]

In addition, the decline thesis presupposes a loss of order within many Ottoman institutions, the state, and society. Historians drawing on 16th century sources[177] often cite this internal Ottoman "degradation" as a further explanation for the subsequent decline.[178] One

[174] The 19th-century orientalist historians Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Mouradgea d'Ohsson's periodization are examples of this tendency.
[175] Today it is Nafpaktos in Greece.
[176] HESS, 1972, p. 53.
[177] Among these, the most commonly encountered are the letters of advice (*nasihatname*), which became widespread during this period. These texts were addressed to the sultans, aiming to provide guidance and counsel based on observations of social and religious life.
[178] İNALCIK, 1995, pp. 41–52; 1998, pp. 15–28; LEWIS, 1968, pp. 21–39; 1962.

notable example is the Ottoman bureaucrat and chronicler Mustafa Ali, who links political failures to the deterioration of high culture and the bureaucratic structure. Ali criticizes the formation of the Ottoman ruling class in the 16th century and strongly opposes the promotion of incompetent individuals to high positions.[179] His *Nushatü's-Selâtin* (1581), a pioneering work in the *nasihatname* (book of counsel) genre, criticizes Ottoman society and administration, focusing on concrete events and disorders rather than theoretical issues. Ali explained that he wrote the work to inform the Sultan, who had withdrawn from daily affairs and neglected his supervisory duties, about the extent of bribery, corruption, and ignorance pervading the state. In this sense, the book reflects Ali's respect for both the state and the Sultan.[180] He described the perceived "collapse" by comparing the contemporary situation with the reign of Bayezid II: "What a beautiful age was that fine era, [for] the clean and the dirty were clear to people. Now we have come to a time, when neither the incapable nor the noble is distinct. No one rewards the people of dignity; rather, they are mocked and betrayed."[181]

During Murad III's reign, the court served as the center of Ottoman politics, and he was among the first sultans whose rule was markedly defined by the protocols and dynamics of court politics.[182] According to conventional interpretations, the diminishing competence of the sultans and their senior officials is considered one of the contributing factors that accelerated the perceived decline of the Ottoman Empire.[183] The central issue revolved around the sultans' detachment from the daily responsibilities of governing and leadership. This disengagement facilitated the spread of corruption and incompetence, posing a significant threat to the state's stability.[184] In this context, researchers have highlighted the growing influence of harem women and eunuchs.[185] This development was closely tied to changes in the administration of imperial decrees (*hatt-ı hümayun*) during Murad's reign: whereas appointments had previously required the written approval of the grand vizier, Murad demanded to personally review and sign all appointment documents. Mustafa Ali argued that this practice undermined the grand vizier's authority and enhanced the influence of eunuchs and concubines in administrative affairs.[186] Another indicator of the Sultan's diminishing control was the rising power of the

[179] FLEISCHER, 1986, pp. 214–231.
[180] FLEISCHER, 1986, p. 98.
[181] Quoted from Mustafa Ali's *Künhü'l-ahbâr* (1598), Bayezid II/Nişancılar, Introduction, Fatih 4225, fol. 183v., in FLEICHER, 1986, p. 205.
[182] PEKSEVGEN, 2009, p. 402.
[183] LEWIS, 1968, p. 23.
[184] WOODHEAD, 2005, p. 85.
[185] FAROQHI, 2012, p. 91.
[186] Quoted from Mustafa Ali's *Künhü'l-ahbâr* (1598), MS Nuruosmaniye 3409, fols. 293r.–v., by FLEISCHER, 1986, p. 295.

Janissaries, reflected in their growing social and economic influence and the frequent revolts they staged.

Economic challenges that had already emerged by the mid-16th century also intensified during the 1580s.[187] At the beginning of Murad III's reign, the Ottoman Empire faced a major economic disruption due to an influx of American silver, which caused the value of silver to drop by nearly one hundred percent.[188] This imbalance triggered a period of high inflation. The reduction of the silver content in coins by state officials further devalued the currency, leading to salary cuts based on the new official exchange rate set by the Sultan. In his economic analysis of the period, Ömer Lütfi Barkan argues that the resulting inflation caused widespread and unstable price increases in bazaars and markets. Moreover, he notes that this situation "caused great discontent in the community, which threatens the economic and political order".[189]

In his comprehensive history, *Künhü'l-ahbâr,* Mustafa Ali again links the decline in the prestige of the dynasty and the weakening of state authority to the fall in the value of money during Murad III's reign and the accompanying economic problems. The fact that the Janissaries were paid in devalued coins, and that tradesmen were expected to accept these, created further tensions, ultimately leading to the Janissary revolts of 1589, known as the Beylerbeyi Incident. This uprising is considered the first in a series of Janissary revolts, later referred to as the Istanbul Rebellions.[190] In the last quarter of the 16th century, European states were also grappling with massive international inflation, while wages were rising three- to fourfold. The Ottoman Empire was affected by these conditions as well and resorted to devaluation as a measure to cope. However, this led to further price instability and an escalating economic crisis. Rather than implementing a carefully designed economic strategy that accounted for potential financial uncertainties, the government prolonged the devaluation operation. The inability to manage the crisis effectively provoked revolts, as the populace suffered under the resulting hardships.[191]

Mehmet Kuru, in his insightful examination of tax surveys, describes the 16th-century as a remarkable timespan characterized by abundant rainfall. This period of plentiful precipitation resulted in bountiful harvests and flourishing agricultural production, particularly in Anatolia. Kuru aptly refers to this era as "a magnificent climate", highlighting the prosperous reign of

[187] FLEET, 2016, p. 49.
[188] FLEISCHER, 1986, p. 98.
[189] BARKAN, 1970, p. 572.
[190] FLEISCHER, 1986, p. 297.
[191] BARKAN & MCCARTHY, 1975, pp. 8–10.

Süleyman I. He then marks the turn to the 17th century with contrasting droughts and the accompanying uprisings that spread across Anatolia.[192] Another economically challenging development was the rapid population growth in both villages and cities. Following the end of favorable climatic conditions, grain production in many parts of the Ottoman lands appears to have been insufficient to meet the needs of the growing population.[193] Researchers analyzing cadastral record books (*tahrir defterleri*) particularly emphasize the gap between grain production and population growth. This shortage in food supplies contributed to a decrease in the rural population in the final decades of the century.[194] In one of his reports dated 1590, Lorenzo Bernardo, the Venetian ambassador at the time, also draws attention to the scarcity of supplies in Istanbul. Interestingly, he emphasizes organizational incompetence rather than a shortage: "Though it might seem that the city has lately suffered from many shortages and a great scarcity of grain, this stems from the Turks' lack of organization in this matter, since they live in a haphazard fashion, without setting aside any public provisions for this purpose."[195]

All these challenges have long contributed to the narrative of the Ottoman Empire's "decline". However, from the 1980s onwards, an "anti-decline" historiography emerged, analyzing and challenging this long-standing argument that had been reiterated across both Ottoman and foreign sources.[196] Recent research suggests that the Ottoman state underwent continuous transformations rather than experiencing a fall from idealized past standards or a failure to emulate Western practices effectively.[197] Moreover, this period of turmoil was not unique to the Ottoman Empire but was part of broader global trends, as evidenced by the widespread economic problems, including the aforementioned price increases, which also affected Western Europe.[198] Finally, scholars such as Cemal Kafadar, Donald Quataert, Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, and Baki Tezcan have pointed out that many factors traditionally interpreted as signs of decline are, in fact, ambivalent.

We can begin with the work of Cemal Kafadar as an example of these new, revisionist approaches. Kafadar challenges the argument that the Janissaries engaged in commercial activities alongside their military-administrative duties at the end of the 16th century—a

[192] KURU, 2019.
[193] BARKAN, 1957, pp. 23–26.
[194] FAROQHI, 2016b, pp. 466–471.
[195] DURSTELER, 2018, p. 53.
[196] Dana Sajdi examines the historical background relevant to this thesis in detail, presenting the academic literature on the subject along with the counterarguments it raises. See: SAJDI, 2007, pp. 1–40. For another important comprehensive study addressing this issue see, KAFADAR, 1997–1998, pp. 30–75.
[197] QUATAERT, 2003, p. 4.
[198] BARKAN, 1970, p. 578.

practice often cited as evidence of "corruption" within Ottoman state institutions.[199] Similarly, Donald Quataert, in agreement with Kafadar, draws upon a variety of historical sources to show that the Janissaries' involvement in production and trade dates back to much earlier periods.[200]

Going further, Jonathan Grant contends that the decline theory is misleading and inaccurate, at least with respect to the Ottomans' military and naval capabilities and their competence in war technology. He demonstrates that the Ottomans remained resilient in terms of "decline" well into the 19th century, particularly when compared to the military technologies of their European rivals and neighboring states. While it is true that the Ottomans lagged in military technology between the 15th and 18th centuries and lost wars and territory in the 17th century, they also regained lands lost to the Venetians and Austrians and continued to engage the Persians and Russians.[201] Furthermore, the notion of "territorial loss" or failure to acquire new territories is somewhat misleading: as the Ottomans found themselves surrounded by rival powers—the Habsburgs to the west, the Russians to the north and northeast, and the Safavids to the east—their strategic focus shifted from aggressive expansion to the preservation of existing territories within well-defined borders.[202] Indeed, by the end of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire's domain had even expanded further into the interior of North Africa.

Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj further proposes examining the "decline" issue through the lens of class dynamics. According to him, the period between 1560 and 1700 was characterized by shifts within the ruling elite, social mobility, and the redistribution of wealth. As mentioned earlier, Ottoman sultans began to share power with a broader array of figures. Abou-El-Haj highlights the so-called vizier and pasha gates, emphasizing that this structural transformation should not be interpreted as a sign of "collapse", since political order cannot be explained solely by the presence or absence of a charismatic leader.[203]

Supporting this view, Baki Tezcan notes that, following Abou-El-Haj, the formation of new spheres of power involving elites, the strengthening of the legal order to limit the monarch's authority, and the rising objections and rebellions of the Janissaries can be understood as a form of pre-democratization.[204] Quataert summarizes this perspective succinctly: "[…], rather than looking for sultanic despotism as the norm and deviation from it as decline, scholarship is revealing a constantly shifting locus of power." This highlights an

[199] KAFADAR, 2019, pp. 29–37.
[200] QUATAERT, 2010, p. 199.
[201] GRANT, 1999.
[202] BARKEY, 2016, p. 105.
[203] ABOU-EL-HAJ, 2005.
[204] TEZCAN, 2012.

Ottoman state in continuous transformation.[205] İnalcık also addresses this "power shifting", arguing that Weber's typology of patrimonialism cannot be universally applied. In the Ottoman case, the sultan's authority was never absolute, as bureaucratic professionalism and the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) constrained and counterbalanced the arbitrary and absolute powers of the ruler:[206]

> In its developed form in the sixteenth century, however, the Ottoman bureaucratic apparatus displayed a number of features that do not permit us to subscribe completely to Weber's description. Under Suleyman the Lawmaker (1520-66) the Ottoman bureaucracy cannot be viewed purely as part of the ruler's household, nor were its offices based purely upon personal relation and absolute subordination to the ruler. Empirical research suggests that the Ottoman bureaucracy evolved from a pure "patrimonial" structure and increasingly self-conscious and autonomous organization that functions with a relatively "rational" system of fixed rules and training.[207]

Indeed, Karen Barkey emphasizes that the Ottoman bureaucracy and patrimonial structures operated in a complementary manner, and in practice were subject to different logics that nonetheless went hand in hand. These two pillars, while sometimes at odds with each other, also collaborated in the routinization of Ottoman rule:

> The Ottoman empire was, however, a particularly mixed case because of the complex layering of direct and indirect rule which resulted in variations in the degree of the patrimonial-bureaucratic mix between the core and periphery of the empire. The Ottomans benefitted from both the bureaucratic and patrimonial features of their rule, which sometimes tugged against each other, but also cooperated to routinize Ottoman rule.[208]

Suraiya Faroqhi also emphasizes the rejection of the notion that the absence of "charismatic sultans" caused decline. Given that the Ottoman central bureaucracy had already established itself as a strong and structured institution, charismatic sultans could at times hinder the efficient functioning of administrative mechanisms. Furthermore, the limited prior political experience of most Ottoman sultans, due to nature of their education, was not necessarily perceived as a disadvantage by the high-ranking officials, as it granted them greater scope to exercise influence and control.[209]

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[205] QUATAERT, 2003, p. 5.
[206] İNALCIK, 1992, p. 60.
[207] İNALCIK, 1992, p. 63.
[208] BARKEY, 2016, p. 102.
[209] FAROQHI, 1995, p. 96.

Metin Kunt suggests approaching this historical period—long taught and understood under the rubric of "decline"—with the concept of "transition". He argues that the broader shifts and disruptions within institutions and society should be interpreted as components of a transitional process that ultimately led to a new balance in the 17th century. The peculiarities of this era, he contends, reflect the empire's efforts to navigate a rapidly changing and expanding world beyond its familiar boundaries.[210]

In summary, whether one frames it as "decline" or not, all these analyses indicate that the 16th century, perhaps the most debated period of Ottoman history, was far from static. In light of its multifaceted military, cultural, and social developments, it is better understood as a dynamic and fluid period. Within this context, the 1582 festival should not be seen merely as a simple celebration marking the circumcision of the sultan's son. The following sub-section will examine Sultan Murad III and his exercise of power within this political and economic framework, thereby providing a crucial bridge to the thesis's case study.

[210] KUNT, 1983, pp. 37–38.

2.2. The Ideal Ruler: Image of Sultan Murad III

As the historical background indicates, the 16th century was a complex period that cannot easily be confined to a single template. Yet, the significance of this era is not limited to debates over its designation as a "golden age", nor to the frequent comparisons made with subsequent periods. Its impact on Ottoman society extends further, particularly influencing the standards by which later sultans were judged. Sultan Süleyman I, the ruler of this period, epitomized the "ideal sultan", embodying qualities such as justice, equality, military leadership, generosity, and care for the *reaya*.[211] As Woodhead emphasizes, Süleyman emerged as the earliest Ottoman sultan whose reputation resonated extensively within royal courts and societies in Western Europe.[212] The literature, music, and theatrical works of the time attest to a growing European curiosity regarding the "image of the Turk", which began with Süleyman in the 16th century.[213]

Since the specific qualities of an Ottoman sultan have already been addressed in the sub-section "Sultanic Power", only a brief overview is provided here. According to Mustafa Ali, Ottoman rulers, "appointed by God to rule on earth",[214] were expected to possess numerous qualities. To be considered powerful, a sultan had to be pious, maintain continuity of traditions, demonstrate courage as a warrior, and exhibit generosity, fairness, and forgiveness. Additionally, he was expected to act as a responsible lawgiver and protector of the law, while ensuring the welfare of those under his authority. This idealized model of rulership set a benchmark for subsequent sultans, including Murad III, who reigned at the time of the 1582 imperial festival.

The question of the ideal ruler is particularly relevant in the case of Murad III and warrants detailed examination. Fortunately, extensive information exists regarding Sultan Murad III, encompassing his character, interests, spiritual orientation, and personal life. Moreover, the broader context of his reign is well documented, and contemporaneous observers

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[211] *Reaya*: "Non-*askeri*, tax-paying subjects of Ottoman sultan, Muslim and non-Muslim, urban and rural, but often used to refer specifically to agricultural peasantry". This definition is taken from the "Glossary of Ottoman Turkish Terms" in KUNT & WOODHEAD, 1995. For Woodhead's study of Sultan Süleyman I as a model of the "ideal sultan", see: WOODHEAD, 1995b, pp. 164–190.

[212] WOODHEAD, 1995a, p. 119. In this context, Peter Holt's analysis of the presentation of Saladin and the 13th-century Mamluk sultan Baybars as ideal rulers, and his exploration of the influence of the Islamic literary and historiographical tradition of Süleyman on contemporary Ottoman biographers, is particularly noteworthy. See in the same volume: HOLT, 1995, pp. 122–137.

[213] For studies examining the transformations of the image of the Turk across a wide geography, from Central Asia to South America, see: KUMRULAR, 2016.

[214] FLEISCHER, 1986, p. 302.

critically assessed both the sultanate and the state. The image of Murad III that emerges from these sources reflects a combination of personal traits and individual interests, which will be analyzed in the following sections.

2.2.1. Murad III as a Patron of Art, Science, Religion and Technology

I will discuss Murad's fulfilment of the criteria of an "ideal sultan" later, with examples from contemporary writers. First, however, it should be noted that he was particularly interested in arts. Murad III upheld the longstanding role of the sultan as a patron of the arts, showing favor to numerous poets and writers throughout his reign. He enjoyed music and dance, gathering musicians, dancers, buffoons, and dwarves around him.[215] In his travel book on Istanbul from the late 1570s, German theologian Salomon Schweigger remarks on Murad's interest in reading, particularly history books, reflecting his desire to learn about events in other lands.[216] Murad's passion for books in general, and illustrated manuscripts in particular, is well documented, making him one of the most prominent patrons of writers and artists in the 16th century. Emine Fetvacı also draws attention to Murad's library and notes that he was frequently depicted holding a book, distinguishing him from his predecessors.[217]

Under the penname Murâdî, he composed mystical poems, some of which were included in *mecmua*s and *tezkire*s.[218] He had a deep fascination with mysticism and aligned himself with the Halveti Order, one of the empire's most prominent Sufi orders.[219] Murad's spiritual life extended to an interest in dreams; for instance, *Matali'ü-Sa'adet* (The Ascensions of Felicity), as a compendium dedicated to his two daughters, contains sections on astrology, physiognomy, dream interpretation, and divination, highlighting both his personal spirituality and support for book production.[220]

Technology and science were also areas strongly supported by Sultan Murad. In connection with literature, he recognized the importance of the printing press and printed books. One expression of this awareness was visible in an edict issued in the 1590s, which liberalized the sale of non-religious books printed in Italy in Arabic script.[221] Another

[215] KÜTÜKOĞLU, 2020, p. 175.
[216] SCHWEIGGER, 1608, p. 144.
[217] FETVACI, 2013, pp. 37–39, 43–46. To read the study on the medallion-ornamented manuscripts prepared for the library of Murad III, see ÖZTÜRK, 2021.
[218] For the meaning of *mecmua*, see: fn. 129, and *tezkire*, see: fn. 170.
[219] PEKSEVGEN, 2009, p. 402.
[220] YILDIRIM, 2023.
[221] İNALCIK, 1995, p. 174.

significant contribution was the establishment of an observatory, frequently highlighted by historians as a highly novel and innovative step for that period. Founded in Galata in 1577 by the sultan's chief astronomer, Takiyüddin Muhammed,[222] this observatory—unique in the Islamic world at the time—was no less advanced than the most modern observatories in Europe.[223]

Fig. 2: Sultan Murad III in his library, from the *Javahir al Gharaib Tarjomat Bahr al-Aja'ib*, by Mustafa Cenabi. Harvard Art Museums collections online.

[222] He can be also found as Takıyyüddin er-Rasıd.
[223] İnalcık notes a striking similarity between the instruments used by Takiyüddin at the Galata observatory and those employed by Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, the head of Uraniborg on Hven Island, which was the most advanced observatory in Europe at the time. İNALCIK, 1995, p. 179.

Indeed, the later fate of the observatory underscores how exceptional it was.[224] Baki Tezcan highlights the political dimensions surrounding the establishment and eventual destruction of the *Rasathane-i Hümayun* (Imperial Observatory). Departing from interpretations that frame the observatory's construction as a simple conflict between "progressive" science and "regressive" religion, Tezcan approaches it as a contest between competing political visions. He interprets the construction of the observatory as a demonstration of power and authority: its foundation was not only driven by Sultan Murad's personal interest in science, particularly astronomy and astrology, but also served as a testament to the sultan's capacity to realize a highly complex project under his patronage.[225]

2.2.2. Murad III as a Fair Ruler

Narratives of the period reveal another admirable characteristic of Sultan Murad: his fair and egalitarian approach to governance. Salomon Schweigger recounts a story from the time of Murad's accession to the throne:

> He was a lover of justice, and when he first came to the throne, he himself rode through the city in person, unknown to anyone and alone, to observe how affairs were conducted among merchants and craftsmen. He carefully inspected their weights and balances, and when he found any faults, he corrected them.[226]

This account demonstrates that Murad was not only a just ruler, but also one who sought to remain directly informed about the conditions of his subjects. His insistence on personally overseeing and signing all appointment decisions, even at the expense of limiting the authority of his own grand vizier and other court officials,[227] reflects the same attitude. Friedrich Seidel, drawing on various sources, similarly concludes that Murad was a "lover of justice".[228] Stephan

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[224] It is assumed that the Sultan Murad had this observatory built for astronomical, but mostly astrological purposes. Both of these were disapproved by a group of *ulema*, including the shaykh al-Islam (*şeyhülislam*) Kadızade Ahmed, and were seen as ungodly and inauspicious, and they declared that a plague that was continuing since years was caused by this "endeavor to reach the mysteries of God". This resulted in the destruction of the Observatory in 1580. Therefore, the only observatory of the Islamic world in its time survived for only three years.
[225] TEZCAN, 2012.
[226] SCHWEIGGER, 1608, p. 144: "Er war ein Liebhaber der Gerechtigkeit / dann als er anfangs an das Reich kommen / ist er in eigner Person / unbekanter weis / nur selb ander / herumb in der Stadt geritten / daß er sahe / wie man haushielt / bey Kauffleuten und Handwerckßleuten / hat die Gewicht mit fleiß besichtiget / und da er mangel befunden / denselben verbessert." Friedrich Seidel cites this information from Schweigger and refers to it as a hearsay. See: SEIDEL, 1711, p. 138.
[227] For more information, see the section "The Reign of Murad III" in this thesis.
[228] SEIDEL, 1711, pp. 137–138: "Liebhaber der Gerechtigkeit".

Gerlach, who resided in Istanbul between1573 to 1578 as first assistant and chaplain to Baron David Ungnad von Sonnegg, Ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire, likewise offered positive remarks about the Sultan's commitment to fairness.[229]

2.2.3. Murad III as a Weak and Secluded Sultan

In Ottoman history, the ceremonial practices of the sultan and his family—rituals that emphasized dynastic presence and authority—began with the prince's return to the capital upon receiving news of his father's, the reigning sultan's, death.[230] The ceremonial process started the moment when the prince, now the new ruler, entered the capital and culminated with his procession and formal entry into the palace.[231] Following this initial appearance, during which the new sovereign presented himself before the public and his subordinates, the sultan's visibility to his subjects was drastically reduced. It is well known that, thereafter, the sultan was rarely seen, both inside and outside the palace. This practice stemmed from dynastic law formulated during the reign of Mehmed II, which codified Ottoman court ceremonial rules.

This law is found in the *Kanunnâme-i Âl-i Osman*,[232] believed to have been prepared late in Mehmed II's reign under his order, written by Leysizade Mehmed Efendi, with certain sections completed by Mehmet II himself.[233] The second part of the *Kanunnâme*, which addresses the protocol rules of the Ottoman Empire, the *şeaire*s (Islamic signs and customs) of the sultanate, and particular crimes and punishments, defines the organization of state and court affairs. According to it, the ritual of the sultan dining with court officials in the Second Courtyard (*İkinci Avlu*) was abolished, and he began to take his meals alone.[234] In fact, the sultan was not allowed to enter the Second Courtyard except on ceremonial occasions and

[229] GERLACH, 1674, p. 160.
[230] Murad III was on duty as a *sancakbeyi* (governor of a sanjak, banner) in Manisa when he was informed of his father's, Sultan Selim II's, death.
[231] YELÇE, 2022, p. 148.
[232] FERGUSON, 2018, pp. 66–105.
[233] ÖZCAN, A., 2003, p. XV.
[234] The Divan Square, constructed in the 1460s as the Second Courtyard of Topkapı Palace, served as a major ceremonial space. It functioned not only as the administrative center of the Ottoman state but also as its symbolic representation. Gülru Necipoğlu aptly compares this courtyard to a theater stage: majestic and impressive, with a large cast of actors. Yet, the main actor, the sultan, rarely appeared on stage. See: NECİPOĞLU, 2014, pp. 87–88.

began to use the Audience Hall or Chamber of Petitions (*Arz Odası*),[235] which he had built, to meet with state officials.[236]

In his memoirs (1675), the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who visited Istanbul twice in the 17th century, notes that the sultan frequently attended the Council (*Divan*) meetings but did so without showing himself. He observed the proceedings from a curtained window overlooking the council chamber, leaving the viziers uncertain of whether the sultan was present, and thus keeping them constantly on their guard.[237]

All these regulations gradually became integrated with the sultan's increasingly secluded character. According to this tradition, it was considered appropriate for the ruler to remain hidden from public view in order to preserve his grandeur and authority.[238] Mustafa Ali likewise records that it was prescribed by law that the sultan should refrain from inspecting fortifications or meeting the public.[239] These practices are closely related to the conquest of Istanbul and the subsequent construction of a new palace. In Islamic culture, the foundation of a new city has always been regarded as a direct manifestation of political power. The city and the palace thus functioned as potent symbols of sovereignty. In the case of Mehmed II, this reflected the broader tradition of employing urban space as an instrument for the expression of power and influence.[240] Along with these developments, the sultan's life became increasingly static and confined within the palace.[241]

Although the practice of the ruler distancing himself from his subjects was not unprecedented in Ottoman history, it reached its extreme form under Sultan Murad III. He was particularly reluctant to appear in public. From his accession to the throne until his death, Murad led an exceptionally secluded life. His isolation extended to the point that he never personally participates in military campaigns—a striking departure from the traditional image

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[235] It is located in the courtyard known as the *Enderun-ı Hümayun*, the private residence of the sultan, situated directly opposite the Imperial Gate (*Babüssaade*), which marks the passage from the Second Courtyard to the Third Courtyard of Topkapı Palace. Serving as the palace's principal reception hall, it was the venue where both foreign ambassadors and high-ranking state dignitaries were received.
[236] ÖZCAN, A., 2003, pp. 15–18.
[237] TAVERNIER, 1675, p. 88.
[238] To read more about the 16th-century sultan's seclusion periods from the observers of the period, see NECİPOĞLU, 2014, pp. 50–54.
[239] ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 62.
[240] GRABAR, 2011, pp. 70–71.
[241] Peksevgen draws attention to the irony inherent in this situation. In contrast to the active, mobile, and omnipresent sultan model established in the norms of classical state administration, he interprets the emergence of this palace-bound, secluded sultan figure as a political paradox. See: PEKSEVGEN, 2009, p. 402.

of the Ottoman warrior-sultan. Instead, he directed imperial affairs and military operations from within the palace, delegating battlefield command to his viziers.[242]

According to late 16th-century authors, and in light of the prevailing habit of comparing all subsequent sultans with Süleyman I, most of his successors were perceived as relatively passive figures—a comparison that inevitably shaped perceptions of Murad III as well. While Sultan Süleyman was a ruler who travelled extensively throughout Rumelia and especially Anatolia in connection with military campaigns, Murad was markedly sedentary. Schweigger, for instance, described Süleyman as a "bloodthirsty, tyrannical and belligerent ruler", a characterization reflection his martial temperament.[243] Murad, by contrast, generally did not have much desire for warfare, as Schweigger also notes.

Moreover, Murad disrupted the long-established Friday prayer ritual, during which the sultan would ride in a grand procession to a different mosque each week and appear before the public. Hans Jacob Breuning, who visited Istanbul in 1579, observed that Murad had discontinued this custom, preferring to remain secluded in the palace.[244]

Such practices gave rise to criticism of Sultan Murad's leadership. Ottoman chroniclers of the period emphasized his avoidance of the battlefield, "unlike his predecessors", and his extreme seclusion as evidence of a weakening of royal authority. He was frequently portrayed as an inert and ineffective monarch rather than a powerful ruler. Mustafa Ali, for example, attributes the "mass corruption" that began with Murad's accession not only to economic troubles but also to the sultan's incapacity to govern effectively.[245] As discussed in the previous section, Ali argues that Murad's neglect of state affairs and his inability to manage them prudently were among the main causes of the empire's "decline." Similarly, Friedrich Seidel, commenting on the sultan's absence from military campaigns, ascribed this to his "infirmity".[246] Murad's health, which appears to have been a well-known concern among contemporaries, thus becomes an important aspect requiring further examination.

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[242] ÇELEBİ, 2008, p. 311; PEKSEVGEN, 2009, p. 401.
[243] SCHWEIGGER, 1608, p. 142: "Als zum Exempel Sultan Soliman war ein Blutdurstiger Tyrann und ein Kriegßmann."
[244] BREUNING, 1612, p. 60.
[245] FLEISCHER, 1986, pp. 300–301.
[246] SEIDEL, 1711, p. 142: "[…] woran ihn sonderlich sein Gebrechen gehindert."

2.2.4. Murad III as a Sick-Looking Man

According to Salomon Schweigger's account, Sultan Murad's body was neither well-built nor strong, and his face lacked a healthy color. Schweigger, like Seidel, writes that the alleged reason for the Sultan's reclusion was related to his problem with epilepsy. As "the shadow of God", the caliph of the Muslims, and the ruler of the empire, the Sultan was expected to embody both physical vigor and mental strength; his health was therefore an important parameter in assessing his power. Closely linked to this was his sexual performance and competence. Schweigger also claims that the Sultan's sexual capacity was affected by this disease and suggests that he was not as fond of sexuality "as the sultans before him" had been.[247]

The issue of Sultan Murad's masculinity was a recurrent topic also reflected in the writings of other chroniclers. İbrahim Peçevi discusses the same matter in his history. According to him, it became problematic that for a long time Sultan Murad had sexual relations only with the mother of his son, Safiye Sultan—a highly unusual case among Ottoman rulers. Peçevi notes that because of this monogamy, Murad later became impotent in his relations with other women, even when he wished to possess them. The Sultan's mother, Nurbanu Sultan, believed that this condition had been caused by black magic. As Peçevi recounts, Nurbanu thought that Murad was bewitched by Safiye Sultan and her supporters. To resolve this critical problem, the concubines close to Safiye were tortured on Nurbanu's orders in order to locate the spell. Moreover, she continued to present new and beautiful women to Murad for a long time to break the enchantment. It was assumed that, through these efforts, the Sultan's sexual appetite eventually returned once the spell was lifted by his mother's intervention.[248]

Narratives from later years continue to provide information about the worrisome health and state of the Sultan. Breuning described Murad in his travelogue as a "sick-looking" man and stated that even though he had to be careful because of his "fainting disease", he could not restrain his sexual activity.[249] Another source, written by a Venetian diplomat, confirms this rumor about his epilepsy. In 1590, Lorenzo Bernardo's *relazione* (report) to Doge Pasquale Cicogna and the Venetian Senate provides details about the Sultan's character, sexual life, and daily routine, stating that Murad suffered from epilepsy and sometimes from earache. He also

[247] SCHWEIGGER, 1608, pp. 143–144.
[248] PEÇEVİ, 1992, pp. 2–3.
[249] BREUNING, 1612, p. 57: "[…] bleicher Ungesunder Farb" und "[…] fallenden Siechtags".

remarks that the Sultan was not a courageous man[250] and lacked qualities such as bravery and generosity that make a "true prince" respectable.

Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall does not mention this epilepsy problem in his extensive writings on Ottoman history. However, like other chroniclers, he also questions the Sultan's abilities and characteristics, calling him a "weak, superstitious, but not cruel and tyrannic ruler".[251] This perception of Sultan Murad as a rather weak and sick ruler among his contemporaries should be strongly emphasized.

Various sources further report that the Sultan had a neurotic personality. In his report, Bernardo describes him as someone who could not be trusted.[252] Özgen Felek provides a very detailed analysis and a psychogram of Sultan Murad based on his talismanic shirts and the dream letters he sent to his spiritual master. From these letters, we learn that Murad described the sultanate and worldly duties as "an unbearable burden". He also expressed disapproval of being sultan and complained about the burdensome nature of this task.[253] Moreover, he suffered from anxiety, restlessness, and incomplete mental stability; according to the letters, he even harbored a wish to end his life.[254] These letters represent a written expression of Murad's fears, concerns, and disturbances. Felek notes the interest of many Ottoman sultans in "miracles" and presents information about the special preparation of the investigated talismanic shirts for protection, strengthening, and encouragement. She then questions the function of these shirts in the case of Sultan Murad, considering the possibility that they served as a means of encouragement for him to go to the battlefield and as protection against epilepsy.[255]

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From all these narratives, it becomes evident that both Ottoman courtiers and foreign observers were keenly aware of Sultan Murad III's diverse characteristics. More importantly, they analyzed these traits in comparison with other sultans, drawing conclusions based on the idealized model of rulership. While Murad's weaknesses, such as his poor health, quick temper, and tendency to make erroneous decisions due to his fears, were frequently highlighted, his

[250] DURSTELER, 2018, pp. 59–60.
[251] HAMMER-PURGSTALL, 1840, p. 591: "[…] ein schwacher, abergläubischer, aber nicht grausamer und tyrannischer herr."
[252] DURSTELER, 2018, p. 60.
[253] FELEK, 2012, pp. 35–36.
[254] FELEK, 2017, pp. 659–662.
[255] FELEK, 2012, pp. 35–36.

admirable qualities were not overlooked. Nevertheless, contemporary evaluations portray him as a ruler who, despite certain merits, failed to fully meet the expectations of the "ideal ruler" or the standards of the ideal Ottoman sultan. This nuanced assessment provides a critical context for understanding the political and personal environment surrounding the 1582 imperial festival.

Fig. 3: Sultan Murad III's portrait, unknown artist, 1603. Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Chapter 3: The Festival of 1582 as a Demonstration of Power

Ceremonies, rituals, celebrations, and symbolic representations play a pivotal role in the manifestation and consolidation of power. These instruments not only provide a sense of grandeur but also function as mechanisms to establish and reinforce authority. From the solemn inauguration of heads of state to the elaborate rituals performed by religious leaders, symbolic acts generate reverence and awe, compelling individuals to recognize and submit to the power being exercised. Similarly, celebrations and festivities, whether commemorating historical events or cultural traditions, serve as unifying forces, fostering a shared identity and loyalty toward the ruling entity. Through such elaborate displays, power becomes symbolically ingrained in the collective consciousness, shaping perceptions and legitimizing authority. Clifford Geertz, a leading figure in symbolic anthropology, described the process of establishing a monarch as an act of "creation". He emphasized that rulers justify their existence and regulate their behavior through a repertoire of narratives, rituals, symbols, formalities, and associated practices—elements that are either inherited or deliberately crafted during periods of change. This intricate network of cultural practices and artifacts thus constitutes the foundation of political legitimacy and authority.[256]

In his insightful study of ceremonies in late medieval Bruges, Andrew Brown emphasizes the symbolic communication between rulers and their subjects. He highlights how authority is reinforced through symbols and, simultaneously, how such rituals constitute a "state-building effort" characteristic of governance.[257] In the case of the Ottoman sultans, both religious and secular ceremonies functioned as a means of attributing diverse qualities to the ruler. The sultan exercised the ability to shape his identity and project his authority through symbols and symbolic gestures.[258]

Imperial festivals were announced across the extensive territories of the Ottoman Empire, aiming to captivate the populace and encourage collective demonstrations of loyalty and devotion to the sultan. A particularly notable example is the circumcision festival of 1582, which served as a prime illustration of these grand imperial displays. Its purpose extended beyond celebrating the rite of passage; it also showcased the splendor and authority of the empire. Through meticulously orchestrated events such as this, the sultan sought to impress the

[256] GEERTZ, 1985, pp. 15–16.
[257] BROWN, 2006, pp. 2–4.
[258] KARATEKE, 2017, pp. 209–212.

people, inspire loyalty, and reinforce the symbolic power and magnificence of his reign. Thus, festivals played a crucial role in strengthening the central authority of governance.[259] Naturally, there were additional motives for organizing such events: economic, social, and political conditions were all significant, and a particularly pressing concern was the scrutiny of the sultan's competence. Consequently, the significance of the 1582 celebration can only be fully appreciated within this broader context.

Relatedly, it is essential to examine the tradition of circumcision, which is the ritual around which the festival was organized. This aspect is crucial for a deeper understanding of the broader display of power and authority. A useful starting point is the term *sünnet,* which carries two distinct meanings: firstly, it refers to the entirety of Prophet Muhammed's teachings and actions (*sunna*), and secondly, it denotes the practice of circumcision (*hitan*). This linguistic choice underscores the importance attributed to the practice of circumcision as aligned with the example set by the Prophet. According to Islamic belief, Prophet Muhammed regarded circumcision as one of the natural acts.[260] Unlike in Judaism, circumcision was not compulsory (*vacip*) for Ottoman Muslims, yet it remained a firmly established tradition. The poet writing under the pseudonym Ulvi, who composed an ode for the 1582 festival, captured this non-obligatory yet essential aspect of circumcision: "with circumcision, comes honor to Islam and goodness to the heart".[261] As such, circumcision represented a significant threshold in the life of not only the sultan's son but all men adherent of the Islamic faith.[262]

Unlike other Islamic cultures, the Ottoman sultans and their family held their circumcision ceremony publicly.[263] The significance of such public festivals was underscored by their role in preserving the historical and cultural legacy of a ritual practiced and cherished since ancient times. These celebrations therefore functioned as a demonstration of the dynasty's deep connection to Ottoman heritage.[264] This intention is further illustrated in a letter

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[259] GEERTZ, 1980, p. 124.

[260] This information is taken from the Decision of the Supreme Council of Religious Affairs dated 2021 and numbered 28 published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. Link can be found in the "Websites" section of the "Bibliography".

[261] ÇETİN, 1993, p. 94: "Sünnet ile gelir İslâm'a şeref, kalbe hayır."

[262] For instance, in nearly every region of Anatolia, circumcision continues to be regarded as the initial step toward manhood, or first *mürüvvet* (the joy experienced by parents), and it is traditionally accompanied by a celebratory ceremony.

[263] Stephen P. Burke points out this distinction in practice, noting the Ottomans' transformation of this domestic ritual into a grand public festival was markedly different from the corresponding practices in Safavid Iran. See: BURKE, 2013, p. 100.

[264] Fetvacı further examines circumcision in relation to dynastic continuity and the adherence to long-standing traditions, within the framework of an analysis of İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. See: FETVACI, 2013, pp. 175–185.

concerning the 1582 festival, written on behalf of Sultan Murad III: in a decree to the provincial treasurer (*defterdar*) of Damascus, the organization of the event was described as adherence to tradition with the words, "celebrations that have been accepted and practiced since ancient times will be carried out as in the past".[265]

The imperial festival is referred to as *sur* in Ottoman sources, a term also appears as *şenlik*. In Ottoman culture, *şenlik* refers to public festivities celebrating significant occasions, engaging the entire population rather than being restricted to specific groups or individuals. These joyous gatherings brought together people from all social strata, fostering a sense of collective participation and inclusivity. Unlike exclusive ceremonies, festivals embodied a communal spirit, allowing the entire populace to partake in the celebrations and creating an atmosphere of unity. Alessandro Falassi highlights an important aspect of such festivals in his analysis of their definition and morphology: the flow of daily life was interrupted, either gradually or suddenly, producing a unique temporal dimension described as "time out of time".[266] Within this dimension, individuals engaged in special activities existing outside the constraints of conventional time. Games, music, dances, food, and other sensory elements were designed to divert attention from everyday routines and immerse participants in the extraordinary experience of the festival.

The 1582 festival was an extraordinary event in this spirit, involving the coordination and participation of a wide range of professions, beginning with the court's decision to organize it. Accordingly, the preparation and execution of the festival required intense effort from start to finish. A particularly important aspect of this process was the creation of a sensory-rich atmosphere, achieved through the establishment of various performance spaces in Atmeydanı. With these considerations in mind and taking into account the background of the celebrations for Prince Mehmed's circumcision, the subsequent chapters have been structured with a specific focus: analyzing the festival as a spectacle within the broader context of the representation and consolidation of power and authority. Accordingly, the organization of this long-lasting event, the selection of venue (i.e., the performance stage), the participants, and the chosen performances will all be examined in relation to the concept of power discussed in the previous chapters.

[265] BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d.42/904.
[266] FALASSI, 1987, pp. 6–7.

3.1. Task Assignment: Distribution of Power

The scheduling of the festival required meticulous planning well in advance, due to several factors, including its duration, the participants involved, the provision of food and beverages, and the diverse range of performances. The announcement of the festival was reportedly made about a year prior, as Mustafa Ali notes explicitly in his account: "It was announced a year ago, all the rulers heard the sultan's festivities".[267] The first recorded administrative documents about the 1582 festival are dated to June 3, 1581, further confirming that preparations began almost a year in advance.[268]

The celebrations planned by Sultan Murad on his son's circumcision were initially scheduled for March (*Rabi'ülevvel*) 1582.[269] Jacques de Germigny, appointed ambassador to France by King Henri III (r. 1574–1589) and serving from 1579 to 1585, confirms that the invitation was for the spring of the following year: "à la primevère et premières fleurs de l'année prochaine".[270] This timing ensured the overlap of two significant events. One was the return of the *surre-i hümayun* (or *surre alayı*)[271] to Istanbul, the group that annually delivered aid and gifts from Istanbul to Mecca and Medina during the pilgrimage season, holding both religious and devotional significance. The other was *Nevruz* (Nowruz), a holiday marking the arrival of spring.

Mustafa Ali also notes that even the invitations for the festival were prepared with particular care. Once the decision to celebrate was made, viziers and other officials convened to examine previous examples of festive invitations in order to determine proper phrasing and forms of address for the guests.[272] Imperial officials, provincial governors, and fiscal administrators throughout the Ottoman territories were sent letters either to invite them to the celebrations or to inform them of the upcoming event. Mustafa Ali himself received one of these letters and included it in his account of the festival, which indicated that the event would occur "in the spring of next year".[273]

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[267] ALİ, 1586, fol. 6r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 13; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 366): "Hâsılı bir yıl evvel oldı 'ayân / Sûr-ı sultânı tuydı cümle şehân".
[268] For the decree written by order of the Sultan: BOA, A. {DVNSMHM d.42/164–165.
[269] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 468.
[270] CHARRIÈRE, 1966, p. 53.
[271] The term *surre*, derived from its literal meaning as "a pouch for valuable items such as gold and currency", refers to the funds, precious metals, and other valuables sent annually before the pilgrimage season for distribution among the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina. See: BUZPINAR, 2009.
[272] ALİ, 1586, fols. 16r.–17r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 112–113; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 387–388).
[273] ALİ, 1586, fol. 7v.: "gelecek nev-bahar". The aforementioned complete letter is presented in folios 7r.–8v. in Ali's book (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 98–100; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 369–371).

It is noteworthy that, while representatives from the various regions of the empire were invited to the festival held in Istanbul, the sultan also ordered simultaneous celebrations in different cities across Ottoman lands.[274] This highlights the objective of projecting the dynasty's authority throughout the Ottoman sphere of influence.

The same information regarding the festival's date is corroborated by an Italian letter sent from Istanbul to Venice: "It being established to celebrate in spring the circumcision of Prince Mehmed and it being a very ancient custom to invite friendly rulers on such occasions [...]"[275] Therefore, invitations were dispatched to foreign rulers or their representatives via special convoys, including those to the Holy Roman Empire, Poland, Georgia, Tunisia, and Morocco, as well as to the long-standing "enemy" of the Ottomans, the Persian Shah. In addition, invitations were sent to the Khan of the Tatars, the Sharif of Mecca, the Doge of Venice, the King of France, the Voivode of Erdel (Transylvania), the Bogdan lords (Moldova), Eflak (Wallachia), Dubrovnik (Ragusa), and the Islamic emirs under Ottoman rule, such as the rulers of Egypt, Aleppo, Damascus, Baghdad, Yemen, Buda, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Basra, and Lahsa.[276]

Metin And emphasizes that this invitation letter was as grandiose as the festival itself.[277] An English translation of the letter, obtained by Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson from Turkish historians and published in French, reads as follows:[278]

> We make known to you by this imperial utterance, decorated with our monogram, very noble and very august, the existence of a duty sacred and indispensable for the elect people, for the blest people, for the Muhammadan people, but particularly for the sultans, the monarchs, the sovereigns, as for the princes of blood of their august house, to follow in all the laws and the precepts of our holy prophet, the leader of all the patriarchs and all the celestial envoys, and to observe religiously all that which is prescribed in our holy book, where it is said; "Follow the path of Abraham your father, you who hold the great name of Musulman." We have consequently resolved to accomplish the precept relative to the act of circumcision, in the person of prince Mehmed our well beloved son; of this prince who, covered with the protective wings of celestial grace and divine assistance, believes in felicity and in good grace, in the glorious path of the imperial throne; of this prince in whom respires all nobleness, grandeur and magnificence; of this prince who, honoured with the same name as our holy prophet, makes the complement of the most just

[274] See: BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d.42/164–165.
[275] PEDANI FABRIS & BOMBACI, 1994, p. 227: "Essendo stabilito di celebrare a primavera la circoncisione del principe Mehmed ed essendo costume antichissimo invitare in tali occasioni i sovrani amici [...]."
[276] İNTİZAMİ (S), 1584, fols. 10v.–11v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 119–120); İNTİZAMİ (V), fols. 7r.–v. (PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, pp. 75–76); HAUNOLTH, 1590, pp. 468–469; MANGER, 1583, para. 2.
[277] AND, 2020, p. 59.
[278] This English translation is from Stout's unpublished thesis: STOUT, 1966, pp. 45–47. For the original letter in French, see: D'OHSSON, 1788–1791, pp. 290–293.

> administration of our high and sublime court; of this prince who is the most beautiful of the flowers of the garden of equity and of sovereign power; the most precious sprout of the garden of grandeur and majesty; the pearl of the most fine pearliness of monarchy and supreme felicity; finally the most luminous star of the firmament of serenity, calm, and of the public happiness.
>
> Thus the august personage of this prince, the plant of his existence, having already had some happy enlargements in the garden of virility and force, and the tender shrub of his essence making already a superb ornament in the vineyard of prosperity and grandeur, it is necessary that the vine-trimmer of circumcision work his sharp instrument on this new plant, on this charming rose-bush, and that he direct it towards the vegetative knob which is the chief of the reproductive faculties, and the bud of precious fruits and fortunate sprouts in the great orchard of the Caliphate and of supreme power.
>
> This august ceremony will take place, then, under the auspices of Providence, during the following Spring, in the return of a season when nature rejuvenates and embellishes, offering to human eyes the beauties of Paradise, and makes us admire the marvels of the one who is all-powerful. It is by the example of our glorious ancestors, who had always been accustomed to make public these solemnities throughout the extent of the empire, to convene there all the great lords of the state, and generally all the officers invested with authority and dignity, that we send to you the present supreme order, for to make to you the same notifications, and to invite you to come and participate in the honour and the joy of this festival, which will be celebrated in the midst of the most great rejoicing. That the supreme being deigns to bless this feast, from the beginning unto the end.

However, it is known that, contrary to the original plans, the public celebrations did not commence in spring but were postponed to the end of May or beginning of June. According to Nicholas von Haunolth's account, the delay was caused by the late arrival of essential materials for the festivities from Egypt to Istanbul, due to adverse weather conditions.[279] These deliveries concerned basic food supplies.[280] During this interim period, prior to the public celebrations, private events were held in the Old Palace,[281] the residences of the imperial harem. At these intimate feasts, hosted by the sultanas, Sultan Murad and Prince Mehmed were entertained, allowing the court to rehearse and finalize arrangements for the forthcoming grand public festival.[282]

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[279] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 469.

[280] Palace records further indicate that essential provisions such as sugar, rice, and salt were ordered not only from Egypt but also from various other cities and regions. In his study on the preparation process for the 1582 festival, Mihoko Oku examined the administrative decrees (*Mühimme Defterleri*) recorded in detail and analyzed the raw materials that were procured, providing a clear insight into the meticulous planning and logistical organization behind this imperial celebration. See: OKU, 2017.

[281] Following the conquest, Mehmed II constructed a palace in the Beyazıt district of present-day Istanbul. This initial palace later became known as the Old Palace (*Eski Saray*) after the construction of Topkapı Palace.

[282] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 469; ALİ, 1586, fols. 14v., 15r.–v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 109–111; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 381–185).

It is worth noting the discrepancies in reports regarding the exact start date of the festival. Sources vary in specifying both the commencement and conclusion of the celebrations. According to İntizami, who provides the most detailed account from the Ottoman perspective and is known to have described the event according to its daily schedule, the festival began on June 6. In contrast, Ferahi records May 27 as the starting date. Mustafa Ali mentions "the first day of June," Haunolth gives June 1, while other foreign sources indicate June 2 as the opening day. Consequently, it is impossible to determine precisely how many days the circumcision celebrations lasted. Although the prevailing view is that they spanned 52 days and nights, some accounts suggest a duration of 40 days, while others indicate 55 days. What is consistent across all sources is that the first day of the festival is marked by Sultan Murad's departure from Topkapı Palace on horseback and his arrival at Atmeydanı, accompanied by the music of the military marching band (the *mehter*). The French observer Jean Palerne describes this moment in his book under the title "in what magnificence the great Lord went to the Hippodrome".[283]

Ceremonies, by their very nature, are symbolic enactments conducted according to deliberate planning. They are not necessarily intended to replicate reality faithfully; in fact, they often present a distorted or idealized version of events. In this sense, one can speak of a purposeful idealization—an implementation of a presentation considered exemplary as a means of gaining and/or maintaining legitimacy. [284] To ensure the meticulous planning and execution of the festival, responsibilities were delegated among esteemed and trustworthy statesmen. Regarding the invitations, the initial phase of festival preparations involved consulting records of previous festivals, with particular attention to two circumcision celebrations held during the reign of Süleyman I, likely those organized in 1530 and 1539.[285] This orientation toward historical precedents served not only to uphold tradition but also to determine the necessary supplies and, perhaps, to emulate the ideal of the "ideal sultan" and the "ideal period".

Following the example of previous celebrations, the organization team identified the necessary items, provisions, and other requirements for the festivities, allocating a substantial budget for the expenses. According to contemporary sources, 50 loads of *akçe* (silver coins),[286] were initially allocated from the treasury six months prior to the festival. It is further reported

[283] PALERNE, 1606, pp. 453–457: "En quelle magnificence marchait le grand Seigneur allant à l'Hyppodrome".
[284] KARATEKE, 2017, pp. 238–239.
[285] PEÇEVİ, 1992, p. 65.
[286] Arslan estimates the value of this money to be around 70.000 gold coins at the time. See: ARSLAN, 2009, p. 12.

that similar disbursements of 50 loads of *akçe* were made multiple times throughout the course of the celebration.[287] At this point, it is crucial to recall the economic context of the period, characterized by rising prices and declining purchasing power, a crisis managed through repeated currency devaluations. Consequently, it can be argued that this opulent festivity was carried out with a certain conscious negligence or indifference toward fiscal constraints. This underscores the symbolic importance and functional significance of the "show of power" in the sultan's perception.

Sultan Murad entrusted his most reliable statesmen with the organization and execution of the celebrations, reflecting a deliberate distribution of authority among key individuals. The scale of the festival necessitated a considerable collective effort. The overall responsibility for the festival was assigned to İbrahim Pasha, the Rumeli *beylerbeyi* (governor of Rumelia) at the time. His appointment as head of the festival, titled *düğüncübaşı* (master of the festival), was likely the most significant and extensive role within the entire organization. İbrahim Pasha was a figure of considerable standing: he had been appointed governor of Rumelia just a few months prior to the festival and was later promoted to the position of vizier in 1585. Furthermore, he married Murad's daughter Ayşe Sultan, becoming the sultan's son-in-law.[288]

Kapudan-ı derya (grand admiral of the navy) Kılıç (Uluç) Ali Pasha was appointed *mimarbaşı* (chief architect), a key position responsible for the preparation of decors, performance venues, tents, and technological innovations, including the supervision of firework displays. Oversight and management of the festival's expenditures were entrusted to the former *nişancı*[289] Hamza Bey, serving as *nazır-ı sur*.[290] Additionally, Cafer Pasha, governor of Anatolia and son-in-law of Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, was appointed chief of sherbets with the title of *şerbetçi*. The *Yeniçeri ağası* (head of the Janissaries), Ferhad Pasha, was designated *muhafızbaşı*, responsible for the supervision of the palace guards.

Another notable official was Cerrah Mehmed Pasha, who performed the circumcision of Prince Mehmed and simultaneously held the position of fourth vizier. Additionally, Jane Hathaway highlights Habeşi Mehmed Agha, the chief harem eunuch, as a significant figure in the organization of the festival.[291] As head of the imperial harem, the chief eunuch oversaw

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[287] SELANİKİ, 1989, p. 133.
[288] For this reason, he is also referred to as "Damat" (son-in-law) İbrahim Pasha in history books.
[289] The *nişancı* was among the most important members of the Imperial Council and a key figure within the Ottoman bureaucratic structure. His responsibilities encompassed preparing the content of council meetings, communicating with council members, drafting the agenda, and drawing tughra—the official calligraphic signature—for the sultan's edicts, among other critical administrative duties.
[290] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 471.
[291] HATHAWAY, 2019, pp. 23–24.

critical events such as births and deaths within the sultan's family, making it highly unlikely that he would have remained uninvolved in a major ceremony concerning the sultan's son. Indeed, he played an active role in the compilation of the imperial festival book by İntizami, co-commissioning it, and is even depicted in the miniaturized illustrations of the manuscript, a point that will be revisited in the discussion of Ottoman sources on the festivities. However, as Hathaway notes, aside from this contribution, he is scarcely represented in either the visual or, as far as can be determined, literary narratives within the festival book, suggesting that his involvement was primarily behind the scenes.

In terms of the festival's execution, the rangers, also known as *tulumcu*, were responsible for maintaining order and ensuring that the square remained accessible and safe for spectators. Approximately 500 *tulumcu* participated in the festival, performing additional duties as well: by inflating the leather *tulum*s they carried with air or water and striking individuals, when necessary, they prevented disputes and disturbances. Simultaneously, akin to jesters, they were tasked with entertaining the crowd and eliciting laughter. Furthermore, 600 *sipahi* (professional cavalrymen) were deployed to oversee the surrounding areas, 200 shipyard captives were assigned to clean the square throughout the festival, and 50 *saka* (water bearers) were responsible for watering the square daily.

What can be observed from this extensive roster of officials is that Sultan Murad entrusted his highest-ranking state figures with the preparation, execution, and transmission of the celebrations. These men were also among the most powerful in the empire. As Özgen Felek insightfully interprets, in many ways, the festival functioned as a "visible manifestation of multiple masculinities." The celebrations were orchestrated entirely under the authority of the "sultan and his men." Consequently, it was indeed a "show of man"[292] organized by men, who created what was considered "the most splendid festival"[293] of the "ideal sultan" upon this grand performance stage.

[292] FELEK, 2019.
[293] STOUT, 1966, p. 44.

3.2. The Stage: Atmeydanı

Festivals are not solely temporal events but also inherently spatial. Indeed, time and space are inseparable in their texture, each implying the other.[294] Festivals involve social interactions that take on both spatial form and content; therefore, it is crucial to examine the sonic atmosphere of the festival and how it was perceived and transmitted. Additionally, attention must be given to the spatial dimension itself. In this context, one should recall the capacity of sound to transform and shape space and its role in the sensing of place.[295] While providing an in-depth analysis regarding the phenomenology of space and place is beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation, it is important to note that the festival space under consideration is also an interconnected locality, constituted by a specific configuration of social relations, as geographer Doreen Massey has emphasized.[296]

According to Massey, places are not confined by physical boundaries but can instead be conceptualized as dynamic intersections of social relations and shared understandings.[297] They are a "center of meaning constructed by experience" and, more importantly, by sensorial experience.[298] These experiences, in turn, shape identity, and conversely, our identities and experiences inform how we perceive a place.[299] The selection of a particular place for a celebration, especially one related to expressions of power, is therefore critical, as it enables the creation of designed sensorial and emotional experiences and becomes "a part of a specific cultural design".[300]

This spatial dimension was particularly significant the 1582 circumcision festival, which took place in one of the most important social and political squares of Istanbul from Byzantium times to the present day: Atmeydanı, or the Hippodrome, as it is historically known and referenced in most Western literature.[301] Following the conceptualization of space as inherently dynamic and in motion rather than static, unitary and disconnected from time,[302] I consider

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[294] LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 118.
[295] FELD, 2006, p. 179: "[…] a place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place."
[296] MASSEY, 1992, pp. 12–13.
[297] Massey touches on this constructing and signifying aspect of place in the "Introduction" and elaborates on it in more detail in the chapter "A Global Sense of Place". See: MASSEY, 2007, pp. 19–24 and pp. 146–156.
[298] TUAN, 1975, pp. 152–153.
[299] I will come back to this point later on, when establishing a comparison between different narratives on a certain sonic performance.
[300] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 505.
[301] Since I have chosen to focus on an event that took place in the 16th century, I prefer to refer to it as Atmeydanı, as it was called in the certain period by Ottomans.
[302] THRIFT, 2006, p. 141.

Atmeydanı as a stage. Each social space emerges from a multifaceted and dynamic process, encompassing symbolic and non-symbolic, perceptual and experiential, practical and theoretical dimensions. In short, every social space possesses its own history.[303] In this respect, the following two sub-sections will examine how Atmeydanı functioned as a center of experience, its historical significance, and its design as a stage during the 1582 festival.[304]

3.2.1. Unveiling the Layers of History: From Hippodrome to Sultanahmet Square

Byzantine Era: Hippodrome

Atmeydanı, the ancient and historically significant square in Istanbul, traces its origins back to the Roman Empire. Constructing circuses for chariot races was a Roman tradition, modeled after the 540-meter-long Circus Maximus in Rome. During that period, Atmeydanı was known as the Hippodrome of Constantinople. It is believed to have been built at the end of the 2nd century for the same purpose, by order of Emperor Septimius Severus (r. 183–211). However, although this so-called "legend of Severus" regarding the foundation of the Hippodrome has never been disproven, scholars such as Cyril Mango have argued that it remains doubtful for several reasons. One major point of skepticism is the implausibility of undertaking such an expensive project when even the city walls were in ruins at the time of Severus.[305] In any case, the completion of the Hippodrome coincides with the reign of Constantine I (r. 272–337) and it was inaugurated on May 11, 330, during the celebrations marking the foundation of the new city.[306]

The Hippodrome was not used only as a racecourse. This grand venue also hosted intense gladiatorial combats and athletic contests that tested the limits of human strength and skill. By the 13th century, however, the popularity of chariot races declined, paving the way for new forms of entertainment such as melees, jousts, and tournaments, spectacles in which both men and women took part. These events gradually replaced the once preeminent chariot races, signaling a shift in the sporting culture of the time.[307] As the centuries passed, the venue evolved into a vibrant center of entertainment, featuring theatrical performances accompanied

[303] LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 110.
[304] A very short and preliminary version of this sub-section can be found in the following article: DEMİRBAŞ, 2021.
[305] MANGO, 2010, pp. 37–38.
[306] MANGO, 2010, p. 39.
[307] GUILLAND, 1948, p. 678; MANGO, 2010, p. 36.

by music, acrobatic displays, and exhibitions of exotic animals. These attractions became as popular as the gladiatorial combats that had once defined the space.[308]

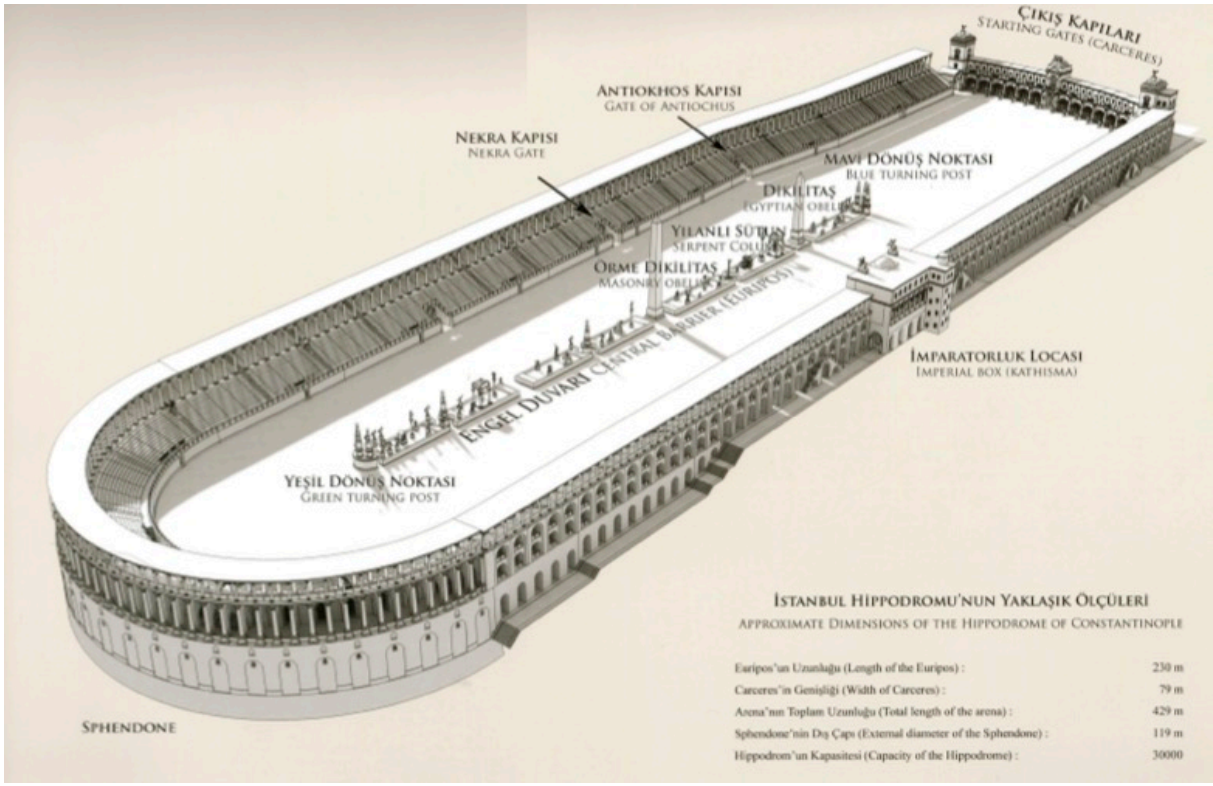

Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the Constantinople Hippodrome by A. Tayfun Öner.
PITARAKIS, 2010, p. 25.

Gilbert Dagron notes that the hippodromes built after the Roman model were representing much more than mere venues of prestige and entertainment. According to him, they also embodied "Romanness" and "Romanization", serving as spaces of political and cultural representation in multiple ways. Although the original layout of the Constantinople Hippodrome remains unknown, it is believed that the imperial box formed an extension of the palace itself. This design allowed the emperor to access the Hippodrome without ever leaving his residence. From his elevated lodge, he could present himself to the public while remaining distant, untouchable, and entirely removed from the crowd below.[309] Seated on opulent couches within the grand imperial lodge known as the *kathisma*, the emperor was accompanied by his

[308] CAMERON, 1999, p. 206; ROUECHÉ, 2010, pp. 55–57. For more details on the chariot races, see GUILLAND, 1969, pp. 562–595; on gladiatorial combats, see ROBERT, 1971, pp. 330–331; for theatrical and circus shows, see CAMERON, 1999 and MARCINIAK, 2014; on spectacles and sport performances, see PARNELL, 2013.
[309] DAGRON, 2010, pp. 31, 34.

esteemed courtiers. The distinguished leaders and prominent members of the racing factions occupied their private enclosures, or *demoi*, while the common people eagerly filled the tiers, animated by the spectacle before them.[310]

The Hippodrome functioned as an undeniable nexus for both public gatherings and political discourse. It hosted numerous festive occasions, including religious holidays, post-war victory celebrations, the commemoration of the city's liberation (May 11), the advent of the new year, as well as grand processions led by imperial and ecclesiastical figures.[311] It was also the site where emperors were crowned—or, at times, renounced their crowns—as exemplified by Emperor Anastasius I (r. 491–518). In 512, Anastasius appeared before the public at the *kathisma* without his crown, declaring his intention to abdicate to quell an ongoing rebellion. When the unrest subsided and the people reaffirmed their support, he retained the throne.[312]

Yet, the Hippodrome also served as a stage for the rising voice of the common crowd, particularly in opposition to imperial authority. In the words of Ekrem Işın, it was "the place where the susurrant voices of back streets and secluded corners unravel."[313] It became the rallying ground for rebellion and resistance, and, at times, for the grim aftermath of public executions and punishments. One of the most striking episodes illustrating both coronation and rebellion occurred during the Nika Riots of 532, under Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565), when the rebels proclaimed Senator Hypatius as the new emperor. The uprising culminated in a brutal massacre within the Hippodrome, where some 30,000 people were killed, including Hypatius himself.[314]

This legacy of spectacle, public engagement, and the intertwining of power and space laid the groundwork for similar practices in the Ottoman era, where imperial authority would be displayed through meticulously orchestrated ceremonies and festivals.

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[310] GUILLAND, 1948, p. 678.
[311] SİNANLAR, 2017, p. 27. For more detail on processions, see BERGER, 2001.
[312] VASILIEV, 1948, p. 30.
[313] IŞIN, 2010, p. 10.
[314] BURY, 1897.

Ottoman Era: Atmeydanı

For centuries, and continuing to the present day, one of the most prominent and intriguing sites in Istanbul has been Topkapı Palace[315] and its immediate surroundings. This prominence naturally extends to Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya), a mosque that had previously served as a major church. Due to its proximity to both the palace and the mosque, Atmeydanı functioned as a focal point for travelers, ambassadors, envoys, and captives from beyond the Ottoman realm. Numerous palace-associated structures were located here, including ateliers for palace artists, enclosures for exotic and wild animals, barns, gunpowder storage, arsenals, military pavilions, and smaller palatial buildings.[316] Edhem Eldem notes that the significance of Atmeydanı grew substantially with the construction of the New Palace (Topkapı) on the Byzantine acropolis. While the palace served as the sultan's residence, it also comprised a complex network of institutions, whose military, administrative, financial, religious, ideological, and symbolic functions extended directly into the Atmeydanı.[317]

Visitors to Istanbul rarely omitted Atmeydanı when describing the city, and this is particularly evident in 16th century narratives. The monuments within the square and surrounding architectural structures consistently attracted the attention of travelers, establishing a tangible connection to Byzantium and the history of Christianity. Among the many observers focusing on these edifices were Pierre Gilles, sent to Istanbul in 1544 to collect Greek manuscripts for the king of France; the Lutheran theologian Salomon Schweigger, who traveled to Istanbul in 1578 in the service of Baron Johann Joachim von Sinzendorf; the Venetian ambassador Benedetto Ramberti, who wrote a report in Italian in 1534; the geographer Nicolas de Nicolay; diplomat Philippe du Fresne-Canaye; and Reinhold Lubenau, a pharmacist in the delegation of the Holy Roman Empire to the Ottoman court in 1587.[318] By the 16th century, when the *city* became a "subject" on its own,[319] and urban plans and visual representations were being created, Atmeydanı emerged as a prominent focus. Several of these

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[315] Topkapı Palace was built between 1460 and 1478 on the orders of Sultan Mehmed II after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.
[316] AND, 2015, pp. 60, 129–130; NECİPOĞLU, 2014, p. 74.
[317] ELDEM, 2010, pp. 184–185.
[318] GILLES, 1729; SCHWEIGGER, 1608, pp. 122–124; RAMBERTI, 1913, pp. 239–240; NICOLAY, 1576, p. 94; FRESNE-CANAYE, 1897, pp. 100–103; LUBENAU, 1995, pp. 147–152. For detailed information on these monuments, which are not mentioned here to avoid further expansion of the subject, see BASSETT, 1991. Regarding the hypothesis that these columns are talismanic, see: ÇELEBİ 2008. For an article examining this square and its monuments through the eyes of Westerners, see: GRELOIS, 2010.
[319] LEFEBVRE, 1991, pp. 277–279.

travelers, including Schweigger, de Nicolay, Stephan Gerlach, and Hans Dernschwam, produced sketches of the square, its monuments, and the city of Istanbul in their writings.[320]

Fig. 5: Detail from Matrakçı Nasuh's map of Istanbul, from the *Beyân-ı Menâzil.* MATRAKÇI, 1537, fol. 8v.

The traveler Hans Jacob Breuning, who arrived in Istanbul in 1579 and stayed for a month, describes his experiences and observations in the city, notably mentioning the "Hippodrome Square" and its monumental structures. According to his account, horse races and equestrian shows were held there, continuing the traditions of Byzantium.[321] Şehsuvar Aktaş, in his thesis, emphasizes this function of the square in relation to these games, describing it as a "site of play".[322] Additionally, battle reenactments with javelins were organized. John Sanderson, who visited Istanbul several times between 1584 and 1602 and served as an assistant to the diplomat Edward Borton, notes that the square, which had been larger in the past, became smaller due to surrounding palaces. He also mentions that horse races continued to be held during this period.[323] For all these reasons, the square was called Atmeydanı, meaning "Horse Square." Beyond the races, an open market was also established. Dernschwam's account reports that

[320] GERLACH, 1674, p. 160; DERNSCHWAM, 2014, pp. 98–102.
[321] BREUNING, 1612, pp. 75–81.
[322] AKTAŞ, 1996, p. 79.
[323] SANDERSON, 2010, pp. 74–76.

every Sunday, *Avrat Pazarı* (Women's Market) was held, where women both bought and sold goods for their weekly household needs.[324]

Fig. 6: Atmeydanı in the 16th century, from the *Hünernâme,* vol II. LOKMAN, 1587–1588, fol. 250r.

The square also served as a venue for festivities, a function that became particularly prominent and continuous in the 16th century. In the 17th century, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier describes the role of Atmeydanı when discussing the palaces of the city: "[…] The palace built in Atmeydanı by İbrahim Pasha, the son-in-law and favorite of Sultan Süleyman II, is now used for public festivities, games, wrestling, carousels and especially for the circumcision of the Ottoman

[324] DERNSCHWAM, 2014, p. 98.

princes, which is their greatest solemnity."[325] This account demonstrates that court festivities continued at Atmeydanı well into the 17th century.

Evidently, the social and political significance of the Byzantine-era Hippodrome persisted into the Ottoman period. In fact, it functioned as a "historical space", in the sense described by Henri Lefebvre, within a rapidly growing city whose expansion was fueled by trade. In her study on 16th-century Istanbul paintings and maps focused on streets and squares, Çiğdem Kafescioğlu argues that Atmeydanı also operated as a site of negotiation and political encounters. She highlights records from the 15th century onward that depict Atmeydanı as a center of justice and politics, as well as a hub for sightseeing and entertainment.[326] Emine Sonnur Özcan, analyzing the usage of Atmeydanı through Jürgen Habermas' concept of the "public sphere" *(Öffentlichkeit),* underscores practices related to the square's use by the public. For instance, the foreign visitors mentioned above, who observed Istanbul and its urban life, were in effect spectators of the city's inhabitants.[327] Özge Bilge Kara refers to the square as "the center of life" during this period, emphasizing its role as a stage for commerce and entertainment.[328]

Turning back to the square's continued role as a political and judicial center, it is important to highlight its function, which was inherited from Byzantine times, as a place of protest where diverse groups could unite, voice their opinions, and revolt against the authorities, particularly from the 17th century onward.[329] Uğur Tanyeli, in his study examining the invisible and intangible spatiality of Istanbul through various thematic lenses, treats the city as a "metropolis of fear" and emphasizes that the uprisings of the 17th and 18th centuries were concentrated in Atmeydanı, a pattern that shifted in the following century.[330] Two of the most notable examples from this period, a century marked by widespread discontent[331], are the following: firstly, the Atmeydanı Incident of 1648, which began as a revolt by the *sipahi*s and escalated into a clash between them and the Janissaries, and secondly, the uprising of 1656,

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[325] TAVERNIER, 1675, p. 56: "Le serrail de l'Hippodrome, que fit bâtir Ibrahim Bacha, gendre & favori de l'Empereur Soliman second, sert aujourd'hui d'Amphiteatre pour des festes publiques, des jeux, des combats, des carousels & particulierements pour la circoncision des Princes Ottomans, qui est leur plus grande solemnité." There is a mistake in the spelling of the sultan's name. It should have been written as: Sultan Süleyman I.
[326] KAFESCİOĞLU, 2019, pp. 17–19.
[327] ÖZCAN, 2009, p. 112.
[328] KARA, 2021, p. 88.
[329] There are various studies on public spaces in the Ottoman Empire, some of which have focused on coffeehouses, especially in their political aspects. For example: YAŞAR, 2018; ÖZTÜRK, 2005.
[330] TANYELİ, 2022, pp. 237–239.
[331] Tanyeli, while talking about the multiplicity of discontents in this century, gives the example of Mehmet Genç's explanation of the 17th century as a "century of crisis" with the number of sultans and *Şeyhülislam*s who were deposed and murdered. See: TANYELİ, 2022, p. 237.

during which the Janissaries protested the devaluation of their salaries and demanded the execution of those responsible under Sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687). This latter revolt, known as the *Çınar Incident* or *Vak'a-i Vak-Vakiye*, concluded with the fulfillment of the rebels' demands and the mass execution of the perpetrators in the square.[332]

Over the centuries, Atmeydanı evolved from a Byzantine Hippodrome into a dynamic Ottoman public square, serving simultaneously as a stage for imperial ceremonies, social gatherings, and political expressions. By the end of the 18th century, this historical layering of social, political, and ceremonial functions laid the groundwork for its transformation into what is today known as Sultanahmet Square, where the traces of its multifaceted past remain embedded in the urban fabric.

From the 19th Century to Today: Sultanahmet Square

The function of the square as an open market and occasionally as a venue for public exhibitions continued into the 18th century. For instance, an elephant brought from India was publicly displayed in 1777, and the first organized public general exhibition took place there in 1863.[333] Yet, from this period onwards, the role of Atmeydanı as a center of festivity gradually began to wane. A major factor contributing to this decline was the relocation of the palace officials to Edirne.[334]

Particularly in the mid-19th century, the city's entertainment focus shifted to other parts of Istanbul following the transfer of the imperial center from Topkapı Palace to the seashore palaces of Sadabat, Beylerbeyi, Çırağan, and finally Dolmabahçe. Although summer houses (*yazlık*), mansions, palaces, and gardens had existed in various parts of Istanbul prior to this period, serving as seasonal residences and venues for entertainment for both the imperial family and the wealthy elite, they had not functioned as central sites.[335] The relocation of the imperial palace to the Bosphorus shore in the 19th century brought a notable change: planned imperial spectacles were now held at the water's edge, intended primarily for the imperial family rather than the broader public.[336]

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[332] İNALCIK, 2009, p. 398.
[333] CANTAY, 1991.
[334] For example, the circumcision celebrations organized during the reign of Mehmed IV (1675) were held in Edirne. For studies on this festival, see fn. 15.
[335] It is also noteworthy that Byzantine emperors had constructed summer residences near the water, indicating a continuity in the use of waterfront locations. See: AKÇURA, 2019, pp. 39–45.
[336] TERZİOĞLU, 1995, p. 89.

However, Atmeydanı, renamed Sultanahmet Square in 1911, continued to hold historical and cultural significance in Istanbul. From the late 18th century onwards, the square and its surrounding structures, particularly monumental edifices such as Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet Mosque), became favored sites for visits. Beginning in the 1790s, elite tourism emerged, with ambassadors and their entourages often receiving guided tours of the mosques upon request. Over time, the square increasingly functioned as an open-air museum, leading to the erection of iron barriers around the monuments to manage visitor access and protect the sites. These measures can be interpreted as early examples of museumization efforts.[337]

This evolution is closely related to the square's earlier role as a venue for public exhibitions, reflecting its enduring character as a site of spectacle and public engagement. A notable example is the public exhibition held in Sultanahmet Square in 1863 during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, which showcased a wide range of international exhibits and drew large crowds. The event not only provided a platform for cultural exchange but also highlighted the growing cosmopolitan character of Istanbul during this period.[338]

The square also continued to function as a public space where political actors could assert themselves and public issues became visible. This role appears to have further evolved during the Second Constitutional Era (*II. Meşrutiyet*). Records indicate that following the declaration of the new constitution in 1908, uprisings and protests in Istanbul were prominently reflected in this square, and some mass executions were carried out there.[339] Similar executions occurred during the Republican era as well. These developments demonstrate the enduring political and symbolic significance of the square, highlighting its continued role as a stage of authority and public engagement despite changes in its name and function over the centuries.[340]

Another example of the square's continued political significance was the Sultanahmet Demonstrations held in Istanbul in 1919. Taking place in this same historic square, these rallies emerged in response to the Greek occupation of Izmir following World War I (1914–1918). They served as a powerful symbol of national awakening for the Turkish people, galvanizing their determination to wage the Turkish War of Independence (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*). With the participation of influential intellectuals, these gatherings also played a pivotal role in promoting

[337] KARA, 2021, pp. 91–92; ELDEM, 2015, p. 78; SİNANLAR, 2017, pp. 72–74.
[338] YAZICI, 2010.
[339] YILDIZ, 2006, pp. 89–92, 254. For a visual reference, see a photograph of the mass execution in Atmeydanı: IŞIN, 2010, p. 343.
[340] For the execution carried out in 1939, see YILMAZ, 2001.

women's activism, empowering them to contribute to the national cause.[341] Among the supporters of the rallies protesting the occupation of Izmir was the Association of Modern Women (*Asri Kadın Cemiyeti*), one of the most active women's organizations of the period. The first demonstration was organized in March 1919, while the largest took place on May 23, 1919, in Sultanahmet Square, attracting an audience of approximately 200,000. At this rally, the writer Halide Edip Adıvar was a prominent speaker.[342] Members of the Asri Women's Association, including Naciye Faham Hanım, Sabahat Hanım, and Şukufe Nihal Hanım, also delivered speeches.[343] The final demonstration, held on January 13, 1920, drew an estimated 150,000 participants from across the city.

Fig. 7: Tables set for Ramadan dinner in Sultanahmet Square. YILDIRIM, 2019.

Sultanahmet Square's role as a space for public gathering, reflection, and action persisted throughout the history of the Republic and continues to the present day. Newspapers reported that, two days before the local elections in 1994, an unexpected crowd gathered in Sultanahmet Square, obstructing traffic on Istanbul's busy streets.[344] The chairman of the right-wing

[341] ÖZDEMİR, 2021a, pp. 10–12.
[342] The documented footage of the demonstration illustrates not only the size of the crowd but also the notable presence of women participants. The YouTube link to this documentary is provided in the "Audiovisual Media" section of the "Bibliography".
[343] ÖZDEMİR, 2021b, p. 131.
[344] ÖZDAL, 2017.

Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) was present in the square alongside their candidate for Mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to conduct a pre-election campaign. Following their electoral victory, the same politicians designated the square as the principal venue for Ramadan celebrations—a tradition that has largely continued to the present. In that year, the then-mayor also reinstated the square's traditional name, Atmeydanı, alongside its official name "as a touching homage to the rich cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire.".[345] The square's transformation into a fairground during the Ramadan festivities, as well as its role as a site for public entertainment, food, and beverages, reflects the enduring notion of continuity with the past.

Today, Sultanahmet Square continues to bear witness to its historical and political significance. In 2019, the 96th Republic Day (October 29th) was celebrated in the square with concerts, and the city's mayor delivered a speech emphasizing the themes of "republic and democracy".[346] During the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day (May 19th), 1,919 young participants performed *Harmandalı*, a folk dance from the Aegean region traditionally associated with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These celebrations were organized under the theme "Hand in Hand from Tradition to Future," highlighting the square's enduring role as a site of collective memory and civic engagement.[347]

While Sultanahmet/Atmeydanı has continued to serve as a stage for public gatherings, celebrations, and political demonstrations over the centuries, its historical role as a performance space reaches back to the Ottoman period. To fully understand the origins of this function, it is necessary to return to the 1582 circumcision festival, where the square's role as a designed stage and the presence of its spectators were most vividly displayed.

3.2.2. The Stage and Its Spectators: Atmeydanı in the 1582 Festival

As can be inferred from the previous paragraphs, Atmeydanı functioned a space through which the state asserted its sovereignty and utilized it as an instrument of its political presence.[348] Therefore, neither its selection as the venue for the 1582 festival nor the manner in which it was prepared to serve as the stage for the corresponding celebrations was accidental. This space cannot be considered a site "designed exclusively for sound or acoustic purposes," such as a

[345] SİNANLAR, 2017, p. 76.
[346] SÖZCÜ, 2019.
[347] BAŞER, 2022.
[348] LEFEBVRE, 1991, p. 279.

concert hall.[349] Nonetheless, meticulous care was taken, and extensive preparations were made to ensure that the performances could be properly followed by the audience. These aspects form the focus of this sub-chapter.

The marriage and circumcision celebrations held during the reign of Süleyman I were generally described as highly magnificent or exceptionally well-prepared by the contemporary writers and observers of the festivities. The 1582 festival, however, differs from these earlier celebrations in terms of spatial organization. While previous festivals primarily relied on temporary architectural structures and arrangements, such as the sultan's throne and awnings or tents for other participants, the scale of the interventions for Prince Mehmed's circumcision festival in 1582 was unprecedented. Although the preparation of the festival site for the guests and the public was elaborate, the organization of the İbrahim Pasha Palace, symbolically the most important venue, warrants first attention.

Although the exact date of its construction is unknown, the palace is thought to have been built during the reign of Bayezid II and was originally known as the Atmeydanı Palace. During the reign of Sultan Süleyman I, it was given to his son-in-law, İbrahim Pasha, and subsequently also became associated with his name.[350] With its view of the Marmara Sea, this palace was regarded as the most beautiful building of the period around Atmeydanı and had already hosted other festivities. By order of Sultan Murad III, the palace underwent extensive renovations for the 1582 festival, with numerous additions, including spacious halls for the Sultan, princes, sultanas, and courtiers to stay during the celebrations. In other words, the palace was once again used as a "celebration or festival house" (*düğün evi*), and the Sultan resided there throughout the festivities.

In addition, Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha, Third Vizier Mesih Pasha, *Düğüncübaşı* İbrahim Pasha (master of the festival), Second Vizier Siyavus Pasha, and Fourth Vizier Mehmed Pasha stayed in the rooms prepared in the same palace.[351] İntizami notes that engineers, *nakkaş*es, and architects were involved in the renovation, working day and night to ensure its timely completion.[352] The *divanhane* section of the palace, serving as the sultan's lodge, directly overlooked Atmeydanı, allowing the sultan to observe the festivities. Most scholarly works on the festival mention that a *şahnişin* was added to the *divanhane* specifically for this occasion.

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[349] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 507.
[350] ATASOY, 2017, p. 48.
[351] URAN, 1942, p. 19.
[352] İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 6r. (PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, p. 74); İNTİZAMİ (S), 1584, fol. 9v. (ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 117–199).

Selaniki also refers to this as a *kasr-ı şahnişin*, meaning "the place deemed worthy for the seating of the sultan," built as a bay window overlooking the street.[353] However, Nurhan Atasoy clarifies that the balcony had already been constructed during the reign of Süleyman I and was renovated for Murad III in 1582.[354] Murad observed the celebrations and performances from this vantage point, as depicted in the miniatures of the festivities.

Fig. 8: The current view of the *exhedra*, constructed for this festival, is located on the side of the building formerly known as İbrahim Pasha Palace, facing the square.
Photograph: A. Tül Demirbaş, January 2022.

The appearance of the sovereign before his subjects was a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, aimed primarily at consolidating his power through a spectacular display of himself and his inner circle. This practice involved the strategic placement of the sultan and his family members within the festival grounds, serving as a means of both identification and symbolic expression. By asserting his presence and prominence in this highly visible manner, the Sultan

[353] SELANİKİ, 1989, p. 134.
[354] ATASOY, 2017, p. 160.

not only reinforced his authority before foreign dignitaries and other political actors but also projected an image of formidable power and legitimacy to his own subjects.

He occupied a higher position within the festival area, while the common people remained below, always at ground level and standing. The positioning of the sultan and his entourage mirrored that of the Byzantine emperor and the notables on the *kathisma* during races and public demonstrations in the Hippodrome. Like the emperor, the Sultan appeared "as if he belonged to another world",[355] sacred and untouchable. An Italian report sent to Venice confirms the Sultan's "invisibility" from the outside when occupying this space: "[…] and the platform of which I speak is covered above with lead, in the shape of a half-pyramid, and has greenery in front and on the sides, so that His Majesty can scarcely be seen when seated low […]."[356]

Fig. 9: Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395) presenting a laurel of victory from the *kathisma* in the Hippodrome. Detail from the pedestal of the obelisk. Photograph: A. Tül Demirbaş, January 2022.

[355] DAGRON, 2010, p. 34.
[356] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 3: "[…] e il poggio ch'io dico cop(er)to di sopra di piombo à mezza piramide, et ha dinanzi et dalle bande verdi in modo che poco si può vedere S(ua) M(aes)tà sentando poi bassa [...]"

In the 16th-century Ottoman festivities, notables and statesmen were positioned near or adjacent to the Sultan, rather than mingling with the general populace. Art historian Sezer Tansuğ highlighted the relationship between the compositional structures of the miniatures depicting the 1582 festival and the visual representations of Byzantine festivals. To demonstrate the similarity between these depiction schemes, he referred to the 4th-century reliefs on the Obelisk in Atmeydanı.[357] (Fig. 9) However, Ekrem Işın challenges this comparison, arguing that the two examples differ significantly; according to him, the architectural structure built for the Sultan cannot, in any way, be equated with the imperial lodge.[358] Nevertheless, in both cases, it is clear that those in power employ spatial organization as a means of creating and sustaining identity and authority through symbols and symbolic gestures.

Fig. 10: Sultanas depicted looking through open windows, from the *Zübdet'ül-eş'âr.* DERVİŞ, 1582, fol. 10r.

[357] TANSUĞ, 2018, pp. 57–58.
[358] IŞIN, 2010, p. 15.

The Sultan's family was also positioned close to him. Prince Mehmed was seated next to the Sultan, while the prince's mother, his sister and their entourage of women occupied the right mansion, adjacent to the Sultan's lodge. The sultanas are not visible in the miniatures (except for the *Zübdet'ül-eş'âr*, see Fig. 10) because they observed the celebrations through red latticed windows from their designated section, making them invisible from the outside.[359]

Fig. 11: Sultan Murad III and guests are watching the parade,
from the *Şehinşahnâme,* vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 31v.–32r.

Regarding the preparation of the palace itself, the most significant modification was perhaps the replacement of the main doors in the first courtyard and the construction of a 72-meter-long, three-storey wooden building facing the square in front of this courtyard. Such constructions, particularly those serving as spectacle lodges, obstructed the use of the palace's main gates, necessitating the creation of a new entrance.[360] Additionally, the steps at the palace entrance were renovated.

[359] ATASOY, 2017, p. 58.
[360] ATASOY, 2017, pp. 86–88.

All these renovations and carefully planned modifications clearly demonstrate that the foremost concern was the placement and visibility of the sultan, followed by his family, and finally all high-ranking guests during the festival. Consequently, if there was a single visual structure that dominated the sensory atmosphere of the event, it was undoubtedly the İbrahim Pasha Palace.[361] While this prominence is already evident in the miniatures of the festival, it was the palace itself that commanded attention, largely due to the presence of the sultan.

State officials and ambassadors sent by friendly states were accommodated in lodges specifically reserved for them.[362] According to Palerne's account, the seating arrangement was organized as follows:[363]

> […] in the first, and highest, of these places was Sinan Pasha, Grand Vizier and Councillor of State, in the position formerly held by Almat Pasha, together with the other three [Viziers], and Uluç Ali Pasha, the great captain and Admiral of Turkey, who had once been a poor fisherman from Calabria; along with the Beylerbeys and Sanjakbeys, ranked on beneath another. On the second floor were the other dignitaries of the Sublime Porte and palace associates. And on the third and lowest level were all the ambassadors of the Christian kings and princes who had been invited to attend the said ceremonies—namely, the ambassador of France, who held the first rank, as well as those of the Emperor, Poland, Venice, and Ragusa […]

Although not depicted in any surviving sources, the spatial organization of the square extended beyond the Sultan's side. The pavilions on the opposite side were occupied by, in Palerne's words, "other Muslim ambassadors who did not wish to align themselves with the Christians".[364] The first row was reserved for the Persians, followed by the ambassador from Tatarstan, and then those from Morocco, Transylvania, and Moldavia. The Polish ambassador, who was expected to occupy the three-story box on the opposite side, was instead assigned a separate lodge among the Muslims, particularly because he arrived late, to avoid being placed behind the other Christian ambassadors.[365] (Fig. 12)

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[361] SPENCE, 2020, pp. 18–19.
[362] ATASOY, 2017, p. 86; ARSLAN, 2009, p. 13; SELANİKİ, 1989, pp. 133–134.
[363] PALERNE, 1606, p. 443: "[…] au premier desquels, & le plus haut, estoit Sinan premier Bachat grand Vizir, & conseiller d'estat, au lieu d'Almat Bachat, avec les autres trois, & Ochially Bachat grand capitaine, & Admiral de Turquie, qui a esté un pauvre pescheur de Calabre: ensemble les Beiglerbeigs & Sangiacbeigs, de grade en grade: au second estage estoyent les autres Seigneurs, & courtisans de la Portte. Et au troisiesme & dernier, qui estoit le plus bas, estoyent tous les Ambassadeurs des Roys, & Princes Chrestiens, qui avoyent esté invités pour assister ausdictes cérémonies, sçavoir celuy de France, qui tenoit le premier rang, celuy aussi de l'Empereur & ceux de Poloigne, Venise & Raguze […]"
[364] PALERNE, 1606, p. 444: "[…] les autres ambassadeurs Mahométistes, qui ne se voulurent mettre au rang des Chrestiens."
[365] PALERNE, 1606, pp. 444–446.

Ceremonies played a crucial role in staging the political and cultural tensions of the period. The spatial organization of the Ottoman court festivities often reflected diplomatic relations,[366] as exemplified by the case of the French ambassador. King Henry III's refusal to attend the festival on religious grounds had already displeased Sultan Murad.[367] Matters were further complicated when the French ambassador, Jacques de Germigny, failed to attend. His absence was partly due to the simultaneous invitation of the Polish ambassador, and also because, as the representative of France, de Germigny would have been admitted only with the same rank as the Venetian ambassador, without receiving any additional privileges.[368]

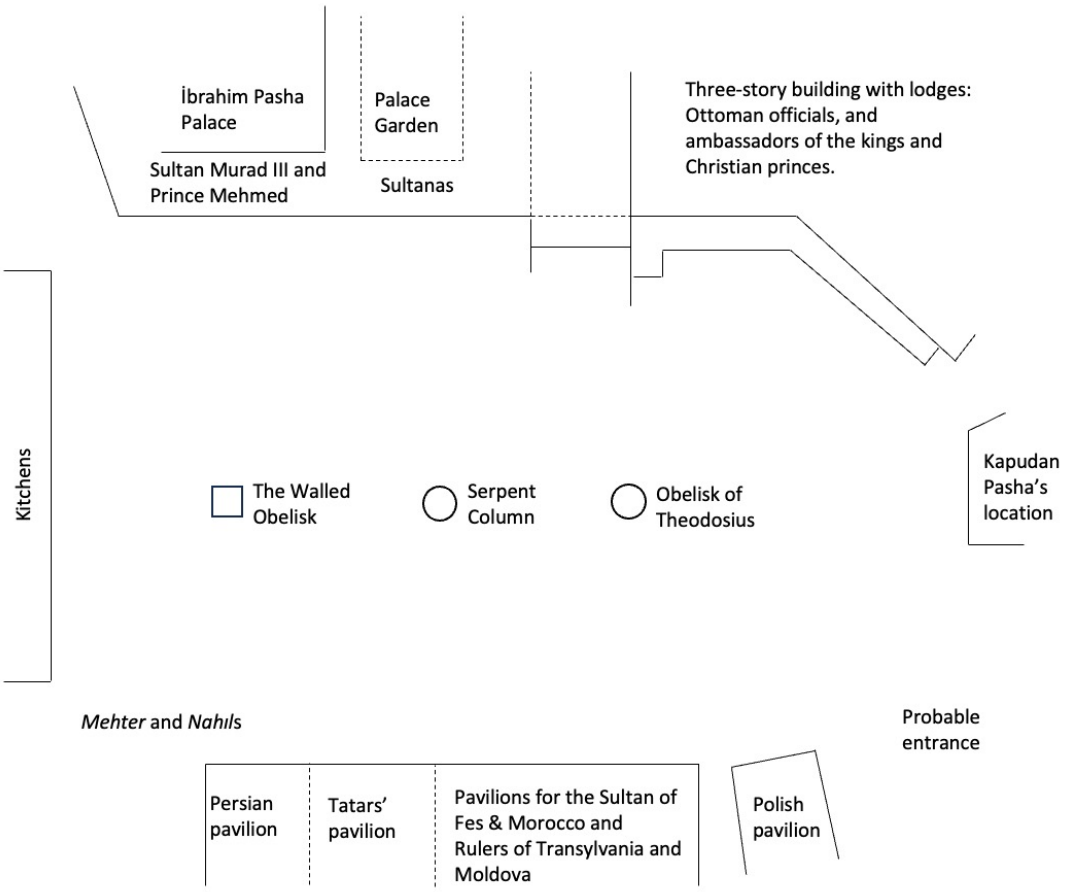

Fig. 12: Seating arrangements at Atmeydanı for the festival of 1582.[369]

[366] YELÇE, 2022, p. 159.
[367] JENSEN, 1985, p. 467.
[368] ÖZKAN, 2003, pp. 91–92; GÖZÜBÜYÜK, 2018, pp. 104–105.
[369] The plan was inspired by Stout's drawing, and it is prepared based on the narratives of Lebelski, Palerne, Haunolth and the anonymous text titled *Türkische Beschneidung*. See: STOUT, 1966, p. 58; LEBELSKI[2], para. 2; PALERNE, 1606, pp. 442–444; HAUNOLTH, 1595, pp. 512–514; TURKISCHE BESCHNEIDUNG, 1582, para. 13–14. See also İntizami's account of the seating arrangements: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 1v.

Another aspect of the festival closely linked to diplomatic and bureaucratic relations was the exchange of gifts. This practice formed part of what Frédéric Hitzel terms the "diplomatic game", encompassing ambassadorial receptions and serving as a significant element of the festival.[370] Representatives from both Christian and Muslim states, as well as rulers and high-ranking Ottoman officials from various provinces, presented gifts to the Sultan and the Prince. Palace records indicate that the type and quantity of gifts varied according to the origin and status of the participants. Textiles and clothing were particularly common, followed by items such as goblets, mugs, and pitchers; books, especially the *Qur'an* and *divan*s; raw materials including sugar, pharmaceuticals, and marble; and even human slaves and animals, such as dogs, hawks, falcons, and horses.[371]

The impressive size of Atmeydanı is frequently emphasized in festival narratives. Ottoman writers, in particular, convey this grandeur through metaphors, suggesting that the magnificence experienced extended beyond what could simply be seen. For instance, Peçevi describes the square as "as wide as the ninth level of the sky".[372] Palerne, the French observer of the festival, provides more precise measurements, noting the space as 60 or 80 fathoms (*toyses*) long and half as wide, while describing it as remarkable.[373] Haunolth further states that the racecourse (*rennplatz*) measured 400 steps (*schritt*) in length and over 100 steps in width.[374] The square could easily accommodate 60,000 spectators, in addition to the participants in the demonstrations.[375] To organize this enormous space effectively, additional areas were incorporated: large tables for banquets were set up throughout the square, covered with awnings and canopies. Ferahi describes an extra marquee erected between the two obelisks at the center of the square, where high-ranking officials (*ümera*) and viziers (*vüzera*) were served. The same large tent was later used for the mass circumcision, as will be discussed in detail.[376]

One of the most striking elements shaping the sensory atmosphere of the festival stage was its lighting. Festival nights glowed with torches, oil lamps, and lanterns, transforming the square into a mesmerizing spectacle. The vibrant colors and intricate designs of these illuminations left a lasting impression on all who witnessed them, heightening the grandeur

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[370] HITZEL, 2017, p. 244.
[371] For the palace registers in which gifts are recorded, see: TSMA.d.9614; TSMA.d.5649; TSMA.d.7856. One of these lists (TSMA.d.09614) is dated April 17, 1582, and, as Hedda Reindl-Kiel has argued, the gifts must have been sent according to the first date on which the festival was scheduled to take place (Spring 1582). Her article can also be referred to for a detailed analysis of the gifts of the 1582 festival: REINDL-KIEL, 2009, p. 42.
[372] PEÇEVİ, 1992, p. 63.
[373] PALERNE, 1606, p. 442.
[374] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 470.
[375] AND, 2020, p. 96.
[376] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 240, 248.

and awe of the celebrations. Kadimi described the effect of burning candles at night, which likely encompassed all festival lighting, with a vivid analogy: “the lights almost prevented the stars from appearing in the sky”.[377] Similarly, Lebelski noted the impact of the countless hanging lamps: “[...] tyed an infinite number of lamps, very splendisaunt, most dexteriously handled, which was a great light through all the place.”[378]

Some chroniclers particularly emphasize the meticulous care and craftsmanship involved in the festival lighting. According to Palerne, a large number of lamps were mounted on poles erected throughout the square. Next to the obelisk stood a large wheel whose movement caused twelve smaller wheels to turn; although the smaller wheels themselves did not move, they appeared to rotate in unison with the main wheel. These lamps, positioned high above, illuminated the entire square, prompting observers to note that “it was a very pleasant sight” and that “they made a place as bright as day”.[379] While candles primarily served to illuminate the square, these examples demonstrate that they were also designed as performative elements, arranged into elaborate compositions. At the 1582 festival, oil lamps were raised and lowered using pulleys to form inscriptions and images. Haunolth reports that one such formation depicted a lion, while others created figures resembling a galley or a tree, described as “extraordinary”.[380]

The detailed and meticulous preparation of the festival, and of Atmeydanı as its stage, is well documented, revealing the tremendous impact of the celebrations. Lebelski emphasizes the festival’s significance in relation to the sultan’s desire to be recognized and respected by foreign powers, noting that the event was organized in a “very methodical and sumptuous way”.[381] Moreover, Atmeydanı, a historical public space in everyday life, was transformed during the 1582 festival into “a place where the palace moved outdoors”.[382] In this manner, it became a stage for political interactions and for the display of the ruling dynasty and its members, who were normally invisible to the common people.

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[377] ALVAN, 2020, p. 65: “Gice seyrinde şu denlü yandı mûm / Şu‘lesinden gökde görünmez nücûm”
[378] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 2.
[379] PALERNE, 1606, p. 484: “[…] chose assés plaisant” and “[…] elles rendent une claire en la place, pareille au jour.”
[380] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 484.
[381] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 2.
[382] YELÇE, 2014, p. 89.

3.3. *Padişahım Çok Yaşa!*[383] – Sultan's Generosity

During court celebrations, the benevolence of rulers takes center stage, illuminating their profound care for their subjects. Grandiose festivities serve a multifaceted purpose, embodying deep symbolic meaning and fulfilling essential functions within a ruler's realm. They provide an opportunity for the ruler to display magnanimity and generosity, ensuring the well-being and happiness of their people. The lavish display of wealth and abundance creates an atmosphere of festivity, allowing the populace to partake in splendor, even if only briefly. Moreover, such celebrations divert attention from the opulent lives of the ruling elite, shielding their ostentatiousness from public scrutiny. By investing in the joy and prosperity of the people, rulers reinforce their image as benevolent protectors, thereby consolidating their legitimacy and authority. Ultimately, court celebrations function as a powerful instrument for strengthening the bond between ruler and subjects, cultivating loyalty and gratitude within the realm.

With regard to Ottoman imperial festivities, I have already discussed the sultan's duty of protection and care when outlining the virtues that defined an ideal ruler. This section now turns to the symbolic gestures and practices that embodied Sultan Murad's generosity and forgiveness during the 1582 circumcision festival. Examples from contemporary festival narratives will illustrate these expressions of imperial benevolence.

3.3.1. Forgiveness of Prisoners

In the context of court festivals, rulers occasionally granted pardons to prisoners as a demonstration of benevolence and mercy. A notable example comes from Tudor England during the reign of King Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547). During the annual Christmas festivities at court, the king would often extend pardons to prisoners, allowing them to be released and reunited with their families for the holiday season. Similarly, in France under King Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715), known as the "Sun King", grand celebrations, *fêtes* held at the court of Versailles, featured lavish banquets, theatrical performances, and masquerade balls. On special occasions, such as the birth of an heir or the conclusion of a major treaty, the king would issue

[383] Translation by the author: "Long live the Sultan!"

pardons as a symbolic act of magnanimity and as a gesture intended to promote harmony within the realm.

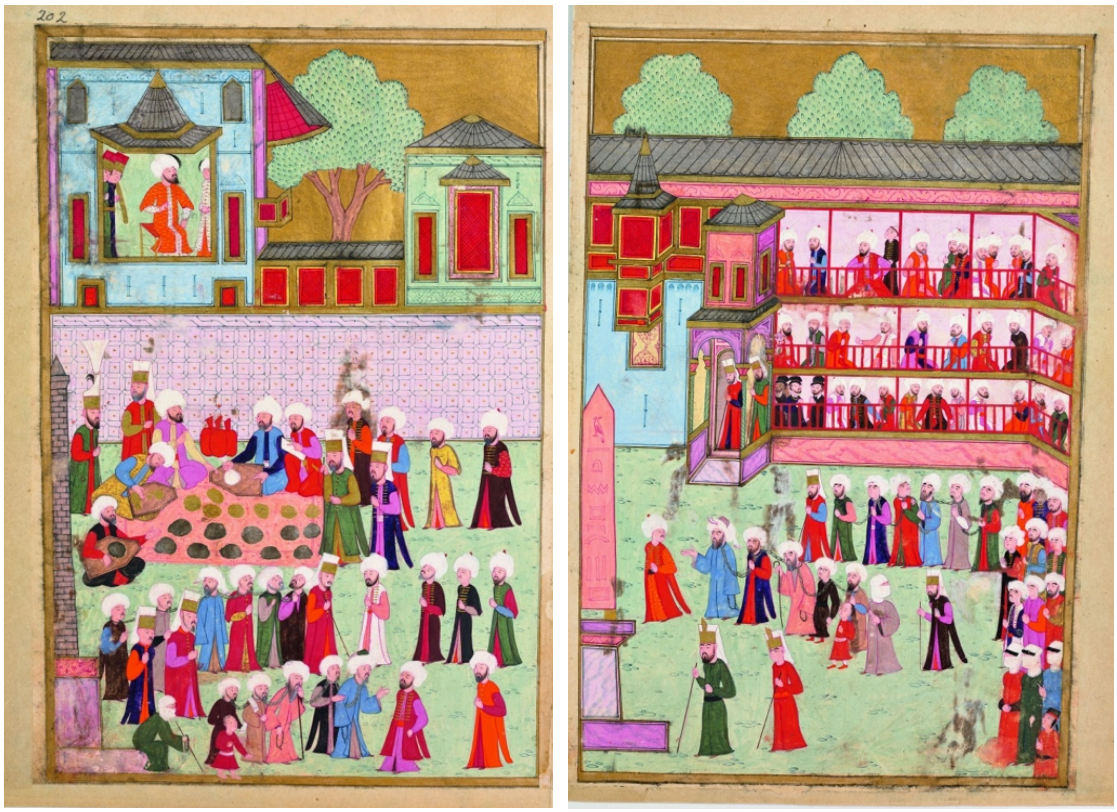

Fig. 13: Prisoners discharged by the order of Sultan Murad III, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 201v.–202r.

These examples illustrate how European monarchs used court festivals as opportunities to grant pardons, thereby emphasizing their benevolence and fostering goodwill among their subjects. Similar acts of clemency can also be found in the Ottoman context, most notably during the 1582 festival. An act of pardon was regarded as a manifestation of the sultan's compassion and his wish to bring joy and forgiveness to his subjects.

According to Mustafa Ali's account, all those who had been imprisoned for any reason, including murderers (*katil*), were pardoned by Sultan Murad. Those forgiven also included individuals who had been required to pay compensation, known as *diyet*, for their offenses.[384] During the 1582 festival, convicts whose debts had been paid by others, and who were therefore condemned to work for their benefactors (*mücrim*),[385]were likewise released. Mustafa Ali's

[384] In Islamic law, *diyet* refers to the monetary or material compensation paid as punishment or as blood money for the unlawful killing, injury, or mutilation of a person. See: BARDAKOĞLU, 1994.
[385] İNTİZAMİ (T), fols. 201r., 202r.–203v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 299–300).

verses shed light on the motives behind this generous decision, describing the celebration as a time to please and rejoice the people, in keeping with the festive spirit of the occasion: "Our feast is a banquet of rejoicing; it is the time to gladden the people. Even he who is a murderer or a criminal, my pardon shall be his aid and his certainty."[386]

Beyond those released from debt, another group benefited from the Sultan's mercy during the festival. These were men who identified themselves as veterans and defenders of Islam, who had been captured by the infidel enemy in battle and could only secure their release through ransom payments. At the festival, around 200 of these destitute veterans appealed to the Sultan for his benevolence. Mustafa Ali records that they were rewarded with abundant imperial fights and granted both purses of money and slaves, as they had requested.[387]

Such public acts of forgiveness were not merely gestures of compassion but also deliberate performances of sovereignty. By transforming mercy into spectacle, the sultan reinforced his image as a just and magnanimous ruler, strengthening the ideological bond between himself and his subjects.

3.3.2. Food for Everyone

Throughout history, the relationship between food and imperial power has been deeply intertwined. Beyond its basic necessity for survival, food had served as a potent symbol of wealth, abundance, and control. In imperial contexts, the provision and distribution of food were crucial tools for asserting and maintaining authority. Within the Ottoman Empire, the act of feeding was a significant component of court festivities, where everyone was regarded as a guest of the sultan.[388] Thus, such celebratory events became exceptional occasions during which a plentiful and accessible supply of food was made available to a vast number of individuals.

Imperial rulers often sought to display their opulence and grandeur through lavish feasts and banquets. These extravagant displays of food were not only a means of satisfying personal desires but also a deliberate strategy to impress subjects, foreign dignitaries, and rivals. The ability to provide such abundance was perceived as evidence of the empire's strength, resources, and dominance.

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[386] ALİ, 1586, fols. 94v.–95r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 261; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 592): "Sûrımız sûr-ı şâdmânîdir / Halkı şâd itmenün zamânıdır / Ol ki yâ kâtil ü ya mücrimdir / Ana 'afvum mu'in ü câzimdir."
[387] ALİ, 1586, fols. 92v.–93r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 256–258; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 585–587).
[388] İNALCIK, 2017, p. 31.

At the 1582 festival, as in earlier imperial celebrations, food was distributed in two different ways: a general feast for the public and a banquet for those within the official protocol.[389] The public feast was an enormous gathering that included high-ranking officials, foreign guests, and ordinary citizens alike. Consequently, the preparation of these meals was both demanding and costly, requiring meticulous planning, from selecting ingredients to organizing the utensils used for service. All kitchen and dining equipment was procured and supplied; workspaces for cooking were prepared, and food storage areas were established. Sinan Pasha's residence in Atmeydanı was stocked with pantry provisions, while fireplaces and kitchens were strategically constructed in front of the furnaces and within the square. One thousand five hundred *sahans* (shallow pans) and trays were produced, each weighing six to six and a half kilograms of copper. According to Selaniki, these vessels were so heavy when filled that only strong men of great vigor could carry them. They were primarily used for the distribution of rice.[390]

During the festival, tables were laden with a variety of dishes, and all participants, including foreign guests, aghas, soldiers, hafiz, and courtiers, followed a strict ceremonial protocol. The first special feast (*taam-ı has*) of the festival was offered to those who had taken part in organizing and serving the celebrations. More than 300 tables were set up under awnings in Atmeydanı, accommodating nearly 15,000 guests.[391] Lavish banquets were also held for members of the *ulema*, aghas, preachers and hafiz, the lords of Rumeli and Anatolia, the Captain Pasha and naval officers, viziers and other state dignitaries, Janissaries, and sheikhs. These events are described in detail in the narratives of Mustafa Ali and Ferahi, and to some extend in İntizami's account as well.[392]

Foreign chroniclers likewise paid particular attention to the feasting scenes. They described the meals as plentiful and exquisite. The Italian report signed "Le Vigne de Pera" even records the specific banquet days—for instance, a feast for 4,000 *sipahi*s held under a large tent on Monday morning, the 11th.[393] Lebelski, when commenting on the dishes served at the sultan's sumptuous feasts, noted that "if we compare it with ours," there was no venison, wild birds, or fish of any kind, and that instead of wine, only sugared water (most likely *şerbet*)

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[389] To read on banquets at festivals during the reign of Sultan Süleyman I: YELÇE, 2014.
[390] Selaniki gave it according to the unit of measurement of the time, I did the conversion to kilograms. SELANİKİ, 1989, p. 133: "[…] iki bin dirhemden dahi ziyâde" (even more than two thousand *dirhem*).
[391] ALİ, 1586, fols, 79r.–80r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 57–58; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 551–553).
[392] ALİ, 1586, fols, 79v.–90r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 232–251; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 551–578); ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 113–117, İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 74r., 75v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 181–184).
[393] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 1.

was offered. Yet, he adds, the guests were entirely content, “all simply and homely dressed”.[394] One final remark by Lebelski is particularly striking: Sultan Murad himself never attended these banquets. He remained apart from the attendees and dined alone, “as in a cage”.[395]

Fig. 14: Banquet for the officials of Rumelia, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn.* İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 74v.–75r.

The true culinary highlight of the festival was the grand feast offered to the public. From June 4 to July 14, food was distributed daily, with bread, rice, and mutton serving as the main dishes.[396] Ferahi records that two hundred sheep were slaughtered each day for these meals and that three thousand bowls of food were distributed. He further notes that the provisions were also shared with the poor and orphans, ensuring that the Sultan’s generosity reached all levels of society.[397]

[394] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 6.
[395] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 6. In fact, he was not completely alone, only his eunuchs were with him.
[396] FUGGER, 1923, pp. 63–67; LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 1.
[397] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 111–112.

There was also a playful aspect to the distribution of food, as the aim was not only to feed the people but also to entertain them. This ritualized chaos was known as *çanak yağması* ("bowl looting").[398] The consumption of the food followed a specific order, regulated by the *tulumcus*—buffoon-like figures responsible for maintaining security in the square with their distinctive attire and exaggerated movements.

First, they arranged the crowd in line, and then the start of the looting was signaled by the sound of trumpets and drums. At this command, people rushed toward the food. According to Mustafa Ali, their hair and beards were soon covered in food as they devoured it "like coyotes".[399] Lebelski too, expressed astonishment at the scene, comparing the crowd to starving dogs and calling the event a "feast for dogs." He described the sonic cue that triggered the frenzy as follows: "[…] as soon as the meat is brought, the tympanis and pipes *(tibicinis)* sound out, at the first sound whereof, the people come running to this kitchen, fighting and scrambling for they supper…"[400] Another account even described this chaotic spectacle of people attacking food as a "very delightful view".[401]

Unlike the usual practice, twenty cattle, complete with their horns and hooves, were roasted and served to the public alongside rice and lamb during the festival. Haunolth records a remarkable detail: when the roasted cattle were cut open, rabbits, wolves, badgers, and similar animals emerged from within, alive.[402] Mustafa Ali and İntizami further note that thousands of pots of food in various colors and flavors were prepared, and that the whole roasted animals added a distinct richness and spectacle to the tables in terms of both color and flavor.[403] All of this illustrates how the act of food distributions not only nourished the public but also animated the festive square, enhancing its sensory vibrancy and theatricality.

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[398] For some examples of the looting of bowls, see: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 51v., 92v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 162, 197).
[399] ALİ, 1586, fol. 89v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 251; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 577): "Yağmacılarun saçı sakalı / Destâr u libâs u dest-mâlı / Müstağrak olurdı yag u bala / Her seblet ü rîş dönüp şegâle."
[400] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 6.
[401] FUGGER, 1923, p. 63: "Als dies alles auf dem Erdboden lag, eilten alle armen in höchster Eile herbei, um sich der Speisen zu bemächtigen, was einen sehr ergötzlichen Ausblick gewährte."
[402] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 475.
[403] ALİ, 1586, fols. 89r.–v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 250–251; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 576–577); İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 33r. (PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, p. 115).

3.3.3. Generous Gifts

Usually, the *çanak yağması* (bowl looting) was followed by another display of generosity: the sultan throwing money from his elevated position to those gathered below. The coins scattered from the balcony into the crowd were sometimes gold and sometimes silver. This event, known as *saçı* or *altın ve gümüş yağması* ("gold and silver looting"), which some researchers also describe as a form of spectacle,[404] included the distribution of other precious items as well.

Fig. 15: Sultan Murad III's money scattering and the turmoil that erupted, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fol. 51r.

[404] ARSLAN, 2009, p. 89; AND, 2020, p. 65.

According to an Italian report, for example, on Monday the 18th, the sultan threw thirty silver cups and silver coins worth 4,000 Venetian coins. The same source adds that the Sultan's mother and wife also tossed coins from their own quarters, which were normally closed and hidden from public view.[405] (Fig. 10) In this "solemn feast",[406] golden bowls, trays, cups, and goblets were likewise distributed to the audience.[407]

One of the performative aspects of this practice was the competition it provoked among the people, much like during the banquet. Those rushing to seize the scattered coins were even depicted by Seyyid Lokman in İntizami's *Sûrnâme*. Yet the other side of this spectacle was its potential for chaos and harm. People climbed over one another, crushing and fighting as they tried to collect money and valuables. According to Ferahi, the tumult was so intense that when a pause was finally called, several dead bodies were found in the square.[408]

Richard Schechner, renowned for his work in theater and performance studies, draws attention to the purpose of such theatrical moments in festivals and carnivals: even when they occasionally end in tragedy, their typical aim is to provoke laughter. As he explains in his discussion of ritual, play, and performance, these events momentarily suspend ordinary reality, allowing participants to experience release and renewal through shared emotion and humor.[409] In the same vein, the chaotic yet exuberant scenes of the 1582 festival can be interpreted as performative acts of collective catharsis. The tension between order and disorder, generosity and excess, mirrored the Sultan's power to orchestrate both harmony and controlled chaos, a theatrical reflection of imperial authority itself.

The Sultan also distributed valuable gifts to high-ranking officials, including the grand vizier, other viziers, provincial governors, the *kazasker* (chief judge), the Janissary agha, and the sultan's *hoca* (religious tutor). These gifts included maces and swords, as well as horses adorned with gold, silver, and precious stones, or fitted with saddles and chains inlaid with silver and gold.[410]

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[405] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 3.
[406] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 6.
[407] FUGGER, 1923; İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 45v.–46r., 47v., 86v.–87r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 158–159, 192–193); ALİ, 1586, fols. 90r.–92v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 254–256; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 582–585).
[408] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 341: "Ve bu hücûm-ı nâssa bî-kıyâs idi ki, şol kadar hengâme oldı ki, meydân-ı ma'rekede halk kesretden rehâ buldukda ve bir mikdâr aram olıcak bir niçe kimsenün meyyitin buldılar."
[409] SCHECHNER, 1996, p. 46.
[410] ALİ, 1586, fols. 93v.–94v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 258–260; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 587–591).

3.3.4. Mass Circumcision

In the Ottoman Empire, it was customary to circumcise other children during the celebrations held for the circumcision of a sultan's son. This collective act, often regarded as the support of the wealthy for the needy, functioned as a ritual primarily for impoverished children. On the occasion of his son Mehmed's circumcision, Sultan Murad ordered officials to go door to door across various neighborhoods of Istanbul to identify children in need. According to İntizami's account, the circumcision of more than ten thousand orphaned and destitute boys took place beneath specially erected canopies. These children were also provided with money and beautiful new garments and expressed their gratitude by praying for the sultan.[411]

Religion, as previously discussed in the chapter on the characteristics of the ideal sultan, played a crucial role in imperial festivities and their representational function. Indeed, both Muslim clerics and religious leaders of other faiths participated in the processions of the 1582 festival, publicly expressing their appreciation toward the Sultan. Yet, as the Caliph and the head of both the Empire and Islam, the Sultan's religious authority introduced an inherent sense of Muslim superiority, particularly over foreigners and people of other faiths. This dimension can be interpreted as a form of religious propaganda, and it is known that several individuals converted to Islam during the celebrations.

Mustafa Ali attributed the mass conversions of non-Muslims to Islam to the sultan's majestic presence, sense of justice, and other exemplary human qualities. According to his account, approximately 8,000 individuals converted to Islam during the festival and were circumcised in Atmeydanı as part of this process.[412] They raised their fingers in the air, recited the testimony of faith (*şehadet*),[413] and thus formally embraced Islam.

Hammer-Purgstall also records that over a hundred Christians of Greek, Albanian, Serbian (*Raizen*), and other origins converted to Islam and were circumcised during the same festival.[414] The Venetian report further notes that those who converted included people from Bosnia, Albania, and Rumelia, though they were dressed in Hungarian-style white garments. Many of these converts were described as *disperse,*[415] *vagabondi et malandati* (wanderers,

[411] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 410v.–411r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 472–473).
[412] ALİ, 1586, fols. 90v.–91r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 252–255; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 578–581).
[413] PALERNE, 1606, p. 487: "La ilahe illallah Muhammedün resulullah" (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet.)
[414] HAMMER-PURGSTALL, 1840, p. 520.
[415] The term *dispersi* likely refers to soldiers who had become separated from their military units.

vagabonds and wretches) who had long lived as captives.[416] Following their circumcision, they were incorporated into the imperial service, joining the ranks of *acemi oğlan* (novice boys) and *iç oğlan* (pages of the inner palace), and were assigned to their new duties.[417] These acts of conversion and incorporation not only underscored the sultan's religious and political authority but also exemplified how imperial festivals functioned as performative tools of integration and statecraft.

Fig. 16: Mass circumcision and people who converted to Islam, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fol. 81r.

[416] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 4.
[417] PALERNE, 1606, p. 487; İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 325v. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 401).

3.4. The Sensorial and Spectacular Dimensions of the Festival

The 1582 circumcision festival is remembered and commemorated as the most grand and spectacular of all Ottoman court celebrations. This characterization appears not only in the writings of contemporary scholars but also in the accounts of both Ottoman and foreign chroniclers of the period and beyond. It is particularly noteworthy to reflect on the "magnificent", "splendid", "glorious", "grandiose", yet at the same time the "strange", "unusual", and "fascinating" nature of the events, performances, and various exhibited elements repeatedly emphasized in these narratives.

In this context, it is worth recalling Andrew J. Rotter's work on the sensory history of the British in India and the United States in the Philippines. In the opening paragraph of his study, Rotter vividly describes how empires are experienced and understood through the five senses, and how sensory perception shapes both human interaction and the experience of power:

> Empire was many things. One of them was an encounter between authorities and subjects, an everyday process of social intercourse, political negotiation, policing and schooling and healing. It meant the imposition of control and accommodation or resistance to it. All of these interactions were on some level intellectual, having to do with what people thought about each other. But they were also in significant ways mediated by the senses, perceptions of others formed through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.[418]

The 1582 imperial festival was a captivating display of sensory experiences. It is not difficult to imagine that vast square of Atmeydanı overflowing with people, with the entire city, and perhaps even visitors from other regions, in attendance. The visual richness of colors, fabrics, and symbols reached its peak, while the abundance of food at the banquet tables engaged multiple senses at once. Richard Schechner's reflections on the nature of rituals are particularly relevant here, as they illuminate the structural dynamics of this carnivalesque celebration:

> Many human rituals integrate music, dance, and theater. The display of masks and costumes; the processions, circumambulations, singing, dancing, storytelling, food-sharing, fire-burning, incensing, drumming, and bell-ringing; the body-heat, press, and active participation of the crowd create an overwhelming synaesthetic environment and experience for the audience, tribe, or congregation. At the same time, rituals embody

[418] ROTTER, 2019, p. 1. He had previously made this definition in another article: ROTTER, 2011, p. 4. Also, see: DEMİRBAŞ, 2024.

> cognitive systems of values that instruct and mobilize participants. These embodied values are rhythmic and cognitive, spatial and conceptual, sensuous and ideological.[419]

The visual manifestation of power within the enchanting landscape of the 1582 festival radiated with luminosity, technological sophistication, and an intricate interplay of sounds. Historical records indicate that one of the most striking components of this grand celebration, strategically employed by the Ottomans to project their power and influence, was the use of ingenious machinery and advanced technological devices. These remarkable innovations were meticulously designed to awe and impress, serving as a testament to the Sultan's authority—not only as an affirmation of his own grandeur but also to captivate the populace and leave a lasting impression on esteemed dignitaries from across the empire and beyond.

This sub-chapter is devoted to selected performances and elements that shaped the sensorial and spectacular atmosphere of the festival. Based on a close analysis of primary sources, the selection focuses on those features that provoked or evoked sensory and emotional responses, elements that contemporary observers from diverse cultural backgrounds deemed worthy of recording, describing, and reporting. These examples encompass a wide range of expressions, from processions and performative displays to culinary marvels, mechanical inventions, and encounters with the exotic, each contributing to the construction of the festival's multisensory splendor.

3.4.1. Guilds' Parade and Moving Workspaces

At the end of the 16th century, the population of Istanbul within the city walls was estimated to be between 350,000 and 400,000,[420] making it one of the most populous cities in the world at the time. This immense population was composed of a diverse mix of ethnicities, religions, and nationalities, reflecting the cosmopolitan character of both the city and the empire.[421] In this context, not only the vast number of spectators but also the multitude of participants and performers involved in the 1582 festival must be taken into account. To this already

[419] SCHECHNER, 1993, p. 302.
[420] İnalcık explains in his study that there were various estimates of the city's population, some highly exaggerated, and concludes that the estimate of 300,000 made by the Venetian ambassador Garzoni in 1573 is the most reasonable. See: İNALCIK, 2001. For more information on population estimates for Istanbul in the 15th and 16th centuries, see: ÖZ, 2015.
[421] For a brief overview of Istanbul's minorities and non-Muslims, see: MANTRAN, 1995, pp. 69–82.

considerable figure, one must add those who came from the surrounding areas of Istanbul as well as from other regions of the Ottoman lands.[422]

Artisans and craftsmen held an important place within the city's population and were among the most prominent participants in the festival. In 16th century Istanbul, Ottoman guilds, known as *esnaf*, functioned as the backbone of the city's vibrant economy. They played a crucial role in organizing and regulating various trades and crafts, encompassing artisans, merchants, and professionals. Each guild operated within a clear hierarchy, headed by a master who trained apprentices and journeymen in their respective crafts. Guilds fostered both technical excellence and social cohesion, ensuring that skills and techniques were transmitted across generations while also providing a sense of community and mutual support. As integral components of urban life, they contributed significantly to the city's cultural and social fabric.[423] For this reason, the guilds' parades organized during imperial celebrations were arguably the most important and elaborate part of the entire festival program.

Due to the scarcity of primary sources, particularly for the period before the second half of the 16th century, our access to detailed information remains limited. Nonetheless, the available evidence suggests that the 1582 parade represents the earliest recorded instance of a public procession involving Ottoman artisans.[424] The guilds' parade began on June 11, lasted for twenty days,[425] and, according to various accounts, featured more than 150 artisan groups.[426]

Initially, the guilds showcased their performance to both the city and the public, before proceeding to the square where they greeted the Sultan and performed in his presence. Each artisan class and lodge carried its own banner or flag in the parade. Upon approaching the sultan, they would announce their guild affiliation and offer prayers for him. Derin Terzioğlu refers to the performative aspect of the 1582 festival as "the recreation of the Ottoman world on stage".[427] Examining its components, one can see how fitting this definition is for the festival, and particularly for the artisan procession. As a ruler consolidates his power by

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[422] See the palace records for detailed lists of musicians, acrobats, wrestlers, and other performers, as well as artisans who came from different parts of the Ottoman Empire to participate in the festival: TSMA.d.10377, TSMA.d.10104, TSMA.d.10022.
[423] For Faroqhi's in-depth analysis of the history of Ottoman guild studies and the different approaches and interpretations, see FAROQHI, 2005b. In fact, not only this article but the entire volume in which it was published is highly valuable for understanding the structure of artisan guilds.
[424] FAROQHI, 2005b, pp. 3, 19.
[425] ARSLAN, 2009, p. 23; PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, p. 40; LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 3.
[426] Alongside the artisan procession, there were also various religious orders and non-Muslim groups, including different communities of dervishes (Mevlevi, Kalenderi, Bektashi, etc.) as well as Greeks from the Beyoğlu and Galata neighborhoods of Istanbul.
[427] TERZİOĞLU, 1995, p. 91.

displaying himself to his people, so did the urban society exhibit itself in this festival and parade to affirm and reinforce its existence, as Aktaş emphasizes.[428] This was especially true for the guilds.

Fig. 17: (left) Parade of bread-makers, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 153r.
Fig. 18: (right) Parade of coffeemakers, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn.* İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 367r.

In her meticulous study of 17th-century Istanbul guilds, Eunjeong Yi further notes that the parades organized during festivals fostered strong competition among participating guilds.[429] Each group found ways to distinguish itself not only through flags made of colorful fabrics adorned with garlands but also through elaborate visual constructions. Artisans paraded with mobile workshops and decorations designed to reflect their crafts. These wheeled structures, often enormous in scale, were transported either by groups of people or by large animals. Among the most magnificent elements of the celebrations were what R. E. Stout describes as "spectacular devices". These massive, three-dimensional models dominated the festival

[428] AKTAŞ, 1996, pp. 85–86.
[429] YI, 2004, pp. 4–5.

stage.[430] The term *device* is indeed apt, as these colossal, wheeled structures revealed the mechanical and technical sophistication of the parade. In line with other aspects of the festival, abundance, multiplicity, and sheer size served to reinforce the empire's economic might.

Fig. 19: Parade of *Sırçacıyan* (glassware-makers), from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 32v.–33r.

Taken as a whole, the guild parades were spectacles that captivated the audience's senses. They were vibrant displays of craftsmanship and trade, as members of various guilds marched through the bustling streets, showcasing their skills and wares. From silk weavers to metalworkers, each guild presented its creations adorned with intricate designs and exquisite details. Peçevi described these displays during the parade as "strange and curious".[431] The parades not only celebrated the skill and artistry of the guild members but also stood as a testament to the empire's rich cultural heritage. In this sense, as Stefanos Yerasimos remarks, "Atmeydanı became the essence of the great empire".[432] It was a time when the streets came alive with the spirit of creativity, and onlookers marveled at the masterful craftsmanship that

[430] STOUT, 1966, p. 207.
[431] PEÇEVİ, 1992, p. 65.
[432] YERASIMOS, 2002, p. 36.

defined the Ottoman guild parades. Accordingly, Nakkaş Osman's festival miniatures depict a wide variety of urban types, recording the parades of the city's guilds in vivid visual detail.[433]

Metin And emphasizes that the chariots featured in the parade were significant in demonstrating the technological innovations of the era.[434] His argument rests on two distinct types of sources: First, And refers to the human figures depicted within the large kiln of the glassmakers in Nakkaş Osman's miniatures. Second, he draws on written accounts from various narratives stating that "they were blowing glass in the procession". İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* also makes it clear that there were people inside these moving workshops actively practicing their professions. Bakers were making bread, potters and coppersmiths were producing their wares, and the glassmakers were indeed working in a functioning kiln. Lebelski's narrative further confirms this, noting that the glaziers were visibly engaged in their work before the spectators.[435] However, Suraiya Faroqhi offers a different interpretation, arguing that these structures were not actual workshops but rather "theatrical decors" designed to simulate real production.[436]

Bostanzade notes that intricate and astonishing constructions were produced with great care, unique devices and structures that evoked wonder and admiration. At Atmeydanı, scenes of excitement and amazement unfolded as the crowd watched in awe. Whether decorative or real, the spectators were astonished by the realistic appearance and magnificence of these constructions.[437] A similar sense of realism is also observed in other accounts of the festivities, such as the famous mobile Turkish bath mounted on four wheels and pulled by oxen (Fig. 20). The bathhouse featured a *külhan* (bath stove), *camekan* (changing area), *kurna* (basins), tiles, ornaments, and hanging *peştemal*s (towels). Four people were places on this moving structure, three undressed and one clothed, two of whom appeared to be bathing, accompanied by *tellak*s (attendants). The bathhouse was said to be properly heated, filled with steam, and equipped with both hot and cold running water. In addition, reports indicate that several buildings had to be demolished to transport this enormous bath model to the festival site due to its sheer size.[438]

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[433] FETVACI, 2019, p. 117.
[434] Metin And interprets these cars as "a moving theater stage": AND, 2020, pp. 300–303.
[435] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para.15: "Glassmakers, which made their besseles [vessels] of glass, in the light and presence of all men" Lebelski also mentions elsewhere in his notes that "they were working in the presence of Murad in the arriving chariots".
[436] FAROQHI, 2009, p. 62. She even likens these structures to "tableaux vivant". See: FAROQHI, 2005a, p. 170.
[437] BOSTANZADE, 1870, p. 85. The question of whether these gigantic figures and three-dimensional constructions were real or merely theatrical will be revisited later in the analysis of the mountain model show and its distinctive sonic atmosphere.
[438] İNTİZAMİ (T), fols. 336r.–339r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 409–411); ALİ, 1586, fols. 68v.–69r. (ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 521–523; ÖZTEKİN 1996, pp. 210–211); HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 502.

Such elaborate and lifelike constructions transformed Atmeydanı into a moving stage of wonder, where craftsmanship, imagination, and spectacle merged seamlessly, a prelude to even more symbolic displays that would follow.

Fig. 20: Parade of *Hamamcıyan* with Turkish bath model, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 337r.

3.4.2. Garden of Eden on Stage

To display or affirm imperial power, not only the visual and gustatory but also the olfactory senses of the audience were deliberately stimulated during the festival. This section focuses on sensory elements such as flowers and gardens, while also considering the so-called *nahıl* figures, which appealed simultaneously to sight and smell.

Although the historical context and meaning of flowers vary across cultures, their use in rituals and celebrations has been nearly universal. From weddings to funerals, flowers have long served as ceremonial companions, symbolizing beauty and transience. Indeed, this notion of the "beautiful" extends to fragrance itself.[439] As Andrew J. Rotter notes, scents and the sense of smell are socially classed, and observation that also applies to what is perceived as a "beautiful smell".[440]

Although smell has traditionally been ranked below sight and hearing (and sometimes even touch) in the sensory hierarchy,[441] recent studies have revealed its profound impact. Research shows that odors possess a unique ability to evoke strong emotional responses and trigger vivid memories. Moreover, scents significantly shape sensory perception and influence how we experience and interact with the world around us.

In this context, the flowers that filled the festival stage with a wide variety of colors, forms, and fragrances at the 1582 celebrations should be regarded as a crucial sensorial element. Among the artisans who arrived from different parts of the city and participated in the processions were those specializing in flowers, spices, and gardening. These included gardeners, referred to by İntizami as *bag-banan* who brought to the square a model of a large garden featuring tall cypress trees, roses, tulips, hyacinths, and a fountain with flowing water.[442] (Fig. 21) Mustafa Ali adds that this splendid garden also included nightingales singing joyfully.[443]

Another group that filled the stage with flowers and fragrances were the spice sellers (*bahar-füruşan*). (Fig. 22) They carried a variety of blossoms in their arms, roses, jasmines, carnations, and violets, transforming the scene into a flower garden while their scents filled the air.[444] Fruit sellers (*mive-füruşan*) also joined the flower sellers (*ezhar-füruşan*) in the square.

As Alain Corbin notes, floral fragrances were used in the form of perfumes, oils, and scented waters, with countless variations. More importantly, these scents constituted an essential part of courtly atmosphere. In addition to their use in perfumes and oils, flowers

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[439] Jack Goody notes that, as with all senses, smell carries both positive and negative associations, with the positive ones linked to notions of beauty, delight, and pleasure. However, what is considered aesthetically "beautiful" varies across cultures and contexts. See: GOODY, 2002, pp. 19–20. For the variable examples he encountered in his work on floral culture, see also: GOODY, 1993.
[440] Rotter quotes George Orwell to illustrate the social dimension of smell, recalling Orwell's remark that "what we were taught was that *the lower classes smell*". See: ROTTER, 2011, p. 8.
[441] For an example of this traditional ranking, see MCLUHAN, 1962.
[442] İNTİZAMİ (T), fols. 348r.–350r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 418–420).
[443] ALİ, 1586, fol. 68v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 209–210; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 520–521).
[444] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 33v.–34r., 35v.–36r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 148–152).

arranged in vases also enriched this fragrant setting.[445] With its blossoms said to perfume the entire air, this parade created the distinctive "beautiful" atmosphere of the 1582 festival.

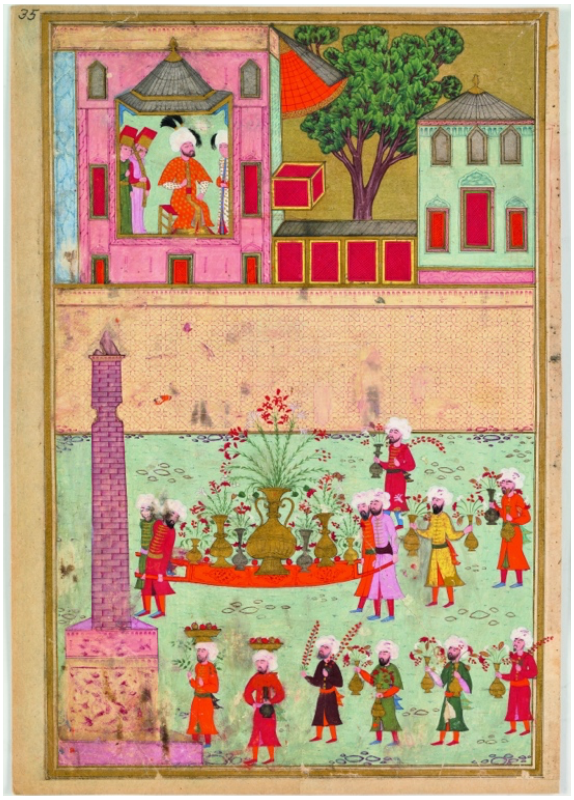

Fig. 21: (left) Parade of gardeners, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 349r.
Fig. 22: (right) Parade of spice sellers, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 35r.

İntizami also devoted a section to the spice sellers from Egypt as a separate group and described the marvelous garden they created. (Fig. 23) The two metaphors he used to portray this exquisite garden structure are particularly noteworthy. First, he writes that those who look upon this garden would feel their longing for the Gardens of Irem fulfilled, for its fruits were said to be from heaven. The Gardens of Irem mentioned here symbolize the "meeting place with God" in Sufi literature and, in Islamic and Eastern literary traditions, represent a place of happiness and eternal spring adorned with colorful flora.[446] Thus, İntizami subsequently refers to this setting as *cennet bahçesi* ("the garden of paradise," or more commonly, "the Garden of

[445] CORBIN, 1986, pp. 74–76.
[446] HARMAN, 2000.

Eden")[447] According to Islamic sources, the *cennet bahçesi* is a divinely endowed space overflowing with endless blessings and delights—an embodiment of serenity, peace, and beauty in its every detail.

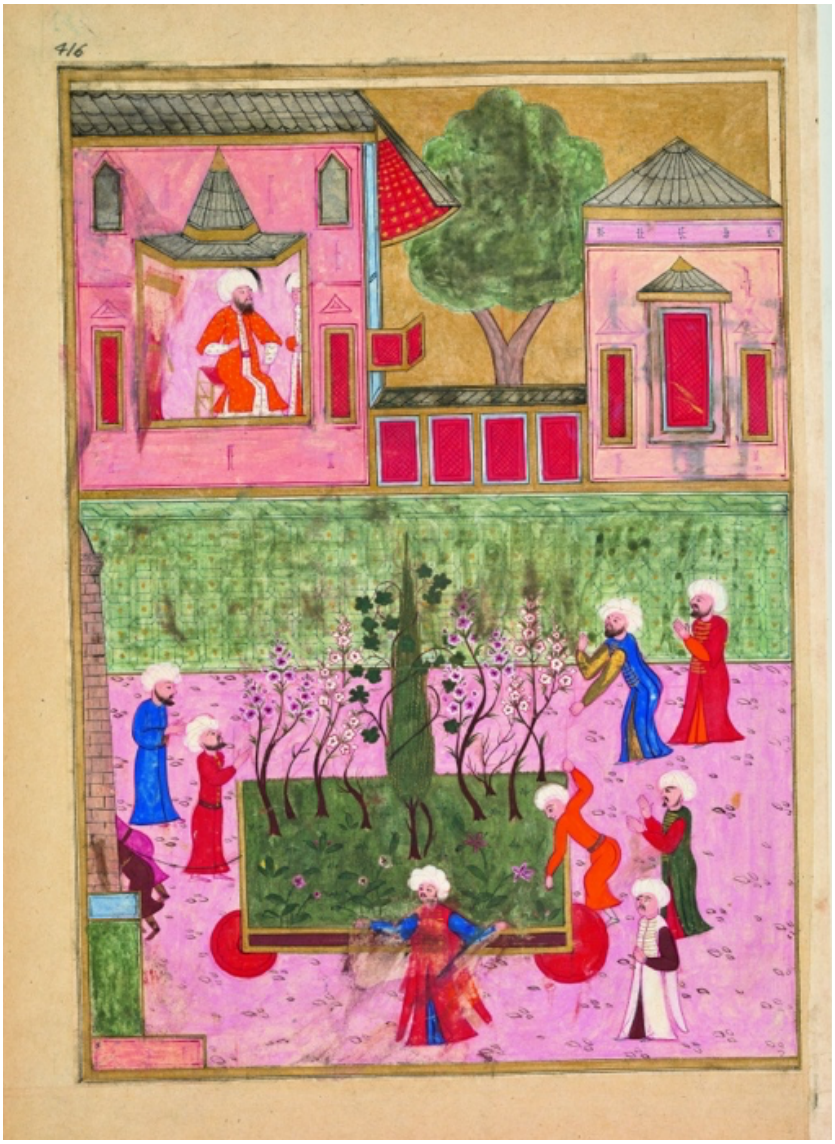

Fig. 23: Parade of Egyptian spice sellers, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 416r.

Foreign guests of the festival also remarked on the beauty of these scenes. Baudier noted that the gardeners found themselves surrounded by flowers,[448] while Lebelski provided more detailed descriptions of their procession. It remains unclear whether these people were indeed

[447] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 416v. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 476): "Muhassal bu bir bâğ-ı halâvet-bünyândır ki İrem tahassürin eyleyenlere bir nazar seyri kâfî […] Zikr olunan hadîka-i behişt-âsânın cevânib-i erba'asında […]"
[448] BAUDIER[1], 1659, p. 113.

gardeners, or rather fruit or spice sellers marching alongside the flower vendors, or perhaps an all-encompassing account blending them all together:

> After them came a great company of gardeners, carrying all kinds of fruits, flowers and herbs, and carrying for a show an image of what the ancient pagans called the God of the Gardens, adorned with leaves, with a crown on his nose, and adorned with flowers.[449]

Three-dimensional *nahıls*, resembling large trees in form, constitute a final element crucial to mention in the context of visual stimulation. These majestic wax sculptures stood as striking testaments to power and affluence. Adorned with gemstones and gilded with shimmering gold, these opulent creations symbolized not only groom's masculinity but also the formidable might of the sultan and the dynasty within the grandeur of the Ottoman court festivities.[450]

The *nahıl*s of the 1582 festival were far more impressive than those of previous celebrations in both size and number. İntizami records that more than a thousand *nahıl*s of varying dimensions were crafted by *nahıl-bends* (makers of *nahıl*) in the Aksaray district of the city. Towering as tall as cypress trees, they were carried by Janissaries and other servants.[451] (Fig. 24)

Hammer, the first chronicler to document them based on his research, states that their height ranged between 24 and 36 meters, that they were made of wax, and that various objects, such as birds, fruits, and sometimes mirrors, were hung upon them. He further notes that their shapes tapered elegantly upwards.[452]

Haunolth reports that on June 1, twenty *elle*-sized,[453] colorful trees decorated with animals, also made out of wax, were brought to Atmeydanı, carried by more than 80 janissaries.[454] Mustafa Ali recounts the transport of 360 *nahıl*s adorned with flowers, tulle, and candles, reminiscent of fruit trees blooming in spring.[455] İntizami likewise records that these gigantic tree figures were embellished with gold, silver, pearls, and rubies, as well as fruits crafted from gold and silver, such as apricots, figs, peaches, quinces, and apples, and flowers such as roses, violets, and carnations.[456]

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[449] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 16.
[450] AND, 2020, pp. 272–296; NUTKU, 1981a.
[451] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 7r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 129).
[452] Hammer-Purgstall provides this information in his description of the 1612 wedding of Ahmed I's (r. 1603–1617) two daughters and his sister. See: HAMMER-PUGRSTALL, 1840, pp. 738–740.
[453] An old unit of measurement. Today it is approximately 1,5 meters.
[454] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 469.
[455] ALİ, 1586, fols. 19r.–20r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 117–118; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 393–395).
[456] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 7r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 129).

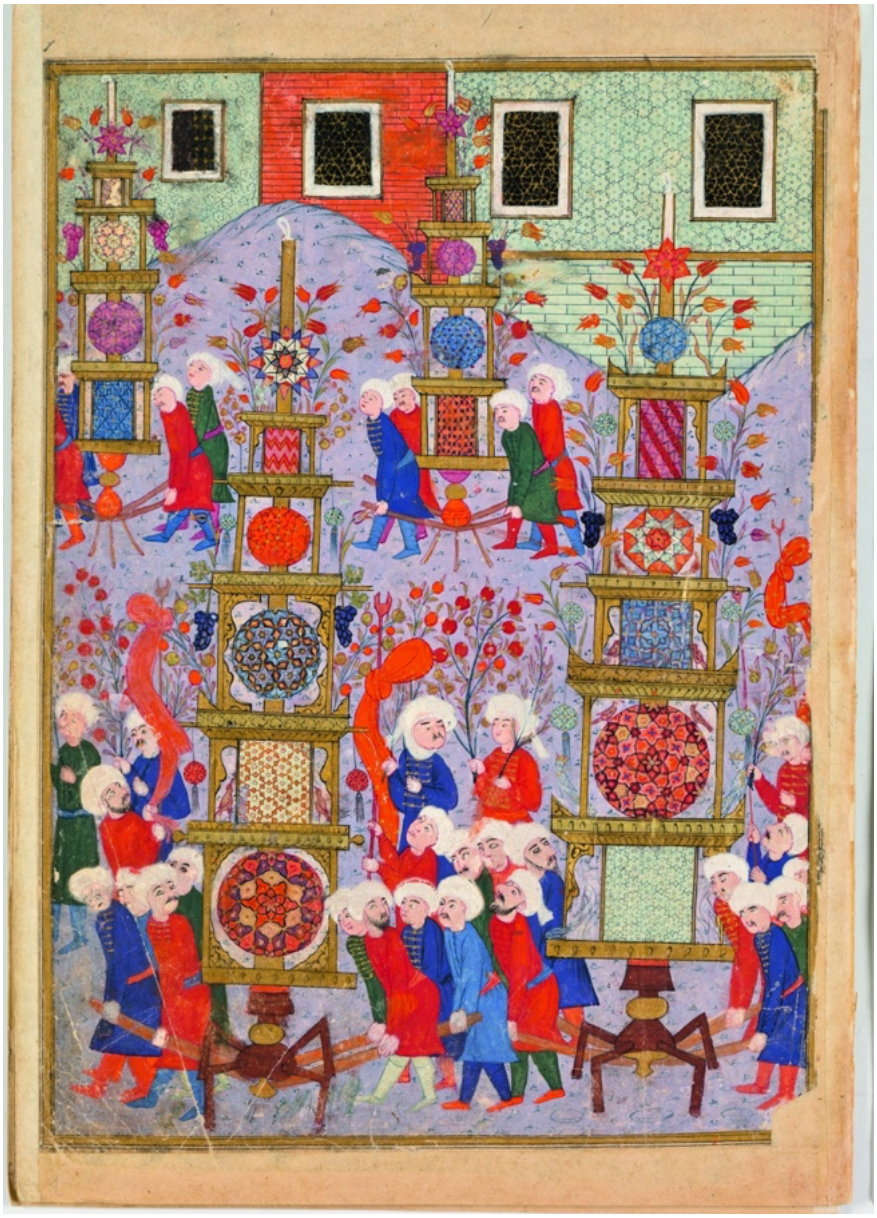

Fig. 24: Festival *nahıl*s, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*.
İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 1r.

In Ottoman narratives, *nahıl*s were closely associated with the prince undergoing circumcision. For instance, Mustafa Ali, describing their splendor, notes that five *nahıl*s were brought out together with the prince at the very beginning of the festival, turning "the front of the palace into a rose garden". The audience was deeply impressed by their appearance.[457] Lubenau likewise praised the beauty of these five *nahıl*s: "In front of him there are five beautiful, big, lovely candles made of flowers, also birds, fruit, cane and other strange things, all made of

[457] ALİ, 1586, fol. 19v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 117; ARSLAN, 2006, p. 394): "Döndi gül cami'ine ol meydân"

wax."[458] Ferahi expressed their impressiveness with a simile: "They were so flamboyant and bright, so they made the moon jealous".[459]

Babak Rahimi, who employs the concept of the "theater state" to describe the Ottoman court festivities in relation to the representation of power through ritual performance, examines the *nahıl*s specifically. He argues that the *nahıl*s symbolized not only birth and fertility but also the uncircumcised phallus of the young prince—an interpretation he bases on the fact that four large *nahıl*s placed in the garden of the Old Palace during the 1582 festival were guarded by Janissaries even in the absence of any audience.[460]

Finally, the passage of these colossal *nahıl*s through the city necessitated architectural arrangements. To enable their transportation to the festival grounds, certain bay windows and walls had to be demolished. However, this was permitted only on the condition that the buildings would later be reconstructed.[461] Authorization to remove the bay windows and eaves of shops and houses was obtained from the city governor, after which architects and clerks calculated the repair costs and immediately compensated the owners. Although these demolitions were carefully regulated and financially reimbursed, they clearly underscore the importance attributed to the *nahıl*s at the 1582 festival.

3.4.3. Exquisite Sugar Sculptures

Oftentimes, festival narratives describe the *nahıl*s alongside with other three-dimensional figures made of sugar. Like the *nahıl*s, these figures, crafted by sugar artists (*şeker nakkaşları*), varied in size. Some were small enough to be carried by a single person, while others were mounted on wheeled platforms and transported to the festival grounds. Before addressing the diverse shapes and themes of these sugar figures, it is important to consider their broader significance.

The Ottoman Empire's access to sugar was largely facilitated through its extensive trade networks and diplomatic relations. Sugar was imported from the Eastern Mediterranean, primarily from Egypt, Cyprus, and Crete.[462] For the 1582 festival, for instance, the raw sugar

[458] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 50: "Vor im hatt man fünf schöner, grosser, herlicher Kertzen von Blumenwerk, auch Vogel, Obst, Rohrbrunner, und andere seltsame Sachen, alles von Wachs gemacht."
[459] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 222: "Görindi 'aleme hakkâ ki nahl-i sûr-ı sultanî / Hilâl oldu hasedden gör felekde mâh-ı tâbânı."
[460] RAHIMI, 2007, pp. 104–105.
[461] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 473.
[462] KARADEMİR, 2015, pp. 186–187.

material came from Egypt. The empire's control over key trade routes and its position as a major hub of global commerce allowed the Ottoman elite to maintain a steady supply of this coveted commodity. Nevertheless, sugar remained a costly luxury item, accessible primarily to the upper classes. Consequently, sugar sculptures were regarded as both precious and prestigious decorative elements.

Ottoman court registers reveal how much money was allocated to sugar in the context of the 1582 festival, covering both transportation and production costs. A total of 366,437 *akçe* was spent on sugar works, exceeding even the 100,000 *akçe* allocated for fireworks, which were themselves considered expensive. The records list three main expenditure categories related to sugar: first, various ingredients such as cloves, citrus, and almonds were purchased from the Franks for a total of 159,266 *akçe*; second, the pure sugar itself cost 119,776 *akçe* for 171 *kantars*,[463] and third, 73,797 *akçe* were paid to the Jewish sugar craftsmen responsible for shaping and decorating the sculptures.[464]

Suraiya Faroqhi interprets these sugar gardens and figures as a form of conspicuous consumption, emphasizing how their rarity and cost signified wealth and power.[465] In his detailed study of the festival's personnel and material needs, Mihoko Oku also highlights the distribution of *halva* to the public during the celebrations, underscoring, as he notes, the centrality of sugar to the festival's splendor and sensory abundance.[466]

According to Ferahi's account, state officials also took part in transporting the sugar figures and sculptures to the square.[467] Mustafa Ali likewise notes the viziers' involvement in the parade of sugar works, referring to it as "the delicious part of the story".[468]

Judging from the festival accounts, the variety, ingenuity, and sheer number of figures created by the craftsmen were as impressive as the quantity of sugar consumed. The foreign guests of the festival, in particular, described these works in great detail. Haunolth lists an extensive array of sugar figures and sculptures, which took a long time to parade due to their great number[469] and were highly appreciated by the sultan,[470] as follows: 9 elephants, 17 lions, 19 leopards and tigers, 22 horses, 21 camels, 14 giraffes, 9 sirens or "wonders of the sea"

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[463] A unit of measurement used during the Ottoman Empire. This amount is equivalent to approximately 10,000 kilograms.
[464] See: TSMA.d.9715-1. For the decree to send fruit and sugar cane from Tripoli for the festival, see: BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d.47/161.
[465] FAROQHI, 2005a, p. 165.
[466] OKU, 2017, p. 53.
[467] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 223.
[468] ALİ, 1586, fol. 12r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 105; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 376–377): "Bura lezzetli yeridür haberin"
[469] The Fugger Zeitung reports that this passage lasted until noon: FUGGER, 1923, p. 63.
[470] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 24r., 25v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 141–142).

(*Meerwunder*), 25 falcons, goshawks, and sparrowhawks, 11 storks, 8 cranes, 8 ducks. There were also a large castle or palace, 5 peacocks, 5 candlesticks, 16 jugs, 17 small watering cans, 6 small pitchers, 8 monkeys, 2 chess and board games with their pieces, 33 bowls of various fruits, 7 bowls of different fish, and crates full of candy.[471] Lubenau lists the same figures and adds two more: "a Bacchus" and "a fountain".[472]

Fig. 25: Figures made of sugar, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*.
İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 24v.–25r.

Haunolth also mentions another remarkable sculpture: a naked, horned monster, larger than a man, seated "in the Turkish style" ("auf Türkisch sitzend").[473] This must be the gigantic figure that İntizami describes following the parade of the bootmakers (*muze-duzan*). After the mules laden with commodities from Rashid in Egypt, particularly sugar, appeared a devil-like giant: "black in color, abominable, hateful, astonishing, both mighty and terrible, of strange creation,

[471] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 472.
[472] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 50.
[473] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 472. And interpreted this as sitting in a cross-legged position. See: AND, 2020, p. 110.

very strange".[474] The creature had two enormous horns on its head, resembling those of a rhinoceros. İntizami reports that those who saw it recited the two suras of refuge from the *Qur'an* (*al-Falaq* and *al-Nas*) which are believed to protect from evil spirits and demons by seeking refuge in Allah.[475] İntizami's account makes clear how striking this sugar sculpture was, and how powerfully it evoked sensations of awe and fear among the spectators.

3.4.4. Loud and Illuminating: Fire Shows

Fire, gunpowder, and light are undoubtedly among the most revolutionary inventions in human history, driving major technological advancements. Their incorporation into festivities soon became not only widespread but also inevitable. In the 16th century, the abundance of such displays was in itself a striking spectacle.

Fire shows, marked by the mesmerizing dance of flames, dazzling pyrotechnics, and captivating performances, offered a multi-sensory experience that engaged the audience on several levels. Their sensorial qualities encompassed the visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory: the vivid colors and dynamic movements of the flames; the crackling and explosive sounds; the radiant heat that could be felt from afar or through the tremor of an explosion; and finally, the pungent smell of burning and gunpowder. All combined, these produced a complex sensory experience.

The 1582 festival was one of the occasions where fire was used most extensively and served an essential component of the long-lasting celebrations, both for its illuminating function and for its demonstrative value. This section focuses on such fire performances, namely, all activities involving fire. Following the categorization by İntizami and Ferahi in their festival books, I will examine the *ateş işleri* ("works from or with fire"), which include illuminations (oil lamps and candles), ridge lights (*mahya*), torches, figures set ablaze, and, of course, the firecrackers and fireworks regarded as the pyrotechnic marvels of the festivities.[476]

Hakan Karateke refers to the pyrotechnic technology of the festivities and fireworks, emphasizing their use of night as a "temporal stage". Accordingly, fireworks constituted the most striking part of the nocturnal program, as the night offered an even more thrilling

[474] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 24r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 141): "[…] esvedü'l-levn, enkerü'ş-şekl, efzahu'l-heykel, müstekreh ü mehîb, garîbü'l-hulka, hilyesi 'acebden 'acib bir dev getirdiler […]."
[475] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 24r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 141–142): "[…] herkesün dilinde sârî ve şiddet-i havf u haşyetden kanderlere batup mu'avvizeteyn lisânlarında su gibi cârî idi."
[476] Metin And suggests that these are related to visual and auditory arts and should be referred to as "light arts" (*ışık sanatları*). See: AND, 2020, pp. 129–131.

atmosphere enhanced by new technological innovations.[477] This interpretation, I believe, can be extended to all works involving fire and light.

As already mentioned, Lebelski vividly describes how the hanging oil lamps and candles illuminated the entire square at night, filling it with radiant brightness.[478] According to his account, *mahya*s[479] and torches placed around the area contributed significantly to this brilliance. Discussing the growing use of night-time and the social history of lighting in Istanbul, Cemal Kafadar draws attention to the hierarchical dimension of illumination, noting that lighting was an expensive luxury not accessible to everyone.[480] Thus, the "temporal stage" of the celebrations, sustained for more than a month, must have entailed an enormous financial burden.

Figures intentionally designed to be set on fire were indispensable components of both Ottoman and European celebrations. Suraiya Faroqhi argues that these fiery spectacles played a crucial role in establishing legitimacy and acted as powerful tools of propaganda.[481] It is remarkable that such figures attracted as much attention from festival participants as the fireworks themselves and were often elaborately described in contemporary narratives.

Much like the sugar sculptures, there was a wide array of large figures made of paper and cardboard created specifically to be burned. Palace records include a detailed list under the heading "works with fire carried out by the Cebecibaşı".[482] These consisted of architectural structures such as ships, galleys, fountains, ferris wheels, a church with its monk, and a mansion; animals including roosters, storks, horses, donkeys, peacocks, rhinoceroses, cattle, rams, goats, dogs, and elephants; mythological beings such as phoenixes and sea angels (*melaike-i derya*);[483] as well as trees and flowers, including violets and cypresses.[484]

These figures were typically fitted with flares and ignited to spectacular effect. The same record also lists 1,253 fireworks (*asumani*) and a single cannon shot (*temaşa-i şahi*). As already noted in the previous sub-chapter, the combined expenses for all pyrotechnic displays and sugar

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[477] KARATEKE, 2015, p. 289.
[478] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 34.
[479] In the English translation of the text, it is written as "links"; I assume these are the *mahya*s (ridge lights).
[480] KAFADAR, 2014, pp. 257–260.
[481] FAROQHI, 2014b, p. 189.
[482] See: TSMA.d.9715-1. *Cebecibaşı* refers to the commander of the *Cebecis*, a military sub-unit of the artillery corps of the Ottoman army.
[483] It can be assumed that the *melaike-i derya* mentioned here refers to mermaids.
[484] Metin And identified these as sugar sculptures, which I also referenced in a previous article, see DEMİRBAŞ, 2021. However, palace records list them among the fire works. He also refers to "the church *without* a monk", whereas the wording should be read as "church *with* its monk" (*kilise me'a keşiş*). See: AND, 2020, p. 110.

sculptures amounted to approximately 100,000 *akçe*—a striking testament to the scale and ambition of the 1582 festival's sensorial extravagance.

Fig. 26: Fortress set on fire, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*.
İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 28v.

These performances involving fire were organized by high-ranking state officials, who appointed experts to oversee them—a clear indication of the significant importance attributed to fireworks. For instance, the fire works described in Ferahi's narrative, which include a dragon in addition to the figures mentioned above, appear to have been commissioned by İbrahim Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of Rumelia. According to his *surname*, Siyavuş Pasha, Janissary Agha Ferhad Agha, Captain Ali Pasha, and Mesih Pasha were among the other prominent

figures associated with these displays. Additional figures equipped with flares and set ablaze included a small giant, a large giant, and several fortresses.[485]

Fig. 27: Figures set on fire, from the *Şehinşahnâme,* vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fol. 46r.

The final fire-related attractions were the fireworks presentations. These were undoubtedly the most spectacular features not only of the Ottoman festivities and the 1582 circumcision celebrations but also of contemporary European festivals. Within the context of early modern court festivities, the use of pyrotechnic explosions played a vital role in enhancing both the splendor and the symbolic significance of the events. Explosive displays, with their vibrant

[485] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 192, 209, 257, 261, 298.

colors and dazzling bursts of light, captivated spectators and illuminated the night sky, embodying the opulence and power of the ruling elite. The extravagant nature of these performances not only reflected the grandeur of the court but also served to capture the collective imagination of those in attendance. Thus, the relationship between pyrotechnic art and early court festivals can be understood as a symbiotic one: the fireworks magnified the prestige and allure of the celebrations, while the festivals themselves provided a stage for pyrotechnic mastery to be exhibited and admired.

In the 1582 festival, fireworks were a core element of the celebrations, and multiple eyewitness accounts attest to the extraordinary impressiveness of the shows. These displays of light were not only visual spectacles but also produced thunderous echoes that reverberated across the city. The explosions were loud enough to affect not only Atmeydanı itself but also its surrounding neighborhoods. Lebelski described the intensity and magnificence of these detonations as follows:

> Now these things being in this order disposed, they shot off squibs full of powder, which made a marvelous noise and sound: and as they fell upon the ground, they spat out six or seven sparkles, like unto stars, and very pleasant to behold.[486]

While Lebelski emphasized the auditory and visual dimensions of the fireworks and fire shows, he also drew attention to their olfactory impact. According to his account, the sky was filled with burning flames, thickening the air with smoke. Thus, it is likely that not only the sound but also the smell of the explosions extended far beyond the confines of Atmeydanı.[487] An anonymous Italian report makes a similar observation about the flares illuminating the sky, noting that "they set them on fire one after another, with such a multitude of fireworks that the air seemed to burn on every side, […]."[488]

3.4.5. Exotic and Wild: Animals

In the grandeur of court celebrations, the display of power often took on a captivating form, with animals serving as living symbols of prestige. Carefully selected and trained, these

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[486] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 33–34.
[487] Sissel Tolaas reminds us that smell is the very first sense through which humans engage with their surroundings: "Smell is the first sense through which we interact with the World and react to it. We smell before we see." See: TOLAAS, 2010, p. 147.
[488] LA VIGNE[1], 1582. p. 4: "[...] le abbrugiotno una dopo l'altra contanti fuochi artificiali che pareva che l'aria ardesse d'ogni canto, ci fu la festa dell'Agà di Janizzari."

creatures embodied the ruler's might and authority, enthralling all who witnessed their majestic presence. This section visits the animal performers who played a vivid role in the 1582 festival. The aim is twofold: first, to emphasize the emotional dimensions of the celebrations, this time through the involvement of animals; and second, to examine how living beings were employed as instruments in the performative construction of power.

To begin with, and in connection with the previous section, attention must be drawn to the more brutal performances involving animals. Richard Schechner, in his exploration of the relationship between ritual and violence, suggests that rituals often entail transformative processes encompassing both constructive and destructive elements. He argues that such rituals have the potential to sublimate violence, much like theater, by channeling it into symbolic actions and performances.[489] This perspective aligns with the notion that rituals provide a structured outlet for expressing power, aggression, and social dynamics within a controlled and symbolic framework.

The 1582 festival, with its distinctly carnivalesque dimension, also featured moments of violence, particularly involving animals. This is evident in the fire-based displays staged during the celebrations. İntizami, in his description of the firecracker makers' performance, recounts that necklaces made of firecrackers were tied around the necks of hounds, which were then released into the square. The terrified animals scattered frantically in all directions, desperate to rid themselves of the burning objects hanging from their necks.[490]

Procházka-Eisl has offered a detailed analysis of the literary style of İntizami's *Sûrnâme*, examining which subjects he describes in detail, which he treats briefly, and the narrative strategies he employs overall. In the context of animal performances, she notes, for instance, that the halva-makers were given a page and a half of description. Seeking the reason for this particular emphasis, she observes that these halva-makers attempted to blow up a live rabbit with firecrackers—an incident that certainly explains the attention it received.[491]

It is also essential to refer to Ido Ben-Ami's study on İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, in which he analyzes how animal performances contributed to the emotional atmosphere of the 1582 festivities. His focus lies particularly on the scenes that evoked a mix of excitement and fear, emotions associated with awe. To this end, he highlights İntizami's narrative style and his

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[489] SCHECHNER, 1993, pp. 296–320.
[490] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 27v.–28r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 144–145). Özdemir Nutku and Metin And note that similar performances took place during the 1675 festival, where hounds, bears, and other animals were set on fire with firecrackers, sometimes resulting in their deaths. Yet, these gruesome scenes were also perceived as absurdly comic and served to amuse the spectators. See: NUTKU, 1981b, p. 29; AND, 2020, p. 144.
[491] PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 2005, p. 47; İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 50v.; İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 21r.

extensive use of religious and mythological metaphors, which shape the book's storytelling approach. Ben-Ami argues that since the *Sûrnâme* was written for the elite leadership, the animal performances serve to portray Sultan Murad as a powerful ruler, one who could, metaphorically speaking, "control nature".[492] Beyond this particular audience-oriented purpose, however, the animal shows themselves must also be understood within the broader context of exoticism, wildness, and the deliberate display of the strange, the feared, and the admired.

The inclusion of exotic animals and their representations in royal collections, as well as their display during festivals and celebrations as symbols of power, was not unique to the Ottoman Empire, but a phenomenon observed in many cultures across different periods.[493] Of course, what was considered "exotic" depended largely on the observer's perspective. We know, however, that the Sultan's menagerie included lions, elephants, giraffes, wolves, bears, leopards, and wildcats, all kept in a building known as the *Arslanhane* ("Lion House") adjacent to the palace.[494] Indeed, animals, especially the exotic and the wild, were among the gifts presented to the Sultan and the prince during the 1582 festival, contributing to the imperial collection.[495] Accordingly, these royal animals, such as lions, giraffes, bears, elephants, and monkeys, also appear in various festival narratives.

Some animals, such as the giraffe, served primarily as spectacles of exotic curiosity. As early as the 1539 celebrations, a giraffe was exhibited to the public.[496] Gülru Necipoğlu, citing Seyyid Lokman and the Austrian ambassador Johann Hoberdanacz, notes that elephants and giraffes were likewise displayed in the first courtyard of Topkapı Palace on feast days as an *izhar-ı şevket* ("display of might"), just as in the 1582 festival.[497] Palerne, in his account, remarks that he was particularly eager to describe the elephant and especially the giraffe he saw at the 1582 festival, since such animals were unfamiliar to Europeans at the time. He

[492] BEN-AMI, 2017, p. 21. I will provide a more detailed analysis of İntizami's book in the next chapter.
[493] For information on animals in European court culture, see this book and especially the "Introduction" by the co-editor Nadir Weber: HENGERER & WEBER, 2019. For a different perspective on court culture focusing on animals and their sounds, see: SCHARRER, 2022.
[494] NECİPOĞLU, 2014, pp. 74–76. Metin And provides a summary of foreign observers who described the Sultan's collection of wild animals in the 16th century. Among them are Derschawm, Lubenau, and Busbecq, whom I have already mentioned. See: AND, 2015, pp. 129–132.
[495] Palace records indicate that during the 1582 festival, the sultan received as gifts four hunting dogs (*saxons*) and six falcons from the Voivode of Moldavia; three falcons from Çıldır Brigadier Mustafa Pasha; one merlin from the Governor of Rumelia, İbrahim Pasha; and a giraffe from the Governor of Tripolitania. See: TSMA.d.9614.
[496] BAYAT, 1997, p. 5.
[497] NECİPOĞLU, 2014, p. 70.

reports that the giraffe was paraded around the square and displayed in all its splendor, so tall that it stretched its long neck into nearby houses.[498]

The spectacle of the two elephants, one small and one large, is described in considerable detail in the accounts of Palerne, Haunolth, and Mustafa Ali. The elephants were not only a sight to behold but also functioned as central showpieces. According to Palerne, the elephants danced at the command of their keepers and knelt beneath the imperial pavilion in homage to the sultan.[499] Mustafa Ali recounts the moment when one of them broke free from its bonds, moved toward the crowd, and sprayed water from its trunk, creating what he portrays as an almost apocalyptic scene. People fled in fear from what he describes as "rain mixed with thunder," trampling one another in the ensuing chaos.[500]

Fig. 28: Show with wild animals, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*.
İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 107v.–108r.

Apart from these examples, the guilds' parade also included performers who worked with animals. There were monkey and bear wranglers, snake charmers, lion tamers, as well as

[498] PALERNE, 1606, pp. 479–483.
[499] PALERNE, 1606, pp. 480–481.
[500] ALİ, 1586, fol. 69v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 212; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 524).

trainers of goats, birds, dogs, and cats. These animals were among the actors of the performances that Metin And referred to as "circus arts".[501] Trained birds performed somersaults; dancing dogs ran through hoops; cats, trained to walk, crawl, and jump on their hind legs, balanced on tightropes like acrobats, astonishing the audience; donkeys followed their owners on their hind legs; and bears embraced one another, danced, and made the entire square burst into laughter.[502]

Some of these shows, however, were based on animal combats that often resulted in bloody spectacles. Ferahi describes one such gruesome scene, a fight between large predatory dogs and greyhounds, which ended with the animals torn to pieces.[503] Another example is the encounter between a lion and a wild boar, a story discussed by both Stout and Ben-Ami. (Fig. 28) According to İntizami's narrative, this encounter symbolized the struggle between Muslims and Christians, with the lion representing the former and the boar the latter; the lion, in particular, embodied the power of Sultan Murad.[504] Ben-Ami notes that the outcome of this confrontation carried significant meaning: If the lion were to lose, it would have been interpreted as a negative omen for the Sultan's legitimacy.[505]

Taken together, it is evident that spectacles involving animals often evoked emotions of fascination, excitement, and admiration mixed with fear.[506] These performances produced a strong effect on the audience and reveal the crucial role of animals, and their displays played the representation of power.

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[501] In his book, he described them grouped together with illusionists. See: AND, 2020, pp. 165–207.
[502] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 233r.–235r.; 358r.–360a.; 373r.–374v.; 391r.–393r.; 371r.–372r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 327; 428–429; 438–440; 455–457; 440); HAUNOLTH, 1595, pp. 479–490, 482; PALERNE, 1606, pp. 472–473; LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 19; ALİ, 1586, fols. 77v.–78r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 228–229; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 546).
[503] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 346.
[504] For the lion tamers' performance at the parade: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 106v.–108v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 210–211).
[505] BEN-AMI, 2017, pp. 19–21.
[506] For further discussion on animal combats and their function as a form of spectacle within European court culture and ritual practices, see GROOM, 2018, pp. 134–162.

3.5. Shaping History: Festival Books

The festival book genre became widespread in Europe during the first half of the 16th century. Coronations, processions, and other public celebrations—most notably those held under the reign of Charles V—were carefully recorded and often published in multiple languages.[507] The Ottoman tradition of documenting imperial festivities began around the same time. For instance, both Ottoman and foreign sources describe the celebrations organized during the reign of the Süleyman I in the first half of the 16th century. However, the earliest true examples of the *surname* genre, that is, "imperial festival books" produced in the specific context of Ottoman court celebrations, were prepared for the 1582 festival. Accordingly, beyond the distinctive ways in which the 1582 festival was planned, staged, and performed, the means through which it was recorded and transmitted to posterity are equally significant, particularly in understanding its function as a demonstration of power.

Philosopher Michel Foucault conceptualized the complex relationship between power and knowledge. According to him, power is not merely exercised over individuals but permeates every sphere of society. It operates through diverse mechanisms and institutions, shaping and regulating human behavior. Within this framework, knowledge becomes an indispensable instrument of power.[508] Foucault contends that knowledge is never neutral or objective; rather, it is produced through power relations:

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.[509]

Foucault's conception of power and knowledge underscores their dynamic and mutually reinforcing nature: power generates knowledge, while knowledge, in turn, legitimizes and sustains power. Thus, power seeks to secure its own continuity through the very act of producing knowledge.

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[507] WATANABE-O'KELLY, 2014, p. 150.
[508] FOUCAULT, 1982.
[509] FOUCAULT, 1995, p. 27.

As previously mentioned, Sultan Murad III had a special fascination with books.[510] He was indeed a bibliophile, possessing an extensive library, and he actively patronized writers and poets. Yet the distinctive character of the 1582 festival accounts composed by Ottoman historians, poets, and chroniclers cannot be explained solely by the Sultan's literary enthusiasm. In this context, Murad supported the creation of narratives about himself and his reign much like other rulers did. However, burdened by criticism during his rule, he may have placed even greater importance on these self-representations than his predecessors.[511]

There exist numerous reports, memoirs, and books in various languages that describe the 1582 festival, as previously discussed. Yet, the "insider" accounts written in Ottoman Turkish occupy a particularly prominent place in the corpus. In addition, many odes (*kasides*) were composed, offering a poetic expression of the festivities. Archival sources further indicate that the palace prioritized the proper documentation, description, and dissemination of the celebrations. According to palace records, a specific sum was allocated from the imperial treasury for this purpose: 12,700 *akçe* were budgeted as payment to those who "wrote and delivered odes" recounting the 1582 festivities.[512]

These books and other types of texts prepared by the Ottomans shared by defining feature: they sought to "present the current state of the court as the ideal world order."[513] Ottoman festival narratives, as components of official historiography, likewise served this purpose by conveying an idealized image of imperial festivities.

A striking example of this tendency can be seen in the narratives describing public participation in the 1582 festival. Scholars such as Özdemir Nutku and Stefanos Yerasimos have compared Ottoman festivities to carnivals in which the entire population took part, social hierarchies were temporarily overturned, and repression was momentarily suspended. However, the festival books from which such interpretations are drawn are, by their very nature, not objective records of the events as they truly unfolded. Even if one were to accept them as reliable historical sources, the *surname* texts provide very little information about whether celebrations occurred elsewhere in the city, or how the populace actually experienced the festivities.

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[510] See: Chapter 2, "The Ideal Ruler: Image of Sultan Murad III".
[511] WOODHEAD, 2005. The Sultan's use of books as a tool in the process of image creation was also analyzed in Özge Nur Yıldırım's thesis dated 2021. The twin books of *Maṭâli'ü's-sa'aâde* (The Ascensions of Felicity) which reveals the figure of a pious and intellectual ruler was analyzed here. It was written in the same year of the festival (1582) and dedicated to Murad III's daughters. This work published lately, see: YILDIRIM, 2023.
[512] TSMA.d.9715-2.
[513] FETVACI, 2013, p. 80.

Rather than depicting a festival in which the people themselves celebrated freely, these texts describe an official spectacle, a choreographed parade organized for the courtly audience, foreign dignitaries, and the public to observe. Furthermore, there are instances in which Ottoman and foreign accounts report divergent details and interpretations of the same events. These discrepancies reveal much about the priorities and emphases of the Ottoman narratives, a theme that will be examined in greater depth through the lens of sonic performance in the subsequent sections of this study.

As I will further elaborate in the following discussion on the written sources of the 1582 festival, it becomes evident that the authors' personal interests, particularly their relationships with those in power and the benefits they could derive from such ties, shaped both the style and the content of their narratives. This circumstance is precisely why the present section focuses on the Ottoman festival books produced after the event and on the ways in which their authors were connected to power.

The primary sources for the 1582 festival were already introduced in the "Introduction" of this study, where the three principal *surname* texts authored by İntizami, Mustafa Ali, and Ferahi were briefly discussed together. Each of these works provides detailed accounts of the 1582 celebrations, describing the stages of preparation, the invited and attending guests, the exchange of gifts, the banquets, and the schedule of performances and entertainments. I group them together here not only because they are more extensive than any other surviving accounts of the festival, but also because all three are devoted exclusively to its description and narration. For this reason, they are all classified as *surname*s, a term derived from *sur* (wedding, festivity, celebration) and *name* (letter or written account). Although some *surname*s are embellished with miniatures, illustrated examples remain relatively rare.

Beginning with İntizami, his *surname* has become the principal source for the study of the 1582 festival, due to its detailed narrative and its accompanying miniatures, which provide vivid visual depictions of the event. The book was compiled from his observations after the festival and was presented to Sultan Murad III in 1584.[514] İntizami's motivation for preparing this work was explicit: he sought a position under the Sultan's patronage. His efforts were rewarded; the work was highly esteemed by Sultan Murad, and İntizami was appointed secretary of the imperial council.

In 1587, Sultan Murad commissioned İntizami to produce a more elaborate version of the book to be preserved in the palace. The Sultan issued specific guidelines for this revised

[514] ARSLAN, 2009, p. 37.

edition, including the division of the text into sections representing the various assemblies featured in the parade. This new version was also to be expanded with illustrations, thereby combining visual and textual documentation. Furthermore, Murad instructed that every group participating in the festival be depicted and that Atmeydanı appear prominently in all miniatures. The inclusion of Atmeydanı and its monuments in every illustration was therefore no coincidence but rather a deliberate choice. This second version of the book was illustrated by the renowned palace painter Nakkaş Osman and his team, and it was completed in 1588.[515]

There are five identified copies of İntizami's *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. Mehmet Arslan notes that the first version, written in 1584 and presented to the Sultan, is the manuscript registered at the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (Hekimoğlu Collection, No. 642).[516] Although undated, the manuscript preserved in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna (H.O.70) is considered by scholars to be another copy of this initial version.[517]

The later, expanded version of the book is believed to survive in three copies: in the Atatürk Library (No. O.108) in Istanbul; the Leiden University Library (UB Or. 309); and in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library (H. 1344). The manuscript in the Atatürk Library is known to represent the revised version, as the process of expansion is described in the margins of two folios within the volume,[518] making it highly probable that this was the first of the expanded copies. The second, held in the Leiden University Library and identified by Jan Schmidt in his catalog, is regarded as the largest and the only complete copy of the expanded version.[519]

Of these five known manuscripts, only the copy in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library, contains the miniatures whose production process is described in the text.[520] The book originally included 500 double-page miniatures, though today only 427 full-page illustrations remain, each measuring approximately 30 x 21.5 cm. This work represents the earliest example of a miniaturized festival book and marks the beginning of a new genre within Ottoman miniature art.

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[515] ATASOY, 1997, p. 15; ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 43–45. İntizami gives information about preparations of miniatures in his book under the title "Vasf-ı Nakkâş ve Sıfât-ı Û", İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 432v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 489–490), and the process of expanding the book under the title "Fermân-şoden-i Tafsîl-i Sûriyye", İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 428v.–432v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 486–489).
[516] ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 32–34. For the manuscript see: İNTİZAMİ (S), 1584.
[517] PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, p. 13. For the manuscript see: İNTİZAMİ (V).
[518] İNTİZAMİ (A), fols. 69r.–v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 44–45).
[519] ŞAHİN, 2019, p. 58; SCHMIDT, 2012. For the manuscript see: İNTİZAMİ (L).
[520] For the manuscript see: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588.

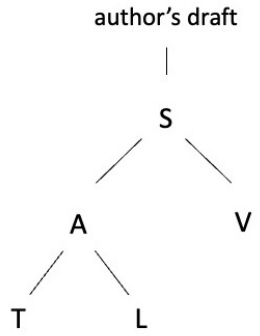

Fig. 29: Estimated stemma of the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*.

Another significant aspect of this book is that it provides an important example of the patronage of court literature, not only by the sultan himself but also by high-ranking court officials. Previously, when discussing the distribution of authority during the festival through assigned tasks, I mentioned the eunuch Habeşi Mehmed Agha and his active involvement in the production of İntizami's festival book. Together with Zeyrek Agha, another harem eunuch, he served as a consultant for the work.[521] In other words, they offered both moral and financial support while overseeing the book's completion. The moment when İntizami presented the commissioned work to these two palace officials is depicted in the final folio of the Topkapı manuscript (Fig. 30).[522] Through their mediation, the sultan's patronage was thus transmitted to the author, making these court officials key intermediaries in the process of literary production.

Providing a comprehensive analysis of the creative process and significance of İntizami's book, Emine Fetvacı argues that the work was crafted to reflect the personal perspectives of these eunuchs, thereby highlighting their role in image-making. It is particularly noteworthy that individuals of such rank assumed this responsibility. According to Fetvacı, this example alone points to significant changes within the Ottoman court hierarchy.[523] Ferahi likewise mentions that Mehmed Agha organized protocol and guest lists, tasks that would not normally be expected of someone in his position.[524]

The patrons of these books, as Mehmet Agha and Zeyrek Agha in İntizami's book, sought to present themselves as wealthy, cultured, and loyal servants of the sultan. It is interesting to

[521] FETVACI, 2013, pp. 176–178, 187.
[522] HATHAWAY, 2019, pp. 23–24. Nurhan Atasoy identifies the person on the left holding the book as Mehmed Agha and the person sitting opposite him as Zeyrek Agha. See: ATASOY, 1997, p. 13.
[523] FETVACI, 2013, pp. 175–185.
[524] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 26.

note that at a time when Ottoman cultural production was taking shape, identity and artistic creation were increasingly defined by individuals of diverse ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds who nonetheless identified themselves as Ottoman.[525] Through these illustrated histories, both the authors and, more importantly, the supervisors of such works "created an image" of the sultan, the imperial power, and the dynasty.

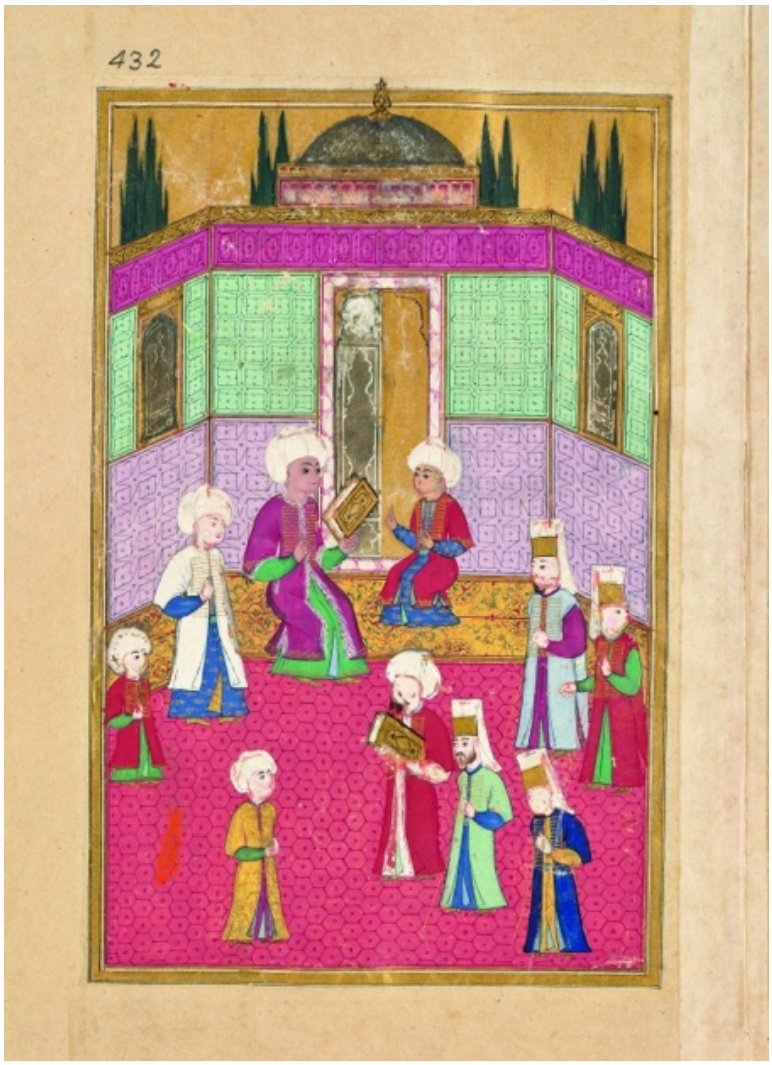

Fig. 30: Mehmed Agha and Zeyrek Agha receive İntizami, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 432r.

Another detailed account of the festival was written under the pen name Ferahi, and presented by Mehmet Özdemir. Apart from the pseudonym, little information is available about the author, and consequently, details regarding the writing process of this *surname* remain elusive.

[525] FETVACI, 2013, pp. 150–164.

However, the year of completion is known, as the author explicitly states it in the text: 1582. Based on this information, Özdemir argues that it is the earliest *surname* describing the circumcision festival organized by Murad III.[526]

Like İntizami's *Sûrnâme*, Ferahi's book follows a chronological structure. Written in the *mesnevi*[527] verse form, it opens with praises to Imam Hasan and Hüseyin, to Sultan Murad and his predecessors, as well as to Prince Mehmed. Following this introductory section, the preparations and the festival itself are recounted day by day, with a particular focus on the procession of the guilds.[528]

The third festival book to be discussed is *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr*, written by Mustafa Ali in 1583. The process of its preparation, the author's motivation, and the fate of the book are all worth examining, as it was written by one of the most prominent historians of the period—a figure renowned for his intellectual independence and his willingness to offer criticism for the betterment of the state. Three extant copies of the work have been identified: Topkapı Palace Library (B. 203), Nuruosmaniye Library (No. 4318), and Beyazıd Library, Veliyyüddin Efendi Collection (No. 1916).[529] Ali's work was long considered to be the earliest *surname* written about this festival, and thus the text that inaugurated the *surname* tradition.[530] However, as Ferahi's book has since been established as preceding all others, this chronology has been revised.

Mustafa Ali learned about the festival through a letter dictated by the Sultan while he was serving as *divan katibi* (council clerk) in Aleppo. By order of the Sultan, he remained in his post and did not travel to Istanbul. Consequently, although his account does not indicate that he relied on any written sources, and though he narrates events as if he had witnessed them firsthand, Ali was not an eyewitness to the celebrations. In fact, the detailed nature of his descriptions attests to his skill in gathering and synthesizing information from various sources.[531] Unlike the two *surname*s mentioned above, Ali's *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr* is not arranged chronologically but structured thematically. Nevertheless, his treatment of both the artisans' parade and the spectacular performances is at least as detailed and vivid as in the other two festival books.

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[526] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 15, 23–27.
[527] *Mesnevi* is a form of *divan* literature poetry, especially in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman literature, consisting of rhymed, paired verses.
[528] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 28–29.
[529] In this study, the Topkapı Palace copy of the book (dated 1586) has been used as the primary source, while the transcribed texts prepared by Ali Öztekin and Mehmet Arslan have been consulted.
[530] ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. XII.
[531] FLEISCHER, 1986, pp. 106–107; ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 11–12.

Like İntizami, Ali sought to secure a prestigious position by presenting his work to the sultan. Although he earned the sultan's appreciation, his book did not attract as much attention as İntizami's *surname*. Ali was not granted the appointments he had hoped for and was eventually dismissed from his post in Aleppo. He later received other assignments, yet these were always temporary. One possible reason is that İntizami likely enjoyed stronger connections with influential figures at court.[532]

At the same time, it is important to recognize Ali's sharp and critical disposition, evident not only in this work but also throughout his broader oeuvre.[533] Although he composed the *Câmiʿu'l-Buhûr* with the hope of attaining a high and permanent office, he did not refrain from criticizing senior officials, often exposing their incompetence.[534] Furthermore, when recounting Sultan Murad's decision not to dine or appear in the same setting as the public during the festivities, Ali contrasts this behavior with that of Sultan Süleyman I, who, according to him, had shared the same table with high-ranking officials and members of the *ulema* during the circumcision celebrations of his sons.[535]

The Topkapı copy of Mustafa Ali's book contains several blank pages, (Fig. 31) indicating that it was originally intended to be illustrated, as in İntizami's account, but this plan was never realized. It appears that the sultan commissioned miniatures only for İntizami's work and not for Ali's. Thus, it is evident that the same degree of attention and patronage bestowed upon the *surname* written by İntizami was not extended to Ali's book.

The miniatures of the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* played an active role in idealizing the event. Created by the court painter Nakkaş Osman and his team in accordance with İntizami's expanded text, these images not only reflect how the festival took place but also envision how it *should* have been. Through them, Sultan Murad's reign was visually legitimized. Furthermore, these miniatures, like the festival itself, constituted a performative space and a collective artistic production of considerable significance. The *Sûrnâme* thus functioned as a pictorial chronicle that could be revisited by future generations of the imperial family,[536]

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[532] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 27.
[533] It is important to remember that Ali strongly criticized the transformations within the Ottoman state and the "corruption" of the social order.
[534] Mustafa Ali voices his disappointment with the incompetence of the palace officials responsible for preparing the invitation letters sent out for the festival. In his view, composing such texts was a simple task, one that he could have executed far more effectively himself. See: ALİ, 1586, fols. 16v.–17r. (ÖZTEKİN, 2008, p. 113; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 388).
[535] ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. XIII.
[536] Arslan interprets the condition of the Topkapı copy, the fact that the manuscript is worn, with some pages scratched and scribbled, as evidence that the book was repeatedly with great enjoyment and even examined by the Sultan's children. See: ARSLAN, 2009, p. 61.

transmitting the image of the sultan as the embodiment of power not only through text but also through image.

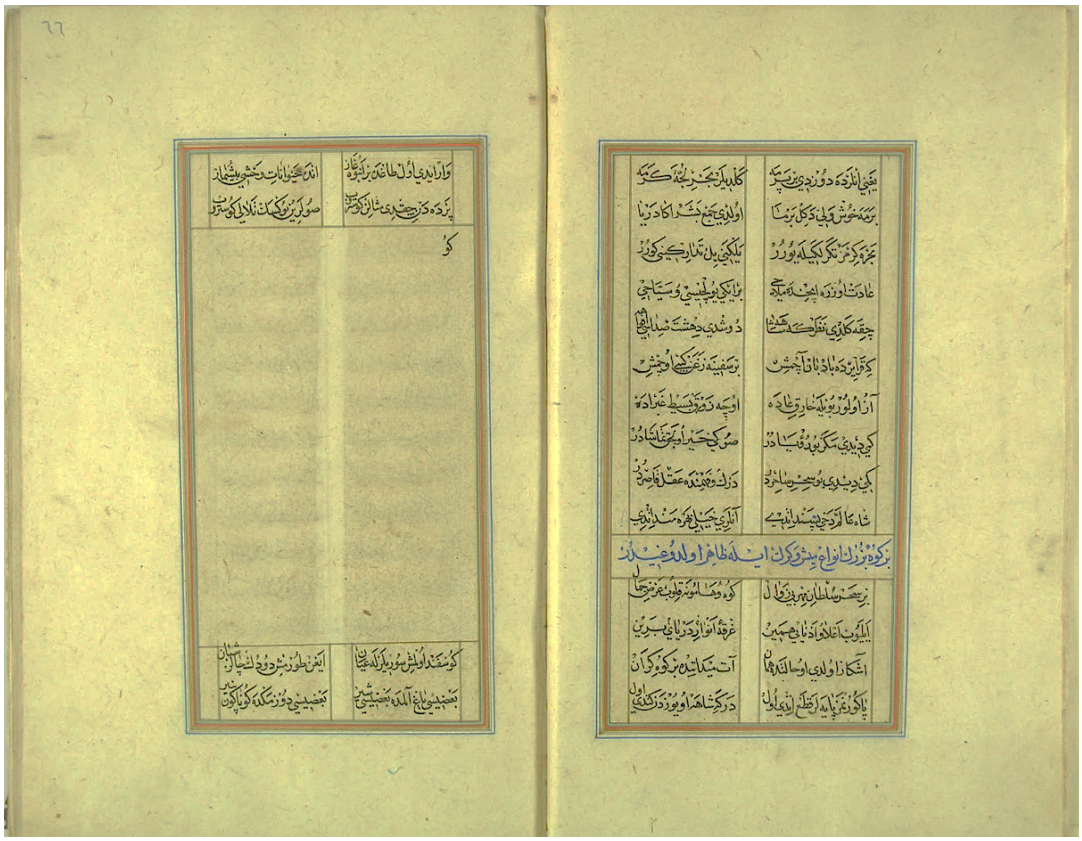

Fig. 31: Pages in Ali's *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr* in which he describes the mountain model. ALİ, 1586, fols. 65v.–66r.

When considering the interplay of the senses, there exists a persistent tension between sight and sound. Similarly, there is a dynamic relationship, if not outright competition, between written and visual narration. Color, perspective, composition, and scale all shape how a narrative is perceived. In some instances, the visual is even regarded as more authoritative than the written word, underscoring the exceptional importance of these festival miniatures.

The composition of all miniatures in the imperial festival book follows an identical design, presented across two facing pages. Atmeydanı, the performance area and stage of the festival, appears at the bottom, populated with public figures, performers, and monuments (see Fig. 25). The figures positioned on the far right are mostly commoners. The audience occupies the upper half of the composition: palace officials and ambassadors are shown on the right-hand page, while Sultan Murad, accompanied by his viziers and the prince, appears on the left-hand page.

According to Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, these two horizontally divided sections emphasize the contrast between a static, hegemonic perspective above and the ever-changing street scene below.[537] Although this dual compositional scheme is consistent throughout, it is important to note that the Sultan, while situated in the upper register, is positioned even higher than all others in that section. This particular placement visually reinforces the sultan's centrality as the locus of power and focus of the entire festival.

The depiction of the festival space is rendered from the perspective of the square looking toward the İbrahim Pasha Palace, and the view of the event is confined to the single façade of the palace and the three-tiered lodges adjacent to it. As Ersu Pekin interprets, while the audience seated in the İbrahim Pasha Palace observes the performances and parades below, they themselves become part of the spectacle, transformed into figures of performance within the pictorial space. In this way, the spectators become the "watched," observed by the viewer of the miniature.[538]

There is also a clearly defined visual frame constructed within the miniatures. In this context, it is crucial to recall that the festival books were produced at the sultan's command and under the supervision of his court officials. Consequently, what was included and what was excluded within this frame directly reflects how and why the frame itself was conceived and how the event was intended to be represented in the first place. Unsurprisingly, the principal figures placed within this pictorial boundary are the sultan, the prince, and the high-ranking officials (i.e., bureaucrats and ambassadors). The performers, of course, also appear within these scenes, but the viewer is granted only a partial glimpse of the stage.

Thus, the miniatures do not provide a comprehensive view of the festival and its constituent elements. Rather, they offer visual impressions, akin to photographs capturing a single moment, of a celebration that unfolded across an enormous square, lasted for weeks, and involved a vast number of participants. Yet even within these "frozen photographs," it remains impossible to determine with certainty whether what meets the eye corresponds to what actually occurred. Taken together, just as İntizami's text contains almost no negative commentary and embellishes even the less remarkable performances,[539] the visual record of the festival depicts not "how it was," but rather "how it was meant to be".

[537] KAFESCİOĞLU, 2019, p. 23.
[538] PEKİN, 2003, p. 53.
[539] PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 2005, p. 49.

Chapter 4: The Sounds of the Festival – Sounds of Power

The performances at the 1582 imperial circumcision festival encompassed a diverse array of multisensory spectacles that captivated audiences throughout both day and night. By engaging not only sight and sound but also smell, taste, and touch, the festival offered an immersive escape from everyday life for all participants, be it performers, or audience. In the previous chapter, I presented various examples that collectively contributed to the creation of a richly textured multisensory atmosphere. Moreover, I demonstrated how this atmosphere functioned to reinforce or generate power by evoking a range of emotions and sensory experiences across different moments. This chapter will now focus specifically on the role and perception of sounds and sonic elements at the 1582 festival.

Sounds and auditory components are as crucial as visual and olfactory stimuli in shaping the perception and interpretation of a place and its atmosphere.[540] Accordingly, I approach the festival as a "sonic-social event",[541] as introduced in the theoretical framework, with the primary aim of understanding how the deliberate or incidental presence, or absence of sound contributed to the creation of a powerful and impressive event. The emphasis here lies on the function of sound and silence in constructing the festival's atmosphere. Additionally, I will explore how these sonic elements were perceived, investigating potential variations in interpretation among chroniclers and contemporary eye- and ear-witnesses. Before moving on to three selected research cases in this context, the sonic atmosphere of the festival will be outlined.[542]

[540] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 506.
[541] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 18.
[542] This summary is a further development of research I presented in a more preliminary version in this article: DEMİRBAŞ, 2021.

4.1. The Festival's Sonic Atmosphere

In contrast to other instances where some researchers argue about the superiority of sight over the other four senses (especially the so-called "lower senses" of smell, taste, and touch),[543] non-visual senses, particularly hearing, were a very important part of imperial festivals. Sound, not only performance of a certain music type but all sounds, that appeal to hearing in all its parameters,[544] had a great effect on the sensory experience in the festive atmosphere that spread throughout the city. The center and main stage of the festival was Atmeydanı, but its sensory elements could actually be heard, seen and felt from various parts of Istanbul. Of course, the firework demonstrations and other explosive shows, which I refer to as the festival's trans-spatial performances, are the first to be mentioned. Light and fiery displays are sensory triggers, and their sonic effects are powerful. These were very dominant sounds that could be heard even at a distance. Lebelski, for example, characterized this moment as very pleasurable, describing the firing of the powder-filled cartridges as making a "marvelous noise and sound".[545] İntizami also mentions the performances with fire, noting that they give noise to the realm and space, and commotion to the ground and time: "[…] when the evening came, displays of fire and firecrackers once again filled heaven and the earth with noise, and set all space and time resounding."[546]

The representative sound of power in the festival space was loud, varied and directly integrated with the other performances. An example for the latter is the procession of artisans with their big wheeled moving workplaces and the people and animals that carried them to the square. This parade itself is enough to make one imagine the sounds of the cars, not to mention about the movement in the three-dimensional workplaces. The various artisans who participated in this spectacle—with and without moving decors—had one thing in common, according to the descriptions: They were all praying. One by one, the artisan groups in the procession would enter the square and come under the pavilion where the sultan was sitting. There, they would stop and pray to the sultan: *Amin! Amin!*[547] This prayer was a sonic way of expressing admiration and reverence for the ruler's competence and wishes for its continuity:

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[543] MCLUHAN, 1962.
[544] SMITH, 2007, pp. 41–42.
[545] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 33.
[546] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 370v., 414v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 437, 475): "[…] kevn ü mekâna velvele ve zemîn ü zamâna gulgule verdi".
[547] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 512.

“Prayer is necessary first for the shah of religion, then for his prince”,[548] as Mustafa Ali wrote. Many of these blessings also came from different religious and denominational artisan groups and their representatives, who also found a place in the parade. These groups would sometimes enter the stage with their instruments, as in the case of the Abdalan-ı Rum Dervishes.[549]

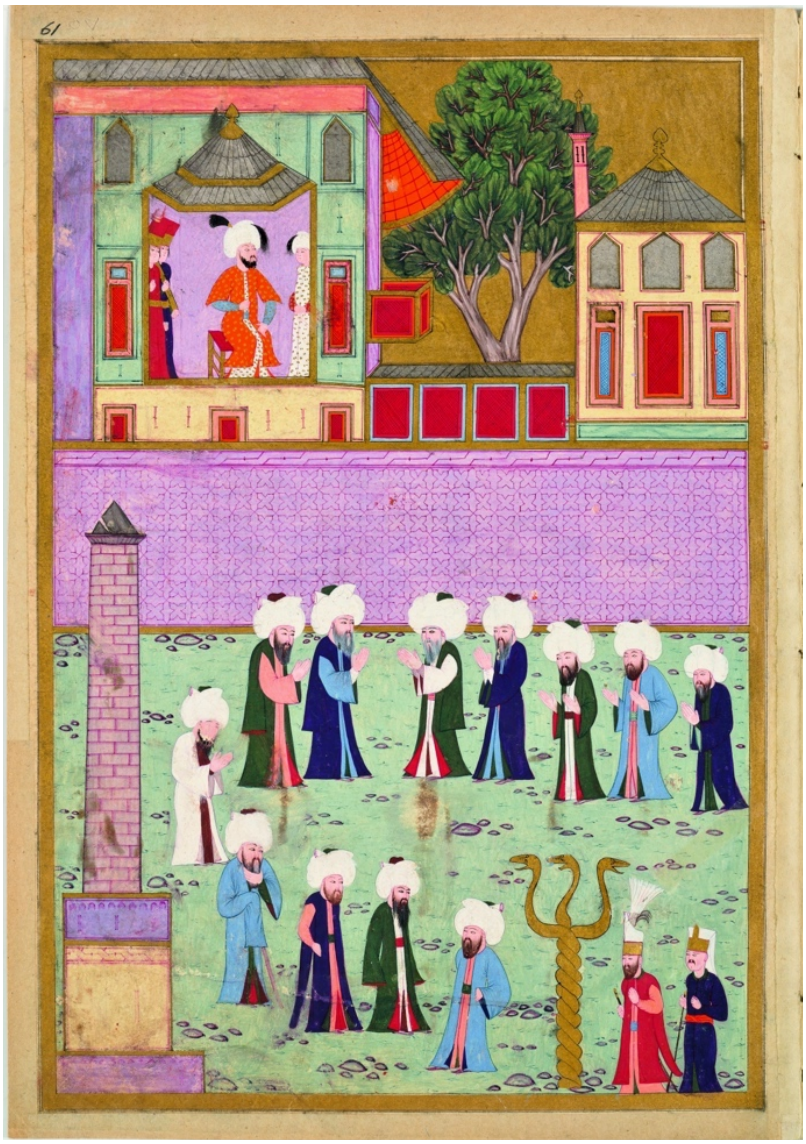


Fig. 32: The pray of preachers,
from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 61r.

[548] ALİ, 1586, fol. 37r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 151; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 439): “Du‘a vâcibdür evvel şâh-ı dine / Gerekdür ba‘d-ezân şehzâdesine.”
[549] ALİ, 1586, fol. 42v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 162; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 455).

Additionally, I would also emphasize the (voluntary or involuntary) contribution from animals to this sonic atmosphere. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the display of exotic and wild animals from the sultan's animal collection, and the performances with them, was maybe the most awe-inspiring aspect of the 1582 circumcision celebrations. Both the animals as such, which were difficult to encounter, and were therefore watched with curiosity, and other animal shows integrated within the artisan procession, constituted random sounds of the festive atmosphere. At the very least, it is necessary to examine their representative voices in written transmission.

For example, Mustafa Ali, describing the chaotic situation when the elephants were on stage, depicts them shouting while they were spraying water from their trunks.[550] In another example, İntizami described the games played by a dog. It was brought on stage by the performers for its skill in jumping through hoops and then it howled in the maqam *segah*.[551] This emphasizes that the sonic elements of war reenactments or fights between animals and between humans have also entered the narratives of festivals. İntizami's work vividly depicts scenes of rams clashing horns, the cries of combatants in mock battles, the metallic ring of swords striking, and the thunderous echoes of gunfire piercing the sky. All of these were further sonic examples of the atmosphere.[552]

Of course, the people who rushed to the square during the bowl looting and gold scattering, sometimes trampling on each other to grab the sultan's gifts, could not be expected to act in silence and tranquility. Another one of these examples must have been the aforementioned show with elephants. The people fled in fear from what Mustafa Ali describes as "rain mixed with thunder" and trampled each other in the stampede,[553] which clearly wouldn't be possible in silence either. Nor do I think the audience watched the impressive and exciting acrobatics, illusionism and juggling shows that went on throughout the festival without showing any vocal and sonic reaction. The vibrant sounds of the audience, encompassing applause, shouts, cheers, and whispers, reverberated through the air, were evoking a multitude

[550] ALİ, 1586, fol. 69v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 212; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 524): "Hem giriv itdi hem sular saçdı / Ra'd u bârân sanup gören kaçdı."
[551] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 371r.–372v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 438–439): "[…] karşısında usûl tutup makâm-ı segâhdan pervâz eyledi." In Ottoman-Turkish music, *maqam* refers to a system of musical modes that provide a framework for melodic improvisation and composition. Music moves along a horizontal axis, or with Walter Feldman's words in accordance with "horizontal musical thinking", and *seyir* refers to this specific path of progression or movement within a *maqam*. See: FELDMAN, 1996, p. 372.
[552] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 225r.–226v., 388v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 321, 451).
[553] ALİ, 1586, fol. 69v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 212; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 524).

of emotions. These encompassed feelings of admiration, devotion, and excitement, as well as occasional hints of trepidation.

Together, these diverse expressions of emotion and energy contributed to the creation of a dynamic and immersive soundscape that defined the essence of the festival experience. Accordingly, one can derive from these sources that there was a constant, crowded humming in the background that changes and transforms depending on the sensorial atmosphere, or as Schafer calls it, the *keynote sounds* of the people filling the entire Atmeydanı.[554]

Finally, there were the musicians of the empire, who were among those who also filled the stage and its surroundings with their sound. In this context, we can say that the voices of Istanbul and even the empire came together in Atmeydanı for the occasion of this festival. In the 16th century, Istanbul was home to Greeks, Armenians, Muslim Turks, Jews (both those who had settled in Istanbul and Sephardic Jews who came later) and Romanis. Ersu Pekin summarizes the multilingual and multi-faith cultural structure of the city in his article titled "The Sounds of Istanbul":

> This situation of being multilingual and multi-faith has played a significant role in creating a shared culture in Istanbul. Religion and language are segregative by nature; sound is not. If anything, sound, as the main component of music, brings people together by allowing people who do not understand one another's language to communicate.[555]

The festival's musical performances were no exception to this diversity. It seems that all genres of Ottoman music (military music, religious music, *fasıl* music[556] and purely entertainment music) and accompanying dances were part of the festival program. Perhaps the best example for how this diversity may have been reflected in the festival's soundscape is the miniature by Nakkaş Osman. In this work, he depicts a Mevlevi dervish performing *sema* with the sound of *ney* (end-blown flute) played by two others; and two *köçek* (dancing boys) dancing with *çarpare*s[557] in their hands in the same frame. (Fig. 33) In terms of further instruments, two *def*, one *mıskal* (a type of pan flute), and one *kemançe* (rebab) are pictured on the left page, and one

[554] SCHAFER, 1994, pp. 58–60.
[555] PEKİN, 2019, p. 37.
[556] *Fasıl* is a term used in Ottoman-Turkish music to describe a traditional musical suite that typically consists of several musical pieces performed in a specific order. It presents a variety of musical forms, including instrumental and vocal pieces, and usually involves improvisation, hence has a dynamic nature. Feldman states that the *fasıl*, whose historical development he examines under the heading of "cyclical concert formats", came into existence between the 15th and 16th centuries, and had taken its form only in the first half of the 17th century. See: FELDMAN, 1996, pp. 177–178.
[557] They are sometimes referred to as *çak-a-çak*: ALİ, 1586, fol. 99r. A castanets-like instrument made of four pieces of wood, two pieces of which are held in one palm and two pieces of which are held in the other palm.

şeşhane (kind of *kopuz*)[558] and a *çeng* (Ottoman-Turkish harp) in the hands of musicians standing next to the dancers are painted on the right page. From this illustration it can well be inferred that the music being played is not entirely a religious one. As a matter of fact, the dancers, who are clearly identified as *köçek* by their costumes, confirm this. *Köçek* is the name given to dancing boys, who usually cross-dressed in feminine attire. They were a part of the entertainment scene in Istanbul and in the palace from the 16th–17th centuries onwards. In turn, in the scene depicted in the lower half of the left-hand page, one can observe music and a performance with a strong religious element. An indication for this is that the instrument called the *ney* is often associated with mysticism and Sufism, and *sema* is an important part of the related ritual. This source thus indicates that such performances integrated societal diversity into the festival's sonic landscape.

Fig. 33: *Köçek*s, Mevlevi dervish and musicians,
from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 389v.–390r.

[558] It is understood from the image that the musician playing the *kopuz* is also the singer.

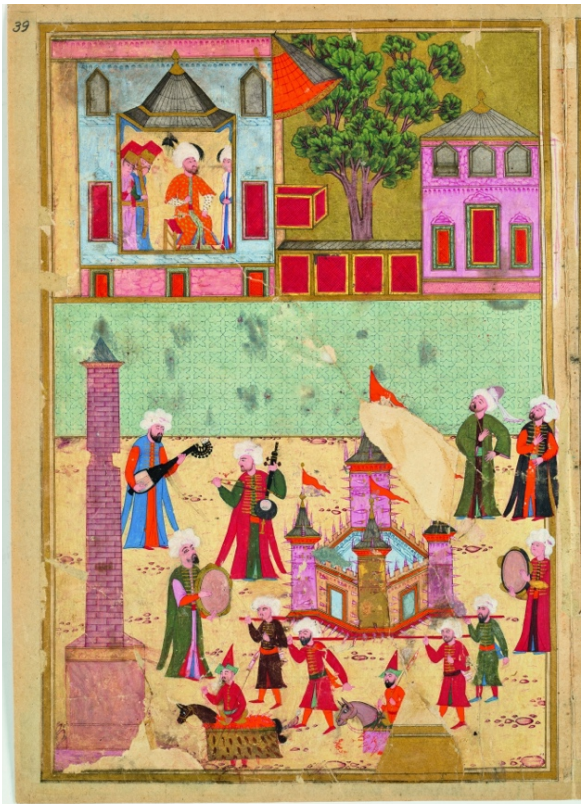
The authenticity of the representation of this scene has been questioned by many researchers. Although it is sometimes considered that this scene proves that different types of music were performed together at the same time and in the same setting, it is necessary to remember the compositional choices regarding the writing and illuminating of the festival books. As previously argued, one must be skeptical about the realism of all their corresponding details. In fact, in the manuscript, the above-stated miniatures are titled to the heading "musicians' arrival", and there is no information in the text about Mevlevi dervishes neither whirling nor blowing the *ney*.[559] At the same time, İntizami's book provides countless examples of Mevlevi *sema* being performed in front of almost every group as part of the artisan procession. There are also other written descriptions of *ney* players and even Mevlevi dancers mentioned together with other musicians while performing.[560] In fact, this leads to a questioning of performance practices in the historical past regarding a certain dance and music genre, which is almost completely associated with religious rituals today.[561]

At the 1582 festival, the presence of musicians on stage was twofold: Firstly, they appeared as part of a performance itself and were on stage in groups under the name *Sazendegan* (Instrumentalists) and often accompanied by dancers and singers. As İntizami's narrative shows, musicians came to Atmeydanı almost every day, especially after the artisan procession, to show off their skills.[562] Also, they often performed before the fireworks, which were part of the nightly entertainment: "[…], the *sazende*s came with *ud* and *çeng* and *rebab* and *kanun* and *tanbur*, and they made *seyir*s in *Irak* and *Isfahan* and other maqams, traveled through a wide variety of pitches."[563]

Ferahi describes musicians under the title "Der Cemâ'at-i Sâzende [vü] Gûyende" (the group of musicians and singers). These accompany the artisan processions with both instrumental and vocal music. In this narrative as well, the musicians appeared on the festival stage more than once, and "their voices reached the sky" frequently.[564] Mustafa Ali likewise

[559] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 390v.–391r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 453–454).
[560] For example: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 307v., 346r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 388, 417).
[561] AND, 2020, p. 223.
[562] For the first mention of them in the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*: İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 17v.–19r. They are mentioned many more times throughout the book, for example: fols. 41v., 73v., 133v., 143v., 390v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 136–137, 155–156, 180–181, 235–236, 243–244, 453–454). For Haunolth's account of the musicians of the festival, see: HAUNOLTH, 1595, pp. 473, 492–493.
[563] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 37v.–38r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 152–153): "[…] bölük bölük sâzendeler ve ud u çeng ü rebâb u kânun u tanbûr … seyr ü ırâk u ısfahan u makâmâtda nâzendeler, envâ'-i seyr ü temâşâyı perdelerden aşırdılar."
[564] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 232: "[…] bir niçe sâzende gûyende sadâları câ-be-câ âsumâna çıkar…"

groups the musicians under a single heading, highlighting the festival's instrumental diversity.[565]



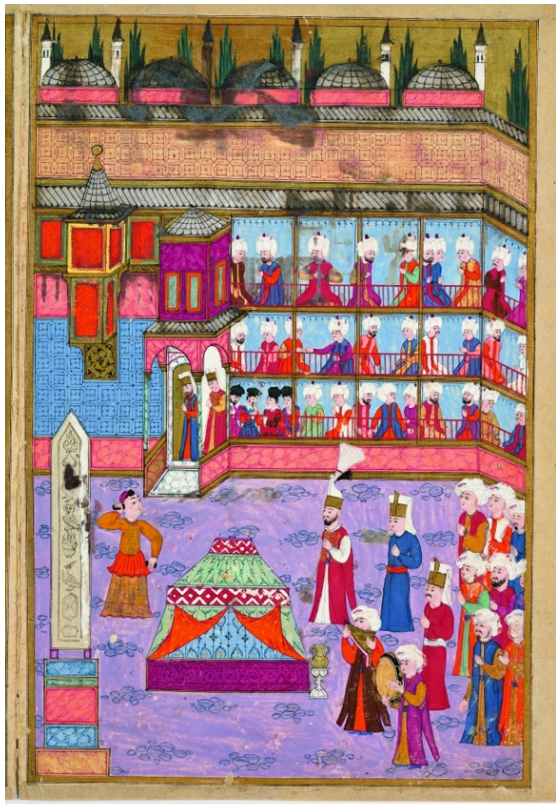


Fig. 34: (left) Musicians and fire-shows in *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 39r.
Fig. 35: (right) Musicians accompanying *Karagöz* performance, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 89v.

Secondly, the festival musicians also accompanied a variety of performances and spectacles. At times, they appeared as a *davul* and *zurna* (drum and shrill pipe) duo, leading the procession of artisans.[566] Other appearances included accompanying the animal shows, such as Romani bear charmers playing the *def* (frame drum or tambourine), as well as during the acts of acrobats, jugglers, and illusionists. Finally, musicians contributed to the dramatic atmosphere of combat re-enactments, using drums and trumpets to evoke a sense of victory.[567]

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[565] ALİ, 1586, fols. 98v.–99v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 269–270; ARSLAN, 2008, 602–604). I find it necessary to remind here Ersu Pekin's study in which he reads the musical performances of the 1582 festival through the instruments depicted in miniatures and referred in texts. See: PEKİN, 2003.
[566] The same practice was followed in another artisan procession organized in 1657; the drum and zurna moved in front of or with the procession. See: AND, 2020, pp. 308–315. Therefore, it is certain that this state of accompaniment is not specific to the festival analyzed in this study.
[567] LEBELSKI^{2}, 1584, para. 29; FUGGER, 1923, p. 64; PALERNE, 1606, p. 466.

In addition to knowing the different musical elements, it is also critical how they are perceived. Of course, what is called "music", or rather, what kind of sounds are designated as pleasant, unpleasant or disturbing,[568] varies due to many factors ranging from cultural codes to the venue or space where the performance is perceived. This becomes even more apparent when taking a more holistic view and focusing on the sonic atmosphere as such. For example, the sounds of the crowd at the festival were sometimes interpreted as "noisy". Lebelski has a similar description regarding a musical scene in his Latin account, where he refers to a certain dissonance even more specifically and detailed:

> […] there you might have seen Arabs, Ethiopians, Persians, Greeks and Spaniards, and other people from other nations, sounding their cornets, pipes, tympanis, citharas and other instruments very similar to cithars. All these, entering into the circle, where they made such a noise and sound, without tonality, without modulation, without alternations, as if the whole city would resound with a sort of mush of voices and songs.[569]

Lebelski's words nicely show how the place was connected with the sound. For when he says that the "without tonality" and "noisy" sound of the musicians filled "the whole city", it can be doubted that they really made the whole city sound. Instead, this group may have circled around Atmeydanı and thus clearly affected the whole neighborhood and the festival area. In connection with the musicians' sound, this spatial place then became "the whole city", providing an interesting indication for what effects sound can have on observers' perceptions.

Another example similarly perceiving the festival's sonic atmosphere as "horrible", "noisy", or "discordant" came from the account in the Fugger Zeitung: "On the fortieth day, a thousand muezzins paid homage to the grand ruler, making a terrible noise with their music."[570] The Italian observer of the celebrations additionally notes a particularly "noisy" instance, characterizing it as a large assembly of musicians and singers: "On Wednesday, around the Hippodrome, about a thousand people were seen passing by, making a great noise with drums, lutes, flutes, and other instruments according to their custom, producing such a great noise that

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[568] GOODY, 2002, p. 20.

[569] LEBELSKI[1], 1582, n.p. or no para.: "In quo cornicines, tibicines, tympanistas, cytharedos, ex Arabum, AEtiopum, Persaru, Graecorum, Hispanorum, gentibus, cum diuerso genere instrumentoru, cyhtharis tamen simillimo reperires. Hi igitur omnes in circum ingressi, tantos strepitus, sine tono, sine comutationibus, interualiss ediderunt, vt tota Ciuitas illa vocum & cantuum veluri quadam farragine reboaret." I benefited from Billerberg's translation, but I translated the names of the instruments and the musicians in the band myself in accordance with Lebelski's Latin narration. For example, Billerberg translated *tibicine* as "trumpet" and *tympanistas* as "tabors". Also, Billerberg translation gives the name Ethiophians as "Mores". See: LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 17.

[570] FUGGER, 1923, p. 68: "Am vierzigsten Tage huldigten dem Grossherrn tausend Muzzedine, die mit ihrer Musik einen furchtbaren Lärm machten."

I can confidently say they sang with great dissonance, after circling the Hippodrome, they departed in pairs."[571]

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In conclusion, multiple sources indicate that the sounds and music of the festival were not always perceived as beautiful, pleasing, or harmonious; at times, they were experienced quite differently. Nonetheless, the sonic environment of Atmeydanı was evidently dynamic and vibrant. This section has provided a brief overview of this auditory atmosphere and illustrated it with notable examples.

The following three sections will explore the complex relationship between sound, silence, and power through selected case studies. The goal is to uncover the semantic agency of both real and imagined sound perceptions,[572] and analyze their contribution to the festival's sensory atmosphere. To begin, I will examine the role and representation of the military marching band during the 1582 festival, situated within the context of the powerful and authoritative sultan and his music. Next, I will turn to a sonic performance that transcends traditional musical boundaries, investigating how the notion of "magnificence" is constructed by comparing different festival accounts. Finally, I will address the unheard and unspoken dimensions of the festival, focusing on its "silent" and "missing" aspects.

[571] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 5: "Mercorì si vide passare d'intorno intorno l'Hippodromo apresso mille persone, che con timpari, liuti, flauti, et altri istrument à loro uso facevano grandis(si)mo strepito, raggiando, che così certo posso dire, che cantando con grandissima dissonantia, et doppo girato l'Hippodromo a dui a dui si partirono."
[572] BIDDLE & GIBSON, 2017, p. 15.

4.2. Sonic Representation of the Sultan: The *Mehter*

The sonic dimension of the 1582 circumcision celebrations prominently featured both unique and recurring musical performances. Among the recurring acts were the *sazendegan* (ensemble musicians), who regularly appeared on stage and embodied the musical spirit of the festivities. Another key presence was the *mehter*, the military marching band, whose repeated performances underscored its symbolic role as an auditory and visual emblem of imperial power. The *mehter*, historically the representation of the Ottoman military power, was a very dominant element of this festival, both sonically and visually. Although the *mehter* is not given a separate heading in the festival narratives—particularly in the Ottoman *surname* (festival books)—its appearances are consistently mentioned, sometimes in detail and sometimes in passing, across all contemporary sources.[573] As a matter of fact, this importance is also reflected in terms of the festival organization, where the *mehter* was an important issue as well: For example, the decision about where the military band would be stationed was as important as where to place the lodges the guests would sit in. From the plan of Atmeydanı, one can see that the *mehter* was eventually placed directly opposite of the sultan's elevated special loggia. (Fig. 12)

The *mehter* is a captivating and distinctive musical tradition that originated in the early Ottoman Empire. With its roots dating back to the 13th century, *mehter* music holds a significant place in history as one of the oldest military marching band traditions in the world. Combining percussion instruments, wind instruments, and vocal chants, it evokes a sense of grandeur and strength, serving as a symbol of the empire's military might and cultural identity. The word itself is translated from the Persian word *mihter* meaning "the greater". Walter Feldman expands this translation to "the greater orchestra".[574] As a result of Christian Europeans encountering the Janissary troops and their music during wars with the Ottoman Empire, the term *Janissary music* additionally emerged to describe *mehter*.[575] Ottoman military music also existed as a symbol of belligerence and sheer might in the eyes of the "other".[576] It does so both aurally and visually. The *mehter* was brought to the battlefield to inspire and motivate

[573] Parts of the analysis presented in this section can also be found here: DEMİRBAŞ, 2024.
[574] FELDMAN, 2012.
[575] JÄGER, 1996.
[576] BOWLES, 2006, p. 534. This article by Edmund A. Bowles examines the impact of the *mehter* music in Europe in its entirety and provides a variety of examples with references from historical sources.

soldiers with its powerful and rhythmic music. This included the purpose and role of "striking fear into the hearts of the enemy".[577]

It was not only through wars that Europeans encountered the *mehter*. Diplomatic encounters were instrumental in bringing this music to foreign ears as well. Such meetings involving the *mehter* sometimes took place when high-ranking court officials, ambassadors and soldiers traveled to Europe to represent the Ottoman Empire, and sometimes, on the contrary, when foreign rulers, ambassadors and representatives were welcomed in the capital. An example for the former is the official entrance of Ambassador İbrahim Pasha to Vienna in 1700, after the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699). The ambassador's entry into the city was sonically loud, as he brought with him a *mehter* team with a large number of instruments in addition to soldiers and high-ranking diplomats.[578]

There are also several cases where the role of the guest was the reverse: For example, the arrival of Friedrich von Kreckwitz and his esteemed entourage to Istanbul in 1591. He was sent by the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612) himself to take over the ambassadorial position. The pharmacist Friedrich Seidel was part of this delegation and was the one who transcribed the welcoming ceremony:

> [...] and were accompanied into our caravanserai by the Sultan's court music, for they did us the honor of a courtly performance with small and large kettledrums, trumpets, shawms, rattles, and bells, so loud that one could not hear his own voice and had to plug his ears because of the ill-sounding [harsh, discordant] tone and noises.[579]

It is obvious that the *mehter* had an impact on European onlookers. In time, this also echoed in European classical music.[580] However, it is clear that the *mehter* music was also foreign to Europeans, and it was sometimes described as "ill-sounding" and "noisy". In fact, there are many examples of these kinds of attributions, whereas Seidel's narrative and the example of the diplomatic visit to Vienna given in the previous paragraph are just two such cases. Gamze

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[577] Today, the *mehter* team, which exists mostly for touristic purposes (such as visits to the military museum) and symbolic performances on national holidays, is advertised with these words: "The *mehter* that gives confidence to friends—or allies, and fear to enemies". As an example see: YENİ AKİT, 2019.
[578] İLASLAN KOÇ, 2024, pp. 132–133.
[579] SEIDEL, 1711, p. 5: "[...] und mit des Sultans Hoff-Musica in unsere Carvanserai begleitet worden / da sie auch uns ein Hoff-Recht gemacht mit kleinen und grossen Heer-Paucken, Trommeten, Schalmehen, Klappern und Klingeln, dass einer sein eigen Wort nicht hören können und für den übelklingenden Thon und Gethöne die Ohren zustopfen müssen."
[580] As examples of studies on the *Turquerie* movement and the effects of the military marching band on European music: LOCKE, 2009 and 2015; MEYER, 1974; GENCER, 2017.

İlaslan Koç notes that the military music accompanying İbrahim Pasha's entrance in Vienna was described in accounts from Habsburg as "a very different and strange sound".[581]

4.2.1. The Symbolic Representation of the *Mehter*

Since the term *mehter* is also used in many historical accounts to denote high-ranking officials and different classes of civil servants, it is worth starting by explaining what is actually meant by *mehter*. Although the *mehter* organization is often associated with tasks such as tent setters, senior servants, or senior officials,[582] what is referred here is the group Evliya Çelebi calls the *çalıcı mehter* ("musician *mehter*" or *mehter* musicians).[583] Note, however, that the origins of Turkish military music date back to ancient times, long before the term *mehter* or *mehterhane* (house of *mehter*) was first coined. Another word that also appears in historical sources to designate this military music is *nevbet* or *nevbethane* (house of *nevbet*).

These terms are generally used in the sense of the music performed by the military band in front of the ruler's palace or presence by beating drums. It is stated that its historical background goes back to ancient times and that the Turks took this tradition that serves as a sign of sovereignty from the Huns and Göktürks.[584] *Nevbet*, or *nöbet*, with one of its meanings of "cycle", represents a continuous procession created by the beating of drums. Naturally, the most important instrument of this ceremony was the *tabl* or *davul* (drum), which held particular significance, symbolizing the ruler, or *Hakan*, throughout history. Additionally, *davul* or *tabl* was often associated with the symbol of the sultan and sovereignty: the *tuğ*. (Fig. 36) In the history of the Turks (and Ottomans), the *tuğ*, was a sign of military and political power and was carried in front of the army together with the flag.[585] Therefore, both the drum and the *tuğ* as symbols that are closely connected with the sultan, constitute crucial elements regarding the historical background of the *mehter*.

According to the analysis of historical sources by researchers, *nevbethane* was widely used as the predecessor of *mehterhane*, and that it was approximately in the second half of the 16th century that musicians began to be referred to as *mehter*.[586] The *mehter* has a compelling

[581] İLASLAN KOÇ, 2024, p. 133.
[582] SANLIKOL, 2011, pp. 22–23.
[583] ÇELEBİ, 2006, pp. 335–337.
[584] ÖZAYDIN, 2007.
[585] In the Uyghur, the Huns and the Göktürks, military music was even called *tuğ müziği* (*tuğ* music). See: ALTINÖLÇEK, 2015.
[586] ELBAŞ, 2019, pp. 25–54; SANLIKOL, 2011, pp. 24–26.

place in the history of Ottoman music, even though knowledge about its music and performance is relatively limited. Today, *mehter* is still active as a folkloric figure. However, most of the music performed today was composed in the 20th century. Our knowledge about the earlier periods of the *mehter* music comes from the accounts of European observers. As with many musical genres that traditionally spread through oral transmission, the notation of what Europeans heard during their stay in Ottoman lands and Istanbul allows us to gain some insights into the *mehter* repertoire.[587]

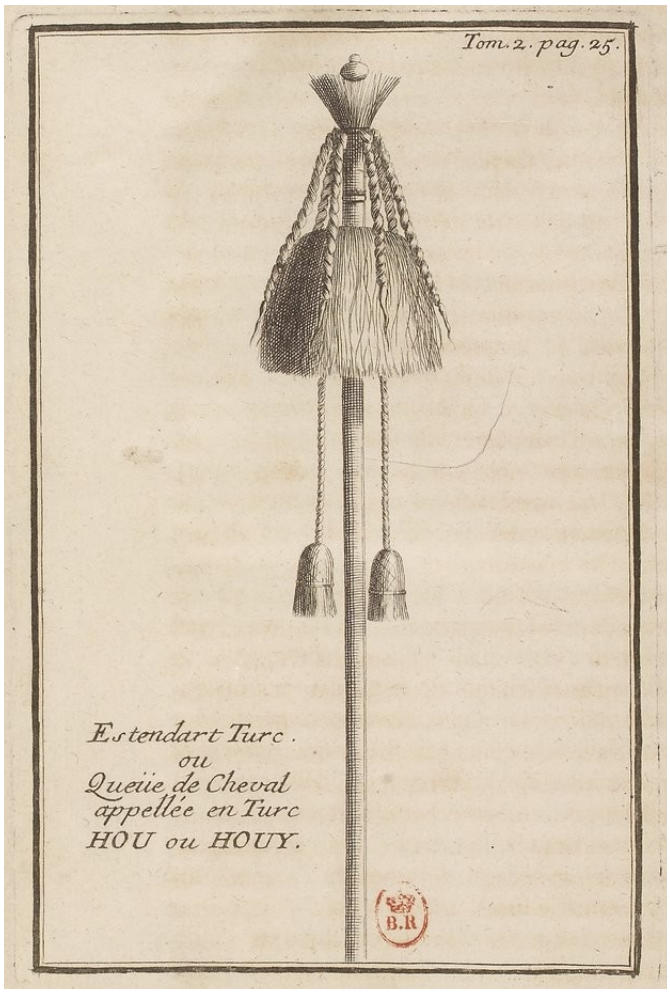

Fig. 36: *Tuğ*. TOURNEFORT, 1717, p. 25.

The *Mehterhane* organization consisted of two distinct sub-groups: official and unofficial *mehter*s. The first group, known as the *mehteran-ı tabl ü alem-i hassa*, were in the service of the palace with its high skilled professional musicians. Their primary role during times of war

[587] For selected research on this subject see HAUG, 2019; WRIGHT, 2000; TURA, 2001; SANAL, 1964; ÖZTÜRK, 2019.

was of paramount importance. Besides joining the sultan or his appointed representative on the battlefield, performing during the sultan's accession ceremony and their accompaniment on official trips were several additional roles they had taken over.

In addition to the official *mehter* musicians, who were subject to the salaries paid by the state, there were others, grouped under the name of *esnaf mehterleri* (artisan *mehter*s), who mostly worked under the patronage of high-level officials such as viziers and beylerbeys, and whose numbers varied. They were responsible for providing public entertainment within the city. Unlike the official *mehteran*, these musicians were not part of the formal system and operated mostly independently to bring joy and amusement to the general public.[588]

Returning to the *mehter*'s connection with "power" and its symbolic representation, it would be fair to say that there is a much more entangled structure. Eugenia Popescu-Judetz analyzes the *mehter* as a show of power and argues that it has a cultural integrity with very complex dimensions. As a matter of fact, she reconciles this complex structure with *mehter*'s symbolic integrativeness. Accordingly, the *mehter* is a musical expression of the concept of *ümmet*, that is, the community of all people of the Islamic faith.[589]

This integrated military and religious representation is also evident in the numerical composition of the *mehter* or how they are organized on stage during the performance. The number of each instrument in the *mehter* is called *kat* and the size of the band was expressed by the number of these. For example, until the 17th century, the imperial *mehter* was usually called *dokuz kat mehter* (ninefold *mehter*),[590] with the number of nine for each instrument in the ensemble.[591] The ensemble consisted of two instrument groups: wind and percussion instruments. The wind instruments were primarily the *zurna* (double reed pipe), followed by the *boru* or *nefir* (wind instruments, similar to trumpet),[592] whereas the percussion instruments included the aforementioned *tabl* or *davul* (drum), as well as the *kös* (large kettle drum),

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[588] For more detailed information on the *mehter* organization, see: SANAL, 1964, pp. 5–26; ELBAŞ, 2019, pp. 55–105; VURAL, 2012.
[589] POPESCU-JUDETZ, 2007, p. 57.
[590] The number nine is considered sacred and appears symbolically in different epics and mythologies in Turkish culture.
[591] From the 17th century onwards, the *mehteran* under the sultan was increased to twelvefold and ninefold *mehteran* were allocated to the grand vizier and some pashas: ÖZCAN, N., 2003.
[592] According to Sanlıkol's findings from written sources, the appearance of the *zurna* into the *mehter* ensemble coincides with the 15th century. In the narratives before that, the *boru* was mentioned instead. See: SANLIKOL, 2011, pp. 26–30. Some sources mention the *kurrenay* (a long and bass sounding brass instrument, similar to horn) among the *mehter* instruments used in the past, although not very often. Together with the clarinet, which has recently entered the orchestra, these two instruments are not counted among the main instruments of the *mehter*. See: ELBAŞ, 2019, p. 197; KARAKAYA, 2006, pp. 525–526.

nakkare (small kettle drum), *def* (frame drum, sometimes with small cymbals attached),[593] *zil* (cymbal) and *çevgan* (a crescent-shaped instrument with a long handle and rattles, bells or chains attached to it). The playing position of the *mehter* musicians was also subject to a special spatial layout. The *tabl* stood in the center of the stage and the other instruments were arranged in a *hilal* (crescent) behind it. This placement was not accidental, as the *hilal* is the symbol of Islam and is also on the flag of the Ottoman Empire.[594]

Fig. 37: *Mehter* in the presence of the Sultan Murad III,
from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 159v.–160r.

With every detail of this ensemble, the music they played and how they sounded, from the number and multiplicity of their instruments to the way they marched, from their clothes to the symbolic *tuğ* they carried, they symbolized not only the power of the Ottoman Empire but also

[593] Elbaş states that the *def* was used only by artisan *mehter*s. See: ELBAŞ, 2019, p. 202.
[594] Of course, it cannot be assumed that this placement was the same on the move or in all examples, but this was the general form.

the power of the sultan. As such, it is remarkable what Mustafa Ali wrote about the *mehter*, when he attributed genders to certain instruments and categorized them according to the effect they create and the function they serve. Mustafa Ali categorizes instruments as "female instruments" and "male instruments" in his book *Mevâidü'n-nefâis fi kavâidi'l-mecâlis* (Tables of Delicacies on the Principles of Literary Gatherings, 1587). While he includes *çeng* and *kemençe* in the group of female instruments, he lists *mehter* instruments as male ones:

> As for the *zurna*, this instrument is the sultan of this group. The *nefir*, the *nakkare*, the *zinç*[595] and the loud *nakrava*[596] are this sovereign's men. Whenever a searing sound comes from the *zurna*, the other satellites and the *davul* follow it, and all the other instruments cease to exist in its presence. These instruments are chosen from the others in masculinity.[597]

Ali's reference to the *zurna* as "the sultan of the *mehter* team" should not be overlooked. Here, the author establishes a hierarchical order, a subordinate-superior relationship between the instruments, calling the *zurna* "the ruler" and the others "his subordinates". Unsurprisingly, he associates these instruments with masculinity, which reminds us of the figure of the sultan, who is also supposed to be masculine, and how he displays (or should display) masculinity. The *zurna* is the most fundamental instrument of the band, along with the *davul/tabl*, and carries the melody in the performance of this music. In this respect, it can be said that while the *davul* represents the mighty sultan with its rhythm, the *zurna* becomes his loud voice and his word.

4.2.2. The *Mehter*'s Presence at the Festival

In the previous parts of this chapter, the symbolic and semantic aspects of the *mehter*, as well as its direct connection to Turkish rulers, and later on Ottoman sultans, were explained. It was pointed out that this connection does not have a single meaning, but incorporates historical, religious, military and faith-related aspects. There is also the issue of how *mehter* was utilized against the "other", and how it was interpreted in the eyes of the other. Both things can be

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[595] As a matter of fact, Elbaş also informs us that this instrument is sometimes called "zenc" or "zenç". See: ELBAŞ, 2009, p. 203. For further information see MENIŃSKI, 1680, p. 327.
[596] This must be a different spelling of the percussion instrument called *nağara*.
[597] ALİ, 1978, pp. 84–85: "Zurnaya gelince bu saz, bu bölüğün sultanıdır. Nefir, nakkare, zinç ve yüksek sesli nakrava bu hükümdarın ekranıdır. Ne zaman zurnadan yakıcı bir ses çıksa öteki uygular ve davul ona uyup ardından gider ve bütün öteki sazların varlığı onun bulunduğu yerde yok olur gider. Bu sazlar erkeklikte ötekilerden seçilmişlerdir."

explained with a wide range of examples in terms of wars or diplomatic relations. In this respect, it can be well argued that the *mehter* was a highly political element, whose performance accordingly produced a political sound. This is further emphasized by Schafer while analyzing the relationship between noise and power:

> We have already noted how loud noises evoked fear and respect back to earliest times, and how they seemed to be the expression of divine power. We have also observed how this power was transferred from natural sounds (thunder, volcano, storm) to those of the church bell and pipe organ.[598]

In the case of the Ottomans, it is obvious that the *mehter* was this noise that aroused fear and respect. Indeed, it also contributed to the representation of "divine power" through its high-decibel music.

Accounts of the loud and "noisy" sound of the *mehter* are plentiful. In 1530, another circumcision festival organized by Sultan Süleyman I drew attention to the magnificent performance of the *mehter*. The Italian captain Marchiò Trivixan, who was in Istanbul at the time and followed the festivities, exaggerated the loudness of the music as follows: "[…] if they were played in Venice, they could have been heard in Padova."[599] At the end of the 17th century, the French diplomat and merchant Laurent d'Arvieux, who described the court of Sultan Mehmet IV (r. 1648–1687) through his travels, described the power of this music in a very similar way: "[…] produced such a loud noise, that it could be heard for some distance".[600]

Ali Ufki referred to the *mehter* as *musica campagna*, or "open-air music,"[601] a sonorous and expansive form intended for outdoor and martial settings rather than for courtly indoor performance.[602] In the 1686 French translation of Ufki's *Serai Enderum* by Pierre de Girardin, King Louis XIV's ambassador to the Ottoman court, the *mehter* instruments were similarly described as producing "a great noise and a sound quite extraordinary and disagreeable.[603]

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[598] SCHAFER, 1994, p. 76.
[599] SANUTO, 1899, p. 453: "[…] et non fa un strepito al mondo, ma tante nachara, trombe et altri instrumenti, numero 200, che fevano grandissimo romor et strepito che si aria aldito di Veniexia a Padoa".
[600] Quoted in BOWLES, 2006, p. 538 from Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du Chevalier d'Arvieux*: "[…] qui faisoit un bruit si fort qu'on l'entendoit à une lieü à la ronde."
[601] The term has also been translated and used as "field music" in German; see UFKİ, 1667, p. 75; HAUG, 2019, p. 416.
[602] UFKİ, 1686, p. 166: "[…] et celle de Campagne qui s'étale davantage et est propre pour la guerre et pour les lieux ouverts." It is also referred to in this source as *musique de guerre* ("music of war") Therefore, in Schafer's terms, it is an "outdoor sound." See: SCHAFER, 1994, pp. 217–222.
[603] UFKİ, 1686, p. 177: "[…] en se servant qui a faire grand bruit et un son fort extraordinaire et desagreable."

The *mehter* dominated the 1582 festival sonically as well. Although their sound and "noise" are not made iconographically visible in the miniatures. For example, the sound emanating from the trumpets' calibers was not depicted, written descriptions provide a wealth of information about it. The "roaring" sound of the *mehter* as an open-air musical ensemble, as it is characterized in one of the anonymous narratives of the festival,[604] was directly linked to its representation of power. Power wants and needs to be heard, and the *mehter*, representing both the empire and its ruler, was loud, impressive, and sometimes frightening.

Accordingly, in the following parts of this section, I will examine in which way the "magnificent *mehter*" took part in the 1582 festival. Thereby, the focus will also be on what function and role *mehter* played, and how it was linked to power on this occasion.

Announcing the Time, Accompanying Others, Sounding the Stage

Controlling and directing time with sound and organizing daily life practices for people through sound is something that is found in all cultures and goes way back in history. For example, bells have been an integral part of human civilization for centuries, with their melodious chimes resonating through the air, captivating senses, and marking the passage of time. From ancient cathedrals to bustling town squares, bells have stood as guardians of time, orchestrating the rhythms of daily life. In medieval times, bells marked the start and end of the workday, guided religious ceremonies, and even signaled the opening and closing of city gates. The precise timing of these events relied upon the skillful coordination of bell ringers, whose artistry and technique ensured that the sound of each bell reached the ears of the community with perfect synchrony. Reinhard Strohm refers to bells and clockworks in towers, emphasizing that they sound out a wide variety of situations with the function of announcement, warning and reminder: "as an indicator of the hour, as a reminder to close the inns, as a signal for the beginning of masses in the churches, of the sessions of the magistrate, of school hours and tribunals, as a warning against thunderstorms, fires and approaching armies; as a messenger of death."[605]

Among the sounds of Istanbul, both the call to prayer and the *mehter* performance can be included in a category which Murray Schafer calls "the sound of time".[606] As a matter of

[604] The expression of "roaring" ("eine dröhnende Musik") is taken from FUGGER, 1923, p. 62.
[605] STROHM, 1999, pp. 3–4. For another recent study examining the role of bells in the representation of power: CUGELJ, 2024, pp. 281–298.
[606] SCHAFER, 1994, p. 55.

fact, there were times when the call to prayer and the *mehter* interacted together. For example, after the conquest of Constantinople, Mehmet II ordered that *nevbet* be played after prayers three times a day in Istanbul.[607] In this way, there was a combination of two musical elements, one representing more military and the other religious sounds. In this way, it is an indication that the Ottoman Empire represented not only the military power but also the religious and spiritual authority of the sultan, the Islamic caliph.[608]

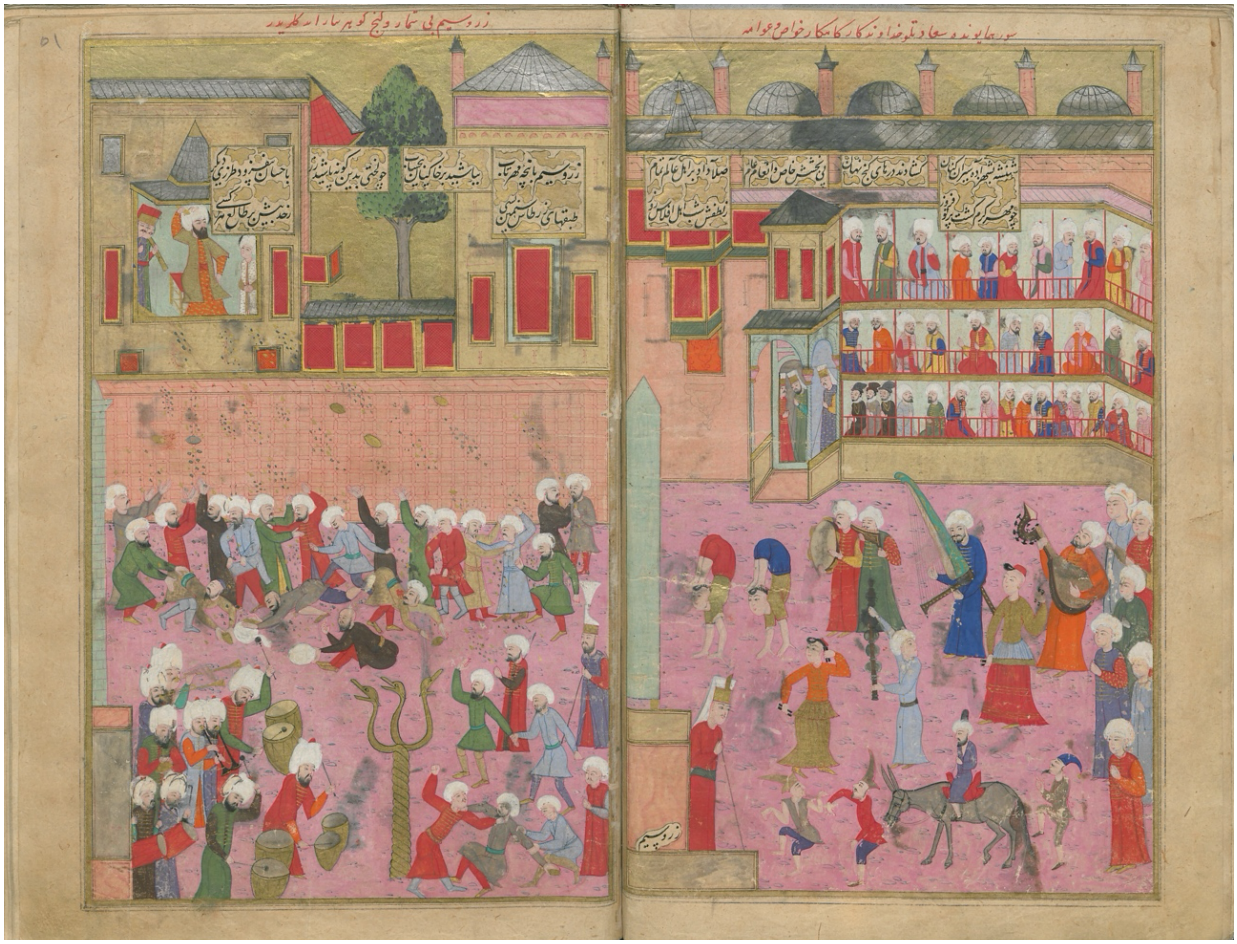

Fig. 38: *Mehter* performance with the gold-silver scattering,
from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 50v.–51r.

At the 1582 festival, the *mehter* functioned both as a heralding presence and as a temporal organizer and leader as well. The *mehter* arrived at the festival grounds with the massive *nahıl*s, the symbol of abundance and fertility, and settled in the area directly opposite the sultan's

[607] POPESCU-JUDETZ, 2007, pp. 63, 67–69.
[608] In this connection, Eugenia Popescu-Judetz, discussing the military-religious character of the *mehter*, notes that for non-Muslim communities its sound was heard as "the voice of terror". See: POPESCU-JUDETZ, 2007, p. 57.

balcony, next to the guests of the Muslim states.[609] The band was in charge of orienting the audience and guests to the various stages of the festival. It was the *kös* and *zurna* that announced the start of the celebrations to the public and the participants of the festival. Mustafa Ali describes the beauty of the sound of the *kös* and *zurna* in the air by saying "it was a gift that can touch the souls of the people".[610] Even though the names of the instruments of a full ensemble are not listed here, the *davul-zurna* or *kös-zurna* combination can actually be considered the smallest *mehter* unit.[611] Another narrative from the anonymous accounts of the festival mentions this opening music, and add other *mehter* instruments as well: "There, in accordance with local custom, roaring music was performed on timpani, trumpets, and other instruments. Then, the actual ceremonies began."[612]

The *mehter*'s function to signal the time and action is seen in the distribution of food during the festival. İntizami reports that when it was time to feast, the *mehter* would announce the time by beating *nevbet*, and the dish plunder would begin. This was usually followed by the sultan's gold and silver scattering ceremony.[613] This information is also mentioned in other Ottoman accounts of the festival. Ferahi, for example, writes that the *mehter*'s voice reached the sky, and then bountiful food (*nimet-i firavan*) were placed into the square and the people feasted.[614] The Italian report confirms that the meal service was announced with the sound of drums and trumpets.[615] Palerne also describes the sound of the drum as a signal: "The poor and the rich alike rushed there as soon as the signal and the first drumbeat had sounded."[616]

Another role of the military band during the festival was to accompany other performances and some groups in the artisan procession. For example, when Ferahi talks about the *Hamamcıyan*, who come on stage with a gigantic three-dimensional model of a Turkish bathhouse, he mentions the *mehter* team marching in front of them. He also states that those

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[609] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 7r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 129); STOUT, 1966, p. 58.
[610] ALİ, 1586, fol. 58v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 194; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 499): "Çünki başlandı sûr-ı sultâna / Çıktı kösün sedâsı keyvâna / Sûrnâlar çalındı sûr-âsâ / Oldu tuhfe halka rûh-efzâ"
[611] In this context, Ersu Pekin points out that even today the *davul-zurna* ensemble that plays at weddings calls itself "mehter". See: PEKİN, 2003, p. 58. Iain Fenlon also recalls that the penetrating sounds of this duo (in his study; *piffero*, an Italian folk instrument like *zurna*, and drum) were remarkable and asserted authority. See: FENLON, 2023, p. 65.
[612] FUGGER, 1923, p. 62: "Dort wurde nach dem Gebrauche des Landes eine dröhnende Musik auf Pauken, Trompeten und anderen Instrumenten ausgeführt. Sodann nahmen die eigentlichen Ceremonien ihren Anfang." On the development of brass instruments as civic and court ensembles, as in the case of the *mehter*, see: COFFEY, 2017.
[613] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 86v. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 192).
[614] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 316, 351.
[615] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 2: "[…] e a suon di trombe e tamburi tutto il popolo si dava all'arma et alla rapina."
[616] PALERNE, 1606, p. 457: "[…] pauures & riches indifferemment y accouroyent, si tost que le signal, & premier coup de tambour auoit sonné."

who made and sold turbans (*Sarıkcıyan*) followed *tabl* and *nakkare* musicians.[617] Another example of the *mehter*'s sounding other performances can be found in a detail given by Lebelski. Lebelski, in his description of the battle between "Germani" and "Turka", says that the victory was celebrated with drums and trumpets. In this way, they literally performed a portrayal of war.[618]

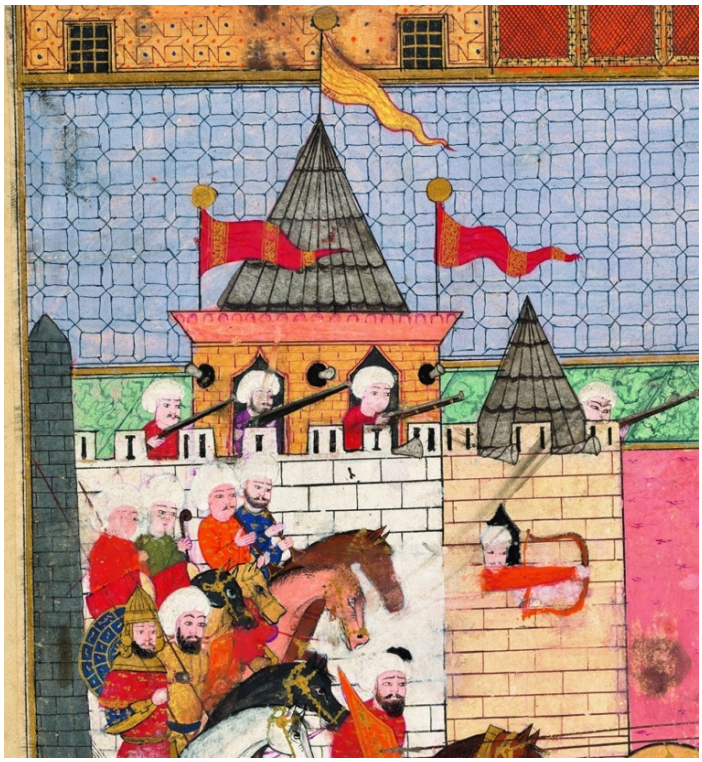

Fig. 39: Detail from battle reenactment depiction together with *mehter* musicians, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 239r.

In addition to marking the passage of time, the *mehter* enhanced the festival's musical dimension as a performing open-air ensemble. Ferahi gives an example to show that the *mehter* musicians did not only announce the beginning of the meals distributed to the public. According to his account, the *mehter* also accompanied the feasts prepared for special guests during the festivities with their *tabl* and *nakkare*.[619] Lubenau's notes provide more detailed information on the presence of the *mehter* in Atmeydanı during the festival. Indeed, this musical ensemble was active at many moments of the festival, showing off its skills to the entire audience:

[617] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 204, 232.
[618] LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 29.
[619] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 219.

> And while the feast was going on, the Keiser's music played throughout the entire day, continuing until ten or eleven o'clock at night, namely, four large drums, eight smaller ones, and ten trumpets, of whom five played at a time, while others came and took turns.[620]

Many Ottoman writers used metaphors to describe the festivities, and narratives about the *mehter* were no exception. For example, in his ode written on the occasion of the 1582 festival, the author with the pseudonym Ulvi says that the sounds of the *kös* and *nefîr* in the festival area resembled the sound of the apocalypse.[621] Schafer was talking about the transition of noise from natural sounds like thunder and volcanoes to other instruments like church bells. Even if this transfer had taken place in the Ottoman soundscapes, when narratives resort to metaphor (and sometimes exaggeration), natural or otherworldly elements are associated with noise, as exemplified by Ulvi's this "apocalyptic sound" metaphor.

The climax of the festivities was probably the 21st day of the celebrations, when Sultan Murad III's son, Prince Mehmed's circumcision took place. According to the accounts examined, the *mehter* took part in the nightly performances in honor of this ritual. According to Haunolth, the circumcision ceremony caused great joy and was celebrated with fireworks. In addition, the celebrations with drums and pipes (*pfeiffen*) continued throughout the night.[622] An anonymous letter signed "Dalle Vigne de Pera" reports a great commotion on the evening of the prince's circumcision: "countless fireworks were set off, accompanied by a tremendous noise of drums, trumpets, and similar instruments, and the celebration lasted throughout the entire night."[623]

The Sultan's Sonorous Entrance

In previous sections, I discussed the semantic association of *mehter* music, its instruments, and the organizations connected to it since its foundation, initially with the *Hakan* among the Turks and later with the Sultan in the Ottoman Empire. This association is reflected in terms such as *mehter*, military marching band, Janissary music, as well as in other historical names. For

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[620] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 55: "Und dieweil das Fest ist gewest, des Keisers musica den gantzen Tagk allerzeit bis in 10 oder 11 Stunden in die Nacht gewehret, als nehmlich vier grose Trummeln, 8 der kleinen, 10 Trometer, auf das allezeit funf geblasen, doch andere komen und umgewechselt haben."
[621] ÇETİN, 1993, p. 96: "Yer yer encüm dökilüp kopdı kıyamet sandum / Sayha-i kûs u nefîr oldı meğer nefhâ-i sûr"
[622] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 510.
[623] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 4: "[…] si fecero infiniti fuochi artificiali, con grandissimo strepito di tamburi trombe et simili instrumenti, e durò questa festa tutta la notte."

instance, İntizami refers to the *mehter* that announced the looting of bowls and the Sultan's ritual of scattering gold and silver as *kus-ı şahi* (the Sultan's *kös*) and *tabl u nakkare-i şehen-şahi* (the Shah of Shah's *tabl* and *nakkare*), in his festival book.[624] In different copies of his *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, it also appears as *debdebe-i kus-ı satveti tas-ı asuman* (splendour of irresistible power('s) drum).[625] Ferahi provides a similar designation: in his festival book, the *mehter* performance is described with the name of *tabl-ı kus-ı padişahiye* (the Sultan's *tabl* and *kös*) and *nakkare-i şahenşahiye* (Shah of Shah's *nakkare*).[626]

This nominal association with the Sultan is not unique to Ottoman sources. In the foreign accounts of this festival and others, the *mehter* ensemble is similarly referred to as the Sultan's ensemble. For example, Friedrich Seidel, who visited Istanbul as part of the Holy Roman Empire's embassy, described the *mehter* as "The Sultan's Court Music" (Des Sultans Hoff Musica).[627] Likewise, Lubenau uses the term "Keisers musica".[628]

This unity of the *mehter* with the Sultan was particularly evident during marches. During the processions, the ensemble both accompanied the Sultan and announce his arrival loudly, fulfilling functions of signaling, warning, and attracting attention. In this way, they gathered people around the Sultan's passageway, cleared the way, or followed him. Their accompaniment was more than merely festive. For instance, the *mehter* accompanied Sultan Mehmed IV to the mosque on the occasion of *Bayram* (fest),[629] and the military music accompanied the grand vizier leading the *veladet-i hümayun* (imperial births) procession on behalf of the Sultan.[630]

Alain Corbin argues that loud church bells in France served as sonic symbols of political authority.[631] Similarly, the *mehter* functioned as a symbol of the sovereign and played a central role in the sonic representation of power. The instruments' appearance, their materials, their numbers, the symbolic *tuğ* carried by the ensemble, their costumes, and their colors all signaled the projection of authority. As in European processions and entries, gold- or brass-colored instruments were the first elements to attract attention in encounters and in miniatures. The percussion instruments were often covered in red, a color also used in Janissary uniforms and

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[624] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 86v. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 192).
[625] İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 10v. (PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, p. 81); İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 67v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 175–176).
[626] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 351.
[627] SEIDEL, 1711, p. 5.
[628] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 55.
[629] GALLAND, 1881, p. 100.
[630] ÖNAL, 2015, p. 436.
[631] Alain Corbin analyzes bells as a symbol of sonic power in the French countryside, see: CORBIN, 1998.

frequently depicted in Ottoman representations of war. Indeed, these two colors, gold and red, were closely associated with power, rulership, sovereignty, and dominance.[632]

Fig. 40: Sultan Murad III's procession to the festival area with *mehter* musicians, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 7v.

In the 1582 circumcision festival, the Sultan's entrance into the festival area marked the beginning of the celebrations. The *mehter* played a crucial role in the grandeur of his sonorous arrival.[633] Dressed in lavish attire and sparkling jewels, the Sultan mounted his majestic steed, wielding swords and daggers. As he rode slowly and solemnly, following the ceremonial and

[632] ÇORUHLU, 2002, pp. 186, 193–195.
[633] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 164–165.

hierarchical order, the nobility welcomed him and escorted him on foot to his designated lodge.[634] The ritual visually reinforced power, authority, and social hierarchy: the Sultan was elevated on horseback, physically above the attendants, who were positioned on foot below him.[635]

For this Sultan's arrival at the festival stage, a parade was organized from the Imperial Palace to the Atmeydanı. This was a moment "out of the ordinary", as the Sultan appeared before his people only during feast times. At other times, even within the palace, he remained distant, rarely seen, and largely inaccessible. By appearing at this festival, he was demonstrating favor to his subjects. According to contemporary accounts, witnessing the "mighty, holy, generous, brave and magnificent" Sultan stirred excitement among the people rather than calmness. Beyond the *mehter*, the audience itself played a crucial role in shaping the vibrant atmosphere, not as passive observers but as active participants influencing the dynamics of the sound throughout the area. As the Sultan's procession moved along the streets, the crowed accompanying him shouted "Long live the Sultan!"

Christopher Small's concept of *musicking* highlights that "the act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies". According to Small, a relationship exists between the music, the performers, and the audience present in the performance space. He emphasizes that performers extend beyond the musicians and composers to include those who engage with unplanned or unorganized sounds.[636] In the context of the 1582 festival, spectators actively contributed through their applause, shouts, cheers, whispers, and other emotional responses. According to İntizami, the people's voices and the prayers they recited for the Sultan on every corner and in every street reached the heavens.[637] These shouting spectators amplified the Sultan's grand entrance with their own voices, reflecting their emotions and perceptions. Regardless of the cultural background or intent of the festival narratives, they consistently emphasize the dominance of the *mehter* in accompanying the Sultan. More precisely, the *mehter* "sounded the moments" in which it made itself visible and audible during what Margret Scharrer terms the "moving court".[638] This was a visual and auditory staging of the Sultan's

[634] ALİ, 1586, fols. 14v.–16v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 109–111; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 381–385).
[635] FELEK, 2019, p. 161; YELÇE, 2014, p. 82.
[636] SMALL, 1998, particularly pp. 1–18, 113.
[637] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 3r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 125).
[638] SCHARRER, 2024, p. 221.

power. Together with the audience's contributions, the *mehter*'s sonic presence was central to the overall soundscape of the Sultan's festival appearances.

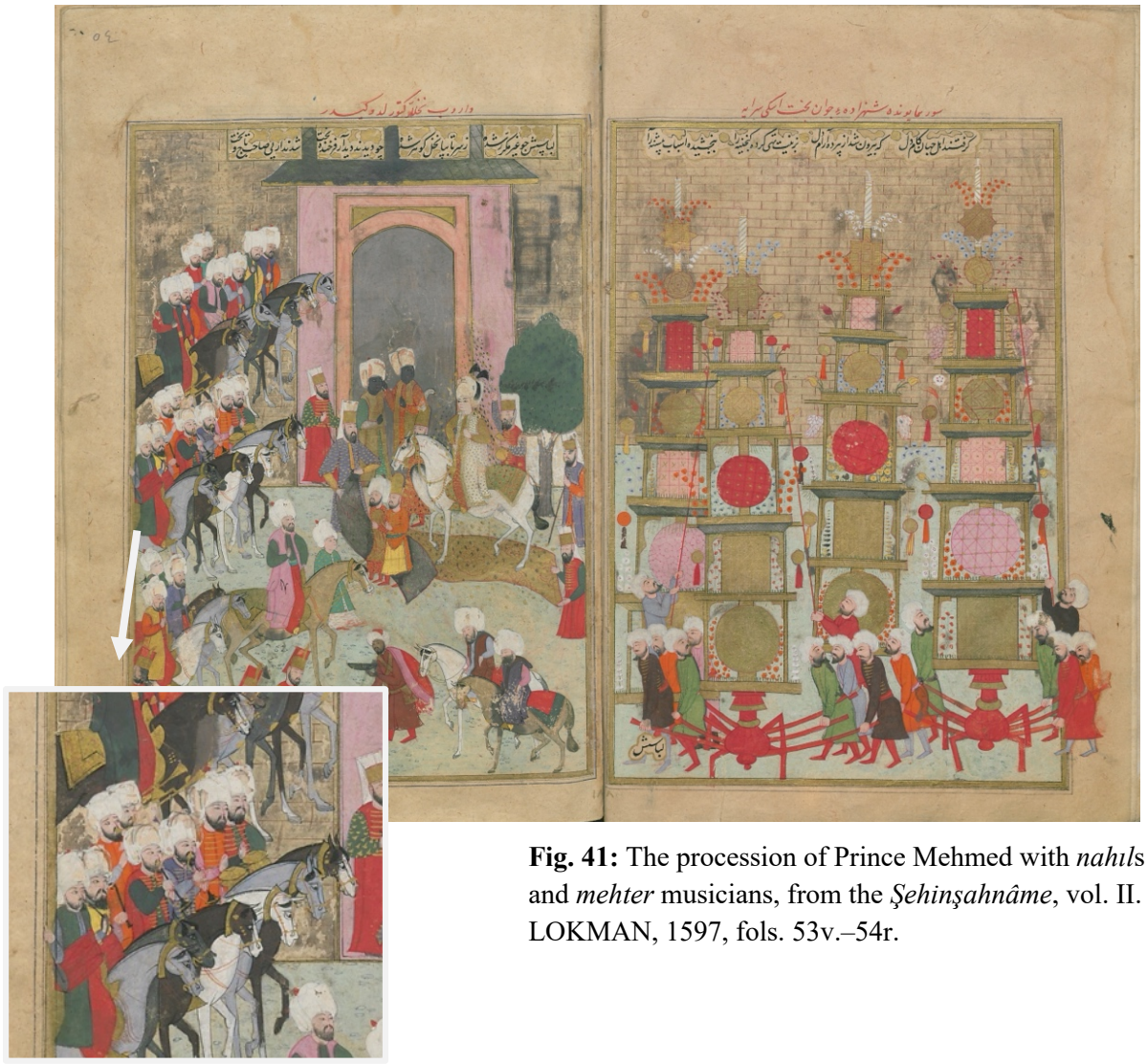

Fig. 41: The procession of Prince Mehmed with *nahıl*s and *mehter* musicians, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 53v.–54r.

Palerne, in his account, describes the Sultan's procession under the title "In what magnificence did the great Lord walk to the Hippodrome".[639] According to this account, Prince Mehmed was present next to the Sultan in this sonically moving scene. The Sultans, appearing in magnificence, were accompanied by *nahıl*s and the musicians who marched with them, "producing such a noise that the air and the earth resounded".[640] Similar to İntizami, Palerne emphasizes the euphoric atmosphere created by the Sultan's: "[…] then the people began to

[639] PALERNE, 1606, p. 453: "En Quelle magnificence marchoit le grand Seigneur allant a l'Hyppodrome".
[640] PALERNE, 1606, p. 454: "[…] à l'arrivée desquels commencerent incontinent à jouer les instruments avec tel bruit, que l'air & la terre en retentissoyent."

shout: *long live the Sultans*: auguring them every felicity, with infinite blessings and hand clapping as a sign of rejoicing."[641]

The narratives indicate that a procession similar to the Sultan's was also organized for the prince. Prince Mehmed made his way from the Old Palace to the Atmeydanı, dressed in clothing adorned with precious stones and carrying a jeweled dagger and sword at his waist. These visual and tactile details were as striking and eye-catching as those of the Sultan.[642] Four large *nahıl*s followed—or marched with—him during Mehmed's festive procession. The poet Nev'i wrote that the prince resembled a *nahıl*, "a work of art created by God".[643] As previously noted, *nahıl*s were used in Ottoman festivities as a symbol of fertility and abundance and were specially prepared for weddings and other celebrations. While the prince displayed himself to the people on horseback, the *mehter* accompanied him with resounding music. Mustafa Ali described the scene:

> The rumble of *kös* and the sound of *tabl* and *nefir* rose to the heavens, stirring the celestial dance of the cherubic host. With these melodies, with this thunderous. clamor, the shah of the world made his radian progress through Istanbul like a sun itself.[644]

According to Haunolth, when the prince arrived at the Atmeydanı after this procession, the *mehter* took their place in the festival grounds and played continuously throughout the day with their drums and trumpets.[645] The resulting sonic atmosphere, combining the joy of the people with the music of the *mehter*, was so intense that conversations became impossible.[646]

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Ceremonies and other propaganda tools were employed to ascribe sanctity to the Sultan. In the case of the 1582 imperial festival, a loud, numerous, symbolic, and historically rooted musical ensemble—and the "male" and "masculine" identity it projected—served to amplify the

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[641] PALERNE, 1606, p. 454: "[…] lors le peuple commença à crier: *vive les Sultans*: leur augurans tout félicité, avec bénédictions infinies, & applaudissemens de mains en signe de resjouyssance".
[642] URAN, 1942, pp. 24–25.
[643] NEV'İ, fol. 101r. (OLGUN, 1937, p. 35): "Gûyâ içinde hazret-i şehzâde bunların / Bir nahl idi ki yapmış onu sun'ı-girdigâr."
[644] ALİ, 1586, fol. 23r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 124 ; ARSLAN, 2008, p. 402): "Yetişdi velvele-i kös ü bâng-ı tabl u nefîr / Samâḫ-ı zümre-i kerrûbe eyledi te'sîr / Bu zemzemeyle bu gavgâyile o şâh-i cihân / Sitânbûl içre güneş gibi eyledi seyrân"
[645] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 470.
[646] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 50.

Sultan's authority. The connection between this ensemble and the empire is not unique to Murad III; as this chapter has shown, the tradition extends far back in Ottoman history. However, the symbolic representation in the 1582 festival was particularly layered. The event occurred at a time when the Sultan's abilities, especially as the empire's absolute ruler, were being strongly questioned, and he was even perceived as the source of a crisis. Against this backdrop, no moment of such a "magnificent" festival should be seen as coincidental; every detail served a larger purpose. On the contrary, they all served a bigger purpose. The *mehter*'s performance filled the atmosphere, stimulating specific senses and emotions. As the representative voice of the Sultan and the sound of power, the *mehter* was loud and commanding, "complex and discordant" to some, awe-inspiring to others.

Fig. 42: Arrival of Prince Mehmed to Atmeydanı, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 55v.–56r.

4.3. Perception of "Magnificence" through Sound: Mountain Model

Beyond the actual musical performances, the sonic atmosphere of the 1582 festival was filled with many other sounds. As highlighted in the previous summary of the festival's sonic aspects, some of these sounds were thoroughly planned, while others erupted spontaneously. Some were perceived as aesthetically pleasing, while others were not. At times, the festivals widely acknowledged "magnificence" was not solely due to the carefully orchestrated spectacle but also emerged from the sounds, or even the noise, it produced. To better understand this perception of "magnificence" and the notion of the "spectacular" in the festival, this chapter focuses on a selected performance that goes beyond purely musical elements. In this context, the Sultan, his power, and his representation, which I analyzed in the previous chapter, are no longer the central focus. Instead, attention shifts to the representation of power and the perception of magnificence in a broader perspective.[647]

The example I have chosen in this context is a model of a mountain and the performance associated with it. I selected this particular case study for two reasons. Firs, it was one of the most striking performances of the festival and appears, either briefly or in detail, in nearly all accounts. The analysis presented here draws on an extensive range of sources, including the detailed festival descriptions by Ferahi, İntizami, Mustafa Ali, and Haunolth, as well as briefer accounts from foreign observers. The mountain model can be considered part of the previously mentioned category of three-dimensional festival structures. From its preparation to the intricate details placed upon it, it is clear that the model was the product of a highly laborious work. Indeed, spectators seem to have perceived it similarly, depicting it in great detail in their accounts. Thus, both the mountain model's size and its components made it visually captivating. Moreover, the way it was presented and performed was not only visually rich but also auditorily engaging. Second, this example was chosen because the mountain model combines sensory elements of sight and sound, making it a dominant feature in the festival narratives.

The aim of the following analysis is to understand the effect created by a sonic-spatial spectacle on the sensorial stage of the Atmeydanı. The focus will be on what this spectacle represented, how it executed, and its role in the consciously planned, enacted, and later,

[647] Parts of the analysis in this sub-chapter were inspired by discussions in the aftermath of a presentation of mine at the "IV International Conference MEDyREN: Early Music, Architectural Spaces and New Technologies" conference in Morella, Spain, in 20–21 May 2022. An exploratory version of this work was thus also prepared for the conference proceedings of this academic event: DEMİRBAŞ, 2025.

narrated festival. This analysis, of course, must rely on the festival narratives. In this regard, it is important to recall Hermann Schmitz's emphasis[648], as summarized by Friedlind Riedel: "It is impossible to simply go (back) to the things themselves" because "things only come into being in light of something else, namely under historically, culturally and linguistically specific preconceptions".[649] I adopt Schmitz's phenomenological approach to "perception" and "sense-making" to account for these inherent limitations. As previously noted, the sources we use to understand an event from the depths of history, accessible to us only through narratives, leave its sounds and effects open to interpretation. This consideration is especially important for an analysis based on historical narratives. The following sections compare depictions of the mountain across different festival records, examining how a particular visual and aural performance was perceived and how the perception of "magnificence" was constructed through the power of transmission.

4.3.1. *Kapudan-ı Derya* Ali Pasha's Mountain

Although the date varies in some sources, it can be assumed that the mountain model performance was exhibited on approximately the 11th day of the festival celebrations. One indication of the date is a palace record dated January 24, 1583. According to this document, which records the daily program of the festival and details the artisan, the performance took place on the 11th day of the celebrations.[650] İntizami's book confirms this information, noting that the show occurred on the 11th day of the festival (*ruz-ı yazdehüm*), which fell on a Thursday. Based on İntizami's stated start date of June 6, this corresponds to June 16.[651] This information is consistent across different copies of the book.[652] Only the Süleymaniye copy, considered the author's first draft (*müellif hattı*), records the arrival of the mountain model at the festival site as the 12th day (*ruz-ı düvazdehüm*).[653] Mehmet Arslan cautions that this copy should be treated carefully for this very reason.[654] Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether this

[648] The founder of the "New Phenomenology," which focuses on embodied and affective perception.
[649] RIEDEL, 2019, p. 19.
[650] See: TSMA.e.1065/25.
[651] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 58r.–60r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 168–169): "Rûz-ı Yâzdehüm: Yine mâh-ı mezbûrun yigirmi dördünci güni ki rûz-o penc-şenbedür…"
[652] İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 24r. (PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 1995, pp. 101–102); İNTİZAMİ (A), fols. 42r.–v., 43r.; İNTİZAMİ (L), fols. 41v.–42r.
[653] İNTİZAMİ (S), 1584, fols. 44v., 45r.–v. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 542–543 and BOYRAZ, 1994, pp. 156–157).
[654] ARSLAN, 2009, p. 34.

source should be considered accurate, given that it was prepared immediately after the festival, or potentially error-prone due to the speed of its compilation.

According to *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, the day began, as on all other days, with the preparation of the square through cleaning. On the same day, the Eyyub Ensari Sufis,[655] conjurors (*Tasbazan*), spice sellers (*Bahar-füruşan*), fruit sellers (*Mive-füruşan*), and equestrians (*Cündiyan*) processed through the square and displayed their skills before the spectators. Before the evening performances, food was distributed, and subsequently, the grand spectacle of the mountain model took the stage at the Atmeydanı.

The information on the date and program of spectacles varies across Ottoman narratives and foreign sources. As previously explained, Mustafa Ali and Palerne preferred to organize their accounts thematically rather than chronologically, which limits their utility for establishing precise dates. Ferahi, however, attributes the mountain show to the 27th day of the celebrations. He writes that it took place after the performances of the *Kase-baz* (those demonstrating with bowls and plates on thin sticks), and the equestrians (*Fırka-i Cündiyan*), followed by the parade of mirror-makers/sellers (*Ayineciyan*), combmakers/sellers (*Şaneciyan*), and other artisans. According to Ferahi, food distribution occurred afterward, and the day concluded with fiery performances.[656] Among foreign sources, Haunolth provides the most detailed account, placing the mountain model presentation on the 15th day of the festival, which corresponds to June 15 based on his stated start date of June 1. An anonymous German report gives the 13th day June 14, while an anonymous Italian report cites the 13th or 14th day. Manger's narrative also suggests June 15.[657]

The mountain model's overall demonstration was organized by the esteemed *Kapudan-ı Derya* (Grand Admiral of the Navy), Ali Pasha. As such, it serves as an example for high-ranking officials taking responsibility for public demonstrations, particularly those associated with fireworks shows. Through these flamboyant and impressive spectacles, officials not only contributed to the festivities and showcased their presence before the Sultan but also displayed their own status and power.

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[655] The Eyyub Ensari Sufis were a local Sufi order associated with the shrine of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari in Istanbul.
[656] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, pp. 298–302.
[657] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 486; FUGGER, 1923, p. 65; LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 2; MANGER, 1583, pp. 27–28.

Fig. 43: Mountain model, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 58v.–59r.

Some of the larger models presented at the festival were brought to the site in pieces, as in the case of a castle model, and assembled before the audience as the show began.[658] The mountain model, however, was carried as a whole, according to contemporary sources. Its construction and transportation to the stage were carried out by Captain Pasha's captives. İntizami notes that thousands of galley slaves worked on the construction of this representative mountain. From his definition of *Kefere-i Forsa* (heathen galley-slaves), we learn that those who transported it were non-Muslims. All narratives agree that the creators—or at least the carriers—of the mountain were subordinates or captives of Captain Pasha, and our knowledge does not extend further. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider in more detail those responsible for creating a structure that drew so much attention at the festival. To do so, we must turn our focus to Ali Pasha, the patron of the spectacle.

Ali Pasha, also known as Kılıç Ali Pasha or Uluç Ali Pasha, was a prominent figure in the 16th century. Originally from southern Italy, he was captured by the Ottomans in 1536 by

[658] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fols. 287r.–289r. (ARSLAN, 2009, pp. 372–373).

Ali Ahmed, one of the Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha's corsair captains. He began his career as a privateer and later converted to Islam, a common practice among those involved in piracy. Over time, he rose from an Ottoman privateer to admiral, became governor of the Regency of Algiers, and was finally appointed as the *Kapudan-ı Derya*, or Grand Admiral of the Ottoman navy, after the battle of Lepanto in 1571.[659] He played a significant role in rebuilding the Ottoman fleet and was known for his military prowess. In 1570s, he attacked Mediterranean cities, particularly the coasts of Italy and Sicily, capturing many non-Muslims to work on ships. While specific details are scarce, it can be inferred that the individuals responsible for designing, assembling, and transporting the mountain model were likely "infidels", non-Muslims brought in as slaves during Captain Pasha's raids. Although their exact identities are unknown, this assumption is consistent with the historical context and the enslavement practices of the period.

The mountain model carried by the demonstrators was significant enough to be depicted in the festival miniatures. (Fig. 43) Iconographic analysis of these miniatures provides insights into both the identity of the demonstrators and the detailed figures of the mountain. In the unchanged composition of the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, Sultan Murad, his viziers, and his son Mehmed appear at the top of the left-hand page, while high-ranking officials and some diplomats are depicted on the right-hand page. At the bottom of the illustration stands a high, detailed, and green mountain. The mountain includes a flowing stream and hills adorned with various trees. It is inhabited by a variety of wild animals, including bears, a deer, and a fox. Additionally, a miniature mill is positioned on the left side of the mountain, and two shepherd figures are shown with their flock, accompanied by dogs.

Another visual depiction of this scene is found in the *Şehinşahnâme*, also by Nakkaş Osman and his team. (Fig. 44) Unlike the *Sûrnâme,* this depiction is confined to a single page, with the miniature situated on the right-hand side of the book, showing only the mountain model in front of the Sultan. Regarding the portrayal of the mountain model, there are no notable discrepancies between the two manuscripts in terms of the positioning and depiction of the figures, apart from torches placed in the square, which indicate that the event occurred at night. In general, the only significant difference between the miniatures of these two illuminated books is the number of performances represented in a single scene. In the

[659] In the beginning he was known by the nickname Uluç, which comes from the word *ılc* meaning "non-Arab heathen". After the battle of Lepanto, he was appointed to his new position due to his efforts on the battlefield and honored with a new nickname: "Kılıç" (sword). See: BOSTAN, 2022. Among Europeans, he is better known as Uchali.

Şehinşahnâme, multiple events are depicted on the same page, in contrast to the *Sûrnâme*, where each scene typically illustrates a parade of a single artisan group or a single performance.[660] This is understandable, as the *Şehinşahnâme* includes not only the festival but also other events of the period, meaning that both written and visual depictions were necessarily selective, and not every artisan group or spectacle was illustrated. For this reason, the inclusion of the mountain model is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, the "crowded" and "condensed" depiction practice of the *Şehinşahnâme* does not apply to the mountain model, which retains a prominent and detailed presentation.

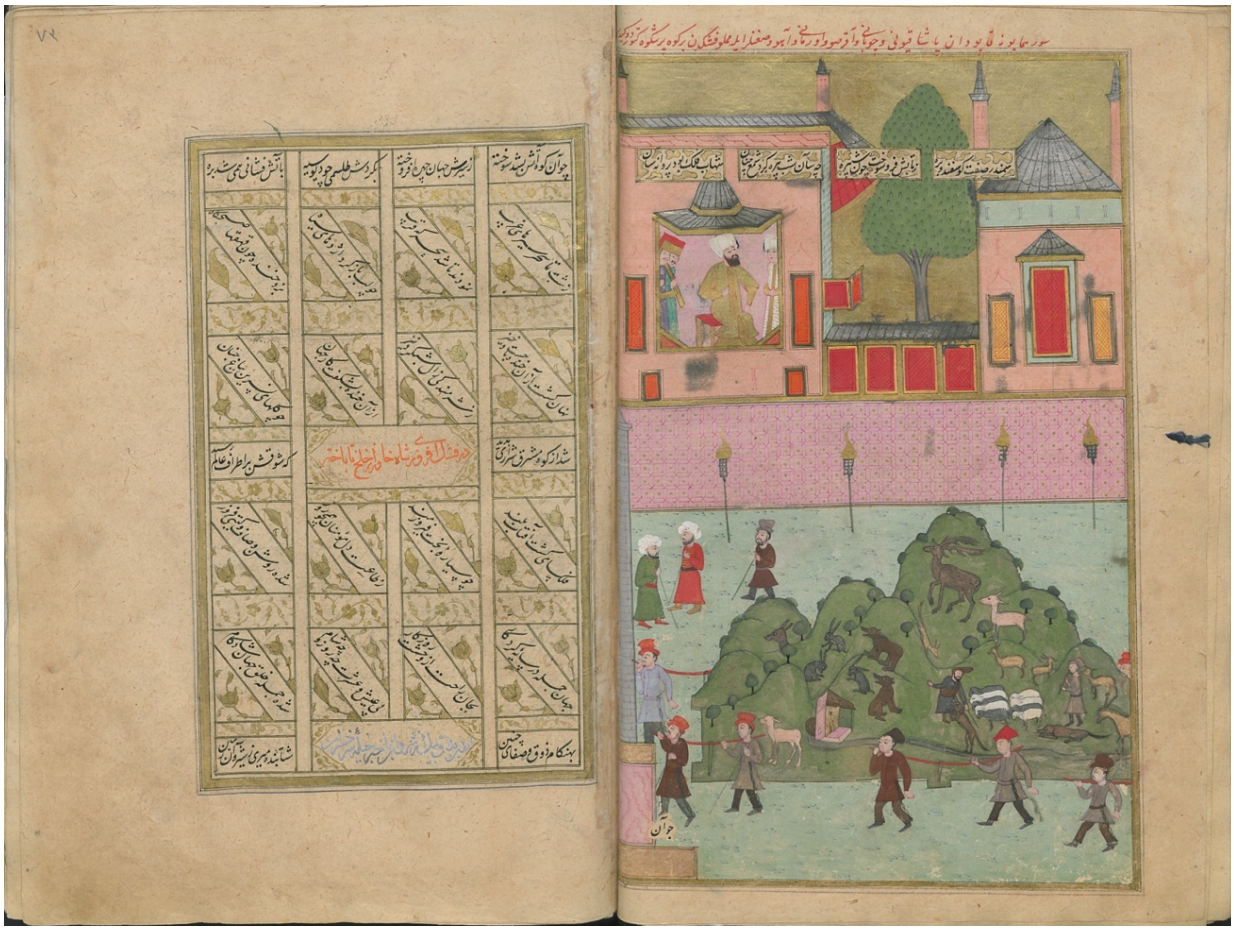

Fig. 44: Mountain model, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 72v.–73r.

Returning to the non-Muslim actors of the performance, both miniatures show that the attire of the figures carrying the mountain model, and those moving behind, besides, or in front of it, differs from other participants, such as the turbaned men standing on the far right in *Sûrnâme*-

[660] Kaya Şahin interprets this as follows: "[…] crowded scenes that read like a condensed version of several paintings" See: ŞAHİN, 2019, p. 61.

i Hümâyûn. These individuals are identifiable by their clothing and hats, which match the style worn by the "foreign" (non-Muslim) guests seated on the bottom floor of the three-storey lodges. Faroqhi describes these hats as "French style".[661] Indeed, throughout the 16th century, numerous sultanic edicts regulated the dress of non-Muslims. In one such decree issued by Murad III on May 8, 1580, the requirement for non-Muslims to wear specific hats—Jews in red and Christians in black, as stipulated in earlier orders—was reaffirmed.[662] This information aids in the identification of the actors in the performance.

4.3.2. Beyond the Battlefield: Performative and Sensorial Significance of Explosives

The use of artillery and explosive displays as a striking form of entertainment was a notable commonality between early modern European festivities and Ottoman court celebrations. Meticulously choreographed spectacles of fireworks, cannon fire, and pyrotechnics not only captivated audiences with their brilliance but also conveyed power, prestige, and dynastic authority. By integrating such awe-inspiring elements, rulers transformed celebrations into enduring cultural statements that shaped the festive traditions of the era and continue to influence perceptions of grandeur today.

In the 16th century, the technology for explosive displays in early modern celebrations was rudimentary by modern standards. Gunpowder, a key component, produced the spectacular effects of fireworks and cannon fire that enhanced the grandeur of these festivities.[663] Its production involved a complex process: the ingredients were ground into fine powders, mixed in precise ratios, moistened, and formed into pellets or grains, which were dried and stored until use.

Fireworks were an integral part of explosive shows. They were created by packing gunpowder into various containers, such as tubes or shells, and igniting them to produce colorful explosions and patterns in the sky. Cannon fire, by contrast, involved loading gunpowder and projectiles into cannons and igniting the powder to propel the projectiles with great force. Although the technology for producing gunpowder and employing it in these

[661] FAROQHI, 2014b, p. 190.
[662] REFİK, 1935, pp. 51–52.
[663] Although the use of gunpowder in the Ottoman Empire began much earlier, the 16th century was a peak period in the use of it, especially in armaments and military encounters. See: ÁGOSTON, 2005, pp. 15–60; CHASE, 2003, pp. 87–98.

displays was relatively basic, it required careful craftsmanship and experimentation to achieve the desired effects. The emphasis was primarily on generating loud noises, bright flashes, and simple visual effects rather than the intricate displays seen in modern pyrotechnics. Nevertheless, these early explosive shows laid the groundwork for the development of pyrotechnics as a form of entertainment and celebration.

The 1582 festival featured both a wide variety and a large number of fire and light shows,[664] which were the most exciting elements of the nightly events. One notable example was the colossal wooden structure designed to resemble a mountain, meticulously filled with an array of fireworks and explosives. This display combined pyrotechnic explosions, which were still regarded as "magic" or "wonder" at the time,[665] and was described as extraordinary and fascinating by contemporary observers. When the mountain model was brought to Atmeydanı and presented to the Sultan and other spectators, it produced a captivating audio-visual spectacle.

Ali Pasha's mountain model was visually depicted with pastoral elements. The human figures on it complemented this idyllic scene: one is shown herding sheep, another playing a *kaval* (a type of end-blown flute). In Karateke's words, it was "actually an elaborate three-dimensional stage serving as the backdrop for a small-scale pastoral scene".[666] However, it is difficult to determine the actual size of the mountain model from the miniatures, as these images were designed to fit on a single page. Records regarding the design and construction of the mountain model are scarce, leaving limited knowledge about the methods used to create the structure and its figures. The same is true for the materials employed in this gigantic construction. In this context, the realism of the figures on the mountain must also be questioned.

While the narratives strongly suggest that real individuals stationed on the mountain, it is unclear whether the figures representing animals, streams, trees, and other elements were authentic. İntizami reports that when the mountain was blown up, the "smart ones" on it escaped in time, while the rest were blown to pieces (as in the example of the beaks of falcons separating and flying through the air).[667] The reference to the "escape of the smart ones" implies that at least some of the information may be based on real events. Indeed, accounts exist of living animals being tied to firecrackers and blown up during these festivities. It is also wort noting the presence of small-scale mobile workplaces of guilds, carried or pulled by

[664] For more details, see Chapter 3, "Loud and Illuminating: Fire Shows".
[665] KARATEKE, 2015, p. 306.
[666] KARATEKE, 2015, p. 293.
[667] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 59v. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 169).

humans or animals, which were described as showing real people performing their tasks in or on top the models. Consequently, whether the figures on the mountain were real remains an open question.

Another hypothesis is that the figures in the mountain model could have been mechanical devices created using a special system. Derin Terzioğlu emphasizes that a prominent theme of imperial festivals was "the claim to world domination" and highlights the automata used in the celebrations. According to her, these "technological fantasies were an important part of the international language of miracle and power."[668] The technological and mechanical displays were often associated with European master craftsmen, indicating that professional competence was prioritized over place of origin, particularly for explosive, fiery and artillery displays. For example, the English artilleryman Edward Webbe, captured by the Ottomans and made a galley slave, served as a master gunner in the war against the Safavids for many years under Sinan Pasha's commend. He was appointed to create intricate fireworks for the 1582 festival.[669] Another enormous model, designed in the shape of Noah's Ark and measuring twenty-four yards high by eight yards wide, was also his work.[670] This points to the origins of Ali Pasha's captives and suggests that the mountain model may have been constructed by them as well. Accordingly, it is possible that a large model produced by this team incorporated mechanical constructions, and that the figures on it functioned as automata.

4.3.3. Discrepancies in Perception, Interpretation and Transmission

The demonstration of Captain Ali Pasha and his captives with the mountain model was at one side a familiar scene, resembling the figures and models of the 1582 festival that had been blown up, exploded, and burned, and yet, it was also unique, according to contemporary descriptions. As noted, it was an enormous wooden structure in the form of a mountain with trees, animals, and people, filled with gunpowder and fitted with firecrackers. Some accounts, supported by visual depictions, report that it was carried to the square on people's shoulders, while others claim it was pulled by figures such as snakes or dragons. What the narratives

[668] TERZİOĞLU, 1995, p. 87.
[669] WEBBE, 1590, para. 32.
[670] The possibility that the model of Noah's Ark mentioned here is in fact Ali Pasha's model of the mountain has been considered, primarily because it was designed by another galley-slave, but also because Webbe's narrative states that it was towed by two dragons. Tamás Kiss argues that Webbe's model of Noah's ark is probably not the same as the mountain model. See: KISS, 2016, p. 222. While I think this is at least as likely as the other possibilities, Webbe's account does not provide any more details.

consistently agree upon is that at a certain point the gunpowder and flares inside were ignited, causing the mountain to explode and producing an exceptionally loud sound.

The climax of the spectacle came when the explosives were ignited, blowing up the mountain. Its sensory impact, combining sight and sound, is highlighted in nearly all the observers' accounts. Yet their narratives diverge considerably regarding both the success, and by extension, the grandeur of the display and its musical components. A key feature of this dichotomy lies in the distinction between Ottoman and foreign writers. Ottoman authors described the mountain's explosion as a grand and satisfying conclusion to the spectacle, whereas foreign observers characterized it as a disappointment that failed to meet expectations. Many foreign accounts even asserted that other fire and light shows during the festival were far more impressive than the mountain's destruction.

To better understand the contrasting perspectives of Ottomans and foreign observers, the following analysis aims to examine the reasons and motivations behind these divergent narratives, as well as the multidimensional framework underlying this case.

Ottoman Testimonies

Bostanzade Yahya Efendi's short historical account, *Tuhfetü'l-ahbâb* (*Târîh-i Sâf*), is among the Ottoman sources that mention the mountain model only briefly. In his book on caliphs and sultans as rulers in Islamic countries between the 7th and 17th centuries, he summarized the entire 1582 festival in a single short paragraph. He described the Sultan's money distribution, the guilds' procession, and the richness of the festival's remarkable shows in just a few sentences, finally noting the gigantic models and the mountain. Considering the brevity of his account, it is striking how much attention he devoted to the latter. Indeed, the mountain model is the most thoroughly described of all:

> Scenes of excitement and wonder unfolded in the Atmeydanı. The entire crowd watched in admiration, where love, joy, and tears intertwined. Around the mountain were adorned gazelles, partridges, and deer, forming a spectacle of grace and vitality. This elegance and refinement were works of deliberate craftsmanship. They adorned the square with splendor. Everything visible seemed an artifice; yet in truth it was a mountain. With subtle workmanship they produced forms as strange as marvels. The artisans produced forms so artful and extraordinary that each was remarkable enough to constitute a book on its own.

> These extraordinary works were witnessed and experienced in person, appearing to the eye like poetry turned into enchantment.[671]

Another source highlights the surreal nature of the mountain model, which Bostanzade Yahya regarded as one of the "unimaginable" spectacles. In Mustafa Ali's *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der-Mecâlis-i Sûr,* the mountain model appears in the fifth chapter, alongside animal shows and other gigantic models, and is described in detail across nearly four pages.[672] This account adds a further layer to the glorifying depictions of the mountain presented in the festival: Ali likened the model to Mount Kaf (*kuh-ı Kaf* or *Kaf Dağı*), a mythical mountain symbolizing vastness and extraordinary greatness, around which dragons are said to circumambulate.[673]

This majestic mountain appears in multiple cultural traditions and is often associated with enchantment, mystery, and spiritual significance. In Persian mythology, Mount Kaf is depicted as a lofty mountain that encircles the world and supports the heavens. It is believed to be the dwelling place of the *simurg,* or *anka,* a benevolent, bird-like creature with immense wisdom and healing powers. The *simurg* is said to possess the knowledge of all ages and to offer guidance to those who seek enlightenment. In Turkish folklore, Mount Kaf is a place of wonder and adventure, frequently portrayed as a magical mountain inhabited by supernatural beings. Legends recount hidden treasures, elusive creatures, and mystical phenomena encountered by those daring enough to venture into its depths. Many of these narratives center on heroes who undertake perilous quests to reach the summit, seeking to unlock its secrets or fulfill their deepest desires. Metaphorically, Mount Kaf represents faces in personal journeys and the transformative power of overcoming obstacles.

It is certain that Ottoman festival narratives are full of similes and exaggerations, reflecting the characteristic language, literary style, and motivations of their authors. Nevertheless, these choices should not be dismissed, as the metaphors selected were deliberate rather than coincidental. The analogy of the mountain in Captain Pasha's demonstration to this magical and mythological mountain served to convey its fascination and grandeur. Mustafa Ali

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[671] BOSTANZADE, 1870, p. 85: "Bina u çîden, ber iki delalet idüb at meydanına şûr u zâr, ve halk-ı âlem âşık itdi, berkûn dehi ağyar u sûz u zâr, rîhe-i gazal u kuluk be-per-refna u âhû gınem idüb be-per-raft. Bu âş u letâfât masnuʿ sanʿat itdük, meydânı kütürdiler, her görünen masnuʿ idüb, kendü tahayyül idik, maʿyûb hakikat tağ, sanayi bil-benâne misâl-i aʿrâb eşkâl peyda itdiler ki, müstakil kitaba meşgul u aynen bu muhaṣṣar der tecrübe raʾ olundı, ve binezdek hicâde amel kadrı ki şiʿr-i sihr enzâr olub."
[672] ALİ, 1586, fols. 65v.–67r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 205–208; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 515–518).
[673] ALİ, 1586, fol. 66v.: "Sûr-ı şâha geldi gûyâ kûh-ı Kâf / Kıldı etrâfını ejderler tavâf."

further emphasizes the spectacle, noting that the mountain was brought to the scene by two terrifying dragons, with sparks emanating of their mouths.[674]

Ferahi briefly mentions the mountain show following the equestrian performance in the festival program, providing an important detail. According to his account, the mountain-like structure, on which grass and straw were placed and lambs and sheep grazed, was made by Captain Ali Pasha's galley-slaves. When they brought it to the festival scene, they circled around with it, before returning to "their place".[675] From his description, it can be inferred that the mountain was set aside after being presented to the audience, and that the demonstration of setting it on fire likely occurred later, possibly during the night. However, while Ferahi does mention other fireworks displays that took place at the end of the day, he provides no details regarding the explosion or burning of this mountain model.

As previously noted, Nakkaş Osman miniaturized the arrival of the mountain model at Atmeydanı and its display before the Sultan, guests, and the public. It is important to remember that this image comes from the expanded version of the book *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, published several years after the festival. İntizami's portrayal is so detailed that Osman's artwork appears to have been created to align the pastoral elements of the narrative. The model was filled with gunpowder and firecrackers and adorned with numerous trees, various figures, stone caves, streams for animals, and pastures for sheep and lambs. The narrative conveys even more than the miniature depicts: nesting birds, wild animals in their caves, ants and snakes in their holes, and references to lions and falcons. It also describes individuals engaged in activities such as rabbit hunting with hounds, while others wander the hills.

Osman's miniature depicts two human figures on the mountain: one grazing sheep and the other playing an instrument, the *kaval*. This depiction represents "a silent sound that needs the aural imagination of the onlooker".[676] The sound suggested in the painting can be inferred to be a folk melody, based on the type of music associated with the instrument. This aligns closely with İntizami's narrative of the soundscape accompanying the mountain demonstration: "[…] some shepherds herd [their] sheep with staff and some farmers plow with [their] oxen. Some play the *kaval* and make the mountain echo, and some entertain their hearts

[674] ALİ, 1586, fol. 66v.: "Hem götürmüştü ânı iki tınnin / Yani korkunç iki ören sehmgin / Nice yüklenmişse arzı gâv-ı hâk / Anı yüklenmişdi iki hevlnâk."
[675] ÖZDEMİR, 2016, p. 300: "Bu üslûb üzre meydan-ı sûr-ı hümâyûn[ı] bir nice kerre devr itdiler ve yine menzillerine gitdiler."
[676] CURRIE, 2014, p. 428.

with folk songs from Karacaoğlan."[677] It is useful here to elaborate on the music that İntizami refers as a "Karacaoğlan türküsü". The term *türkü* generally denotes Turkish vocal music in the style of anonymous folk literature, or *aşık* literature. Such songs are mostly anonymous and evolved over time through collective contributions.[678] Karacaoğlan, the figure mentioned by İntizami as the source of the folk song played by the shepherd, is one of the most significant figures in Turkish folk (*aşık*) literature.[679] These details about the melody, described as "echoing the mountain", emphasize the musical and sonic dimensions of the show.

İntizami's narrative continues with the explosion, which constitutes the main part and the finale of the show: "The mountain has blown up, shone like a lover's breast, and the earth and the sky were filled with a might, terrifying sound."[680] The audience was reportedly very impressed by this majestic atmosphere and astonishing spectacle. The expanded Topkapı edition of the festival book amplifies this praise, adding the following aphorism: "[…] everyone witnessed "the zeal of the determined, skillful, valiant people moves mountains."[681]

Mustafa Ali describes the soundscape of the mountain with similar fascination. According to his account, some of the wild animals on the mountain, which he emphasizes were real, alive, and not merely symbolic or imaginary, sat quietly, while others filled the mountain with their roars.[682] When the show reached the moment of lighting the flares, the spectacle was described as "unprecedented, strange and surprising".[683] Ali concludes his narrative by noting that the fire of the mountain produced sounds that "strike one's face", emitted bright lights, and continued to burn from night until morning.[684]

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[677] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 58r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 169): "[…] çobanlarun kimi âsâ ile koyun güder ve dihkânun kimi öküzleriyle çift sürer. Kimi kaval çalup ol tagı yankılandurur ve kimi Karacaoglan türkisi ile gönlün eglendürür."

[678] ŞENEL, 2012.

[679] Although his birth and death dates are unknown, it is estimated that he lived somewhere between the late 15th and early 18th centuries. See: ALBAYRAK, 2001.

[680] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 59r.: "[…] tag sîne-i uşşâk gibi fürûzân olup, yer ve gök sâdâ-yı mehîble toldu.". This can be found in all other copies: İNTİZAMİ (V), fol. 24r.; İNTİZAMİ (S), 1584, fol. 45r.; İNTİZAMİ (A), fol. 42v.; İNTİZAMİ (L), fols. 41v.–42r.

[681] İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 59v.: "Himmetü'l-ricâl takla'u'l-cibâl." This Arabic aphorism only occurs in this manuscript.

[682] ALİ, 1586, fol. 66v.: "Bâ-husûs üstünde envâ-ı vuhûş / Kimi garrân u demân kimi hamûş / […] Sanma bunlar peyker ü timsâldir / Cümlesi zi-rûh u gerçek hâldir."

[683] ALİ, 1586, fol. 67r.: "Değdi nevbet ateşe yandı fişek / Ehl-i sura hasıl oldu turfe şek"

[684] ALİ, 1586, fol. 67r.: "Yandı ol kûh-ı giran saçdı şerâr / Sol tecelliden tutuşmuş kûh-var / Tâb-ı dîdârına şâhun toymadı / Ateş-i şevk-i cemâle toymadı."

Foreign Testimonies

As noted in the previous section, not every source provides the same level of detail, and this is also true of foreign accounts of the festival. For example, although Palerne described the celebratory elements of the festival thematically, he does not provide any explanation of the mountain model. From his account, it can be inferred that objects were set on fire after the dinner, and that dragons dragged some of these objects, emitting fire from their mouths. However, there is no specific mention of a mountain model among the objects pulled by the dragons:

> After supper, the same entertainments began again as those held during the day, such as rope-dancers and jugglers. Every evening, several castles were brought out to be set on fire, some drawn by satyrs, others by dragons spouting fire from their mouths, all of varied design and well equipped with artillery, rockets, other kinds of fireworks.[685]

Reinhard Lubenau, who was in Istanbul between 1587 and 1589, reported on the festivities based on what he had heard and read. He briefly mentions the mountain model without providing detailed description. Nevertheless, his account, which includes the great mountain, offers slightly more information about what the dragons were doing in relation to it, or, in his words, "stand in front of" it: "[…] and every time the lights and torches were lit, at first small rockets were fired for a time, and then fireworks followed, from towers, castles, galleys, and great mountains, with dragons positioned before them […]"[686]

Continuing to assemble the different pieces for this analysis, another short but significant narrative can be offered. It is an account that is particularly important for understanding how the mountain model came to occupy a place in foreign narratives. According to this anonymous German source, on the thirteenth day of the festival after the food distribution of food to the people, the mountain model was brought onto the stage: "After the people had been fed, an artificial mountain constructed by the slaves of *Kapudan* Pasha, containing fireworks within it, was ignited. It failed."[687] This information, which is not mentioned in the narratives of İntizami,

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[685] PALERNE, 1606, pp. 484–485: "Là commençoit on l'apres souper, quasi les mesmes choses qui se faisoiyent le iour, comme les dánseurs de corde, & basteleurs, & tous les soirs on amenoit quelques chasteaux que l'on faisoit brusler, aucuns trainez par des satyres, & autres par des dragons iettans le feu par la gueule, & trous diuersifiez: bien munis d'artillerie, de fusees, & autres sortes de feux artificiels."

[686] LUBENAU, 1995, p. 52: "[...] auch allezeit, als man die Lichte und Fackeln angezundet, erstlich eine Weil Racketlein geworfen, alsdan schon Feurwergk, als von Thurmen, Schlossern, Galleen und grosen Bergen, da Drachen davor gestanden [...]"

[687] FUGGER, 1923, p. 65: "Nach der Ausspeisung des Volkes wurde ein von den Sclaven des Capudan Paschas errichteter künstlicher Berg, der Feuerwerk in sich barg, entzündet. Dies Misslang."

Ferahi, Bostanzade Yahya, or Mustafa Ali presented in the previous chapter, is brief but clear: "Dies misslang." The author even contrasts the failed mountain model with other figures set on fire, noting that the latter provided a beautiful spectacle in comparison.[688]

This is where the dichotomy in the narratives of the show becomes apparent. None of the sources classified as Ottoman narratives mention the "failed" presentation of the mountain model. On the contrary, they describe it as mighty, impressive, strange, and surprising, with no indication that these descriptions were intended negatively.

The previously mentioned anonymous foreign source reports a failure but does not provide details about what occurred. More specific information can be found in another anonymous account from Istanbul, written in Italian during the festivities:

> […] at night were many fireworks, among which a 'mountain' was burnt, which the High Admiral (*capitanio del mare*) had had made by the slaves. This was as high as a pike and more, and was brought uncovered into a corner of the square, and there covered up, and by degrees furnished with all the fireworks that went with it, which were in very great quantity; but they had not much success, compared with what was expected of them, because having been drawn into the middle of the square by slaves, who made believe it was drawn by two serpents, fire was put to it at the second hour of the night which set it all alight at once, and all the fireworks went off so furiously with no interval that they filled the square and the whole air with fire and it burnt up at once.[689]

This account does not convey a sense of a successful or magnificent performance, either in auditory or visual terms. At the center of the narrative is the view that the mountain model fell short of expectations and was not particularly successful. The reporter attributes these high expectations to the fact that the structure was pulled into the center of the square by two snakes and appears to have found the rapid flashing of fireworks insufficient. Moreover, as in the *Fugger News* report, the author was more impressed by other fire displays: "They succeeded better."[690]

A similar statement is found in the account published by Manger. When night fell, the mountain model was set on fire by two dragons, but as reported in earlier accounts, the

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[688] FUGGER, 1923, pp. 65–66.
[689] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 2: "[…] ma la notte si ficero molti fuochi tra quali fu abbrugiata una montagna fatta fare dal Cap(itan)o del mare alli schiavi; questa era alta una picha et più, portata nuda in un canto della piazza, et in detto loco coperta, et fornita pianpiano di tutti li fuochi che gl'andavano, i quali furon veram(en)te in grandis(si)ma quantità, ma ficero pocha riuscita, rispetto all'expettatione che si haveva di essa, percio che essendo condotta in mezzo la piazza da schiavi, che finsero esser tirata da dui serpi, se gli diede il fuoco à due hore di notte, che in un subito l'accese tutta, et li fuochi tutti senza niuno intervallo di tempo si sparsero con tanta furia, che empi la piazza et l'aria tutta di fuoco, et si consumò subito." For the English translation: BUTLER, 1909, p. 178.
[690] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 2: "[…] et si abbrugiorno delli altri castelli che riuscirono meglio."

spectacle satisfied no one: "From the dragon's mouth, the mountain was lit. It caught fire and burned down very quickly, but was not as entertaining as one might have expected from its appearance. After this, three towers were set on fire, which were much more pleasing to watch than the mountain."[691]

The accounts examined so far provide no explanation for why the spectacle centered on the mountain failed, or why there was no spectacular and impressive explosion as described in Ottoman sources. Instead, they leave the reader with unanswered questions: Was this supposed failure due to incompetence, or was there another reason? Based on these foreign narratives, the climax of the performances involving the mountain model does not sound particularly grandiose, yet it remains difficult to assess its reality without considering the reasons behind this outcome.

In this context, a final foreign narrative, written by Haunolth, who provides the most detailed account of the mountain model and the overall festivities among all foreign sources, may offer some clarification. Haunolth reports that on the evening of June 15, following the dinner and after performances by some of the artisan groups were held, Ali Pasha's mountain was revealed:

> The general commander of the army had a high mountain made of fireworks, which had stood in the square at a wall for several days before and had therefore become very decayed and damaged by the rain. He had it drawn forth, which appeared as though two dragons that were pulling it along […]
>
> […] After this, the said mountain was set on fire by the two dragons that spewed fire upon it. But since it, […], had long been standing in the rain and storm, it caught fire all over and in an instant went up in smoke. Everyone was displeased at this, for each had expected to see strange and amusing spectacle befitting the mountain's mighty outward appearance.[692]

Clearly, both Haunolth and the anonymous account published by Manger express similar dissatisfaction, but Haunolth provides additional details that shed light on the reasons for the

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[691] MANGER, 1538, pp. 27–28: "Auss der Dracken mundt ist der Berg angezindt worden / der ist gar geschwind aber nicht so lustig als man etwa verhofft und das ansehen gewest / angangen vnd verbrunnen. Nach disem hat man 3. Thurn anzindt / die sein vil lustiger zusehen gewest dann der Berg."

[692] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 486: "Der General Obrister vber die Armata hat einen von Feuwerwerck gemachten hohen Berg / so etliche tag zuvor auffn Platz an einer Maur gestanden / vnd derent-halben vom Regen sehr faul und verderbt worden / hervmb führen lassen / welches geschienen / als wann ihne [ihre] zween Drachen fortziehen […] Nach diesem hat man gedachten Berg / durch die zween Drachen / so Feuwer darauff aussgespieben / angezündet / weil er aber / wie obgemeldt / lang im Regen vnnd Ongewitter gestanden / ist er als bald vber vnnd vber brennend worden / vnnd in einem huy verraucht / darob menniglich vbel zu frieden gewesen / dieweil ein jeder seltzame vnnd lustige Sachen dem eusserlichen gewaltigen Ansehen nach zu sehen verhofft hat."

failure. According to him, the mountain model was brought to the Atmeydanı long before the day of the show. Perhaps due to the difficulty of transporting it, or to avoid moving it amid the chaos of other performances, it was prepared in advance. However, it appears that the possibility of rain was not taken into account. This organizational oversight seems to have caused the show to fail and prevented it from achieving the expected impact. Ultimately, although the mountain caught fire several times, it mostly smoked and disappointed onlookers who had anticipated a more spectacular display.

The differences between Ottoman and foreign accounts of the festival were not limited to the explosion of the mountain model filled with firecrackers. In both Haunolth's narrative and Manger's account, the presentation of the musical aspects of the spectacle is portrayed quite different. These descriptions of the sonic atmosphere diverge significantly from the Ottoman narratives. While İntizami and Mustafa Ali emphasize the presence of animals on the mountain, particularly wild ones, the natural scenery, and the sounds of shepherds playing the *kaval*, singing folk songs, and herding sheep, Haunolth's focus is more on the performance and its participants, resembling a Western-style celebration:

> […] even higher stood a boy dressed in red, playing a string instrument, and beside him another little boy with a violin. And the summit, under the mentioned spheres, [was] a naked man with a bow. All around, everything was pleasantly green with hedges and shrubs, among which living lambs[693] and other small animals could be seen. On a rock stood two small towers or a little castle. In front, several wild men were walking with clubs. As soon as this mountain came forward into the square before the Sultan, it fired a salute. Soon after, eight [people] who were dressed in a French [style], four in red and four in blue, leapt out of the mountain with spears, [and] performed beautiful *Mattazina* and *Moresqua* dances.[694]

The anonymous account published by Manger provides a comparable description of the mountain adorned with fireworks:

> […] at the very top stood Cupid in white, and a little below a boy in red. At the bottom, two other boys were also dressed in red. Around the mountain were several live and painted [artificial] sheep and other small animals, and on a rock two small towers had been set up,

[693] İntizami and Mustafa Ali also stated that these animals were alive.
[694] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 486: "[…] besser oben ein Knabe / in roht gekleydet / mit einem Seitenspiel / bey ihm ein ander klein Büblin mit einer Geigen / vnd am Gipffel oder Spitz vnder den obgemelten Kugeln ein nacketer Mann mit einem Bogen / hin vnnd wider aber alles hübsch grün mit Hecken und Stauden / darinn lebendige Lämblin / vnd andere sort der Thier mehr / gesehen / vnnd einem Felsen / zween Thürn oder Castell / vorher sind etliche wilde Mann mit Prügeln gangen / so bald aber dieser Berg etwas herfür auffn Platz vnd für den Sultanum kommen / hat er mit einem Schuss salutiert / darauff bald ihr acht / vier in roht / vnnd vier in blauw auff Frantzösisch gekleydet / mit Spiessen auss dem Berg gesprungen / schöne Mattazina vnd Moresqua getantzt."

> delightful to behold. The mountain was left standing where the Sultan had been seated, and soon his men, four in red, and the other four in blue [clothes], came out and performed several Moresian and Matacinian dances.[695]

Both accounts depict eight dancers, dressed in red and blue attire, leaping from the mountain when it was presented before the Sultan. The dances they performed share the same names in both narratives, with the only notable difference being that the figure described by Haunolth as a "naked man with a bow" is explicitly called Cupido in the other account. The powerful explosive sounds emphasized by İntizami or Mustafa Ali are absent in these foreign descriptions. Haunolth instead mentions the sound of a cannon fire saluting the Sultan. Additionally, those responsible for producing sounds from the mountain included musicians playing a string instrument and a violin, while the eight dancers, dressed in French-style clothing, appear to have performed dances of Western character, accompanied by these musicians.

Moresca is a dance with a complex history, generally characterized by exotic, strange, foreign, and grotesque elements.[696] Three different versions have been identified, the oldest of which is believed to be the mock-battle variation. This version is sometimes combined with the carnivalesque *Matachines* dance, as appears to have been the case in this festival.[697] An Ottoman counterpart to this performance also exists: a battle reenactment using wooden swords, known as *Matrak* or *Matrak oyunu*. In fact, *matrak* is mentioned both in this festival and in accounts of other festivals. It is possible that Haunolth and Manger witnessed a *matrak* performance and described it through the lens of a dance familiar from their own culture. At the same time, the clothing of the performers and the inclusion of the Cupido figure underscore the "European" character of the show.[698]

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[695] MANGER, 1583, p. 27: "[…] zu höchst darauff ist Cupido in weiß und ein wenig onderhalb ein Knab in rot / zu underst aber 2. Knaben auch in rot bekleydt gestanden / und den Berg herumb sein etlich lebendig und gemahlte Schaf / und andere Thierlein / und sonst auff einen Felsen 2. Thürnle lustig zusehen zugericht gewest / den Berg hat man wa der Sultan sein sich gehabt / stehn lassen / und alßbald seins: Männer 4. in rot / und die andern 4 in blaw geklaydt herauß kommen / die haben etliche Moreschisch und Matacinisch tanzen gehalten."
[696] For a reference to *Moresca*, which became widespread as an "exotic" dance at European courts, see: KELBER, 2021. I am grateful to Moritz Kelber for sharing this work with me during its writing phase.
[697] LOCKE, 2015, pp. 113–136.
[698] STOUT, 1966, p. 212: "The spectacle seems to have been of western European rather than purely Ottoman origin." One of the comparisons Stout makes between Western and Ottoman practices in his analysis of the 1582 festival concerns this model of a mountain. He notes the similarity of the structure to representations of the Tower of Babel and suggests that it may be related to biblical stories. See: STOUT, 1966, pp. 241–245. However, as Faroqhi points out, it is difficult to confirm with certainty due to the lack of important data. See: FAROQHI, 2014b, p. 190. For another association of the show with western mythological figures see: KISS, 2015, p. 23.

In a detailed and holistic analysis of another Ottoman court festival held in 1720, Sinem Erdoğan İşkorkutan notes the existence of similar practices. She infers that communicating with an international audience, particularly a European one, was part of the political agenda of the Ottoman court and cites the example of "Frankish style music" performed during the festival.[699] Considering that the mountain model in 1582 was also constructed by non-Muslims, and probably foreign prisoners, it is possible that the show incorporated the cultural and musical elements they brought with them. Regardless, it is striking to find two such contrasting versions of the musical narrative, almost as if two completely different performances occurred. A detailed examination of the numerous accounts of the festivities provides no evidence for more than one mountain-shaped model armed with firecrackers. Thus, it is clear that there was only one example, prepared, constructed and ultimately blown up by Ali Pasha and his captives.

Another approach to understanding this dichotomy is Stout's suggestion that there may have been two different musical performances on opposite sides of the mountain. It is possible that the prepared mountain model was even larger than depicted in the miniatures and described in the texts. Indeed, due to its size and weight, it would have needed to be brought to the festival square by human or animal power, much like other three-dimensional models. Thus, the idea of two separate performances is not entirely implausible, though it is also not fully coherent. As Jonathan Stern notes, "hearing requires positionality", and depending on the listener's location, a space can sound completely different.[700] However, I consider it unlikely that spectators' auditory experience of the mountain model can be understood as "deep listening".[701] As I have already noted, the festive environment, with its crowds and chaotic activity, was a complex intertwining of sounds and senses, forming the overall sonic atmosphere. Therefore, although the physical location of onlookers at Atmeydanı may have influenced what they heard and saw, their experience of the performance was shaped by far more than just these factors.

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[699] ERDOĞAN İŞKORKUTAN, 2020, p. 17.
[700] STERNE, 2012, p. 4.
[701] Composer Pauline Oliveros uses the term "deep listening" to describe a full, attentive, reflexive sonic awareness that alternates between trying to hear everything at once and focusing with deep attention on a single sound or a series of sounds. See: OLIVEROS, 2005.

Two factors shape my view of the incongruities in *soundmarks*[702] within these narratives: perception and preference linked to motivation. In this analysis, I argue that the very different ways in which performance of mountain model was recorded, often along two extremes, should be examined with careful attention to the role of auditory cultures.[703] Indeed, while the impressions quoted in this chapter reflect collective memories and associations formed over several weeks of shared festival celebrations, as Rhoads Murphey emphasizes,[704] each observer must also be considered within the context of differences in culture, language and even faith or religion. As Howes points out, the way individuals experience and interpret the world around them is shaped by the cultural background in which they live—or from which they come—and so is the way their observations are transmitted.[705] In essence, cultural sonic sensitivity is formed against this background and plays an active role in the perception, interpretation, and transmission of experiences by earwitnesses.[706]

In this context, it is useful to recall Procházka-Eisl's observation regarding a tendency sometimes found in historical narratives: the omission of what the audience does not understand or cannot perceive.[707] Procházka-Eisl interprets Haunolth's exclusion of certain religious groups when listing the artisan groups at the festival as a failure to mention what he, as a Christian, could not understand and make sense of. The same idea can be considered in reverse: İntizami and Mustafa Ali may not have understood what they observed, may not have been able to interpret it within their existing musical and cultural frameworks, and therefore may have chosen not to recount it. This aligns with Schmitz's view that all perception is historically and culturally mediated, filtered through particular frameworks.[708]

It is clear from İntizami and Mustafa Ali's narratives, as well as Osman's illustration, that they sought to emphasize the visual diversity and richness of Captain Ali Pasha's mountain model. Yet, for reasons that remain open to interpretation, details of the performance, such as the eruption of the mountain, its sound, and the musicians' contributions, are described differently than in foreign observers' accounts. Given their closeness to palace officials, it is quite possible that they possessed more detailed information about the so-called "failed" demonstration. In this context, the motivations behind authors' writings, to whom and why

[702] I prefer to use Schafer's term since there are very clear cultural-musical differences here. See: SCHAFER, 1994, pp. 239–240, 274.
[703] EISENLOHR, 2018b, p. 38.
[704] MURPHEY, 2008, p. 205.
[705] HOWES, 2005.
[706] RODAWAY, 1994.
[707] PROCHÁZKA-EISL, 2005, p. 44.
[708] Schmitz, 2005 cited in RIEDEL, 2019, p. 20.

they presented their accounts, shaped the content and tone of their narratives, as well as their future projections. The sources examined in this section share similar purposes within the context of the event: the celebrations held for the son of an imperial ruler. These accounts were either directed toward an employer or patron, or intended to glorify and please the ruler. Consequently, their approaches vary considerably within the political framework, as evidenced by the examples analyzed and their contrasting nature. The conditions under which festival books were prepared have been discussed previously,[709] and these factors help explain why these sources do not mention the performance being underwhelming or disappointing. İntizami, in particular, compiled his work to avoid criticism entirely, as this example clearly demonstrates.

Therefore, I argue that the choice of narrative, and the accompanying illustration, was deliberate, and that the depiction of "magnificence" in Ottoman sources reflects an intention to align the account with the overall purpose of staging grand festivities. The sounds of the festival—or rather, the perception, interpretation, and transmission—echo not only factual events but also elements of propaganda. İntizami, in particular, chose to craft a more "insider" or "local" sonic atmosphere, enriched with folk music elements such as the *kaval* and *Karacaoğlan türküsü*, and to shape this narrative for future generations.[710] As a result, readers encounter a pastoral and distinctly "Ottoman" spectacle, both sonically and visually. The perception of the mountain's explosion illustrates this approach: while both Ottoman and foreign accounts use the term "noise" to describe the spectacle, the meaning attributed to this "noise" differs completely. For foreign observers, it represents unintentional, unwanted, and aesthetically disturbing sound—the "noise of failure". For Ottoman sources, it signifies a loud, surprising, and somewhat frightening, yet simultaneously impressive and majestic, auditory experience.[711]

[709] See: Chapter 3, "Shaping History: Festival Books"
[710] Ersu Pekin also reads the mention of Karacaoğlan's name as an attempt to boast. See: PEKİN, 2003, p. 87.
[711] NOVAK, 2015, pp. 125–138; SCHAFER, 1994, p. 273.

4.4. The Power of Silence

In the earlier chapters of this dissertation, I have discussed the musical elements of the 1582 festival as well as the representational power and perception of sound in relation to noise. I now turn to another dimension that has so far received little attention, yet, in my view, is crucial in the context of representation of power: *silence*. Both sound and silence constitute equally fundamental categories through which power is expressed, and, as has been observed, "silence alone is worthy to be heard."[712]

The narratives of the fifty days and nights of celebrations in Atmeydanı consistently emphasize the sonorous, noisy, vocal, and musical aspects of the festivities. Human voices, whether those of the festival crowd or the invited guests, conveyed a wide range of senses and emotions. Alongside these were the sounds of animals included in the performances, the sonic movements of carriages and other three-dimensional models, the guild procession, the light and fire displays, and the musical, dance, theatrical, acrobatic, and circus performances that filled the festive space. Together, these elements constituted the sonic atmosphere of the event and "echoed the early modern soundworld"[713] of Istanbul. Yet within this overwhelming sonority, I have also sought to identify moments of silence. Proceeding from the view that silence can itself be a vehicle for the exercise of power,[714] my aim is twofold: first, to examine the absence of sound (voice, speech, writing) within the dynamism, sonority, and multiplicity of the 1582 festival, and second, to "interpret the meaning of what is not spoken as in interpreting the meaning of what is said";[715] in order to consider its meaning, form and function.

Silence can signify many different things and can be associated with a wide range of emotions. It may represent sadness, grief, mourning, anger, shame, shyness, confusion, fear, or worry, but it can also reflect peace and comfort. Its meanings are culturally, temporally, and spatially variable. What form of silence is considered good, bad, aesthetic, necessary, rude, or correct—or, more broadly, what its meaning is—depends on the cultural context.[716] Yet one commonality across many cultures is that, in relation to authority, silence functions as both a tool and a form of communication.[717]

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[712] Henry David Thoreau, 1961, quoted in CORBIN, 2018, p. 19.
[713] LAW, 2017, p. 111.
[714] ACHINO-LOEB, 2006, p. 3.
[715] SAVILLE-TROIKE, 1995, pp. 6–7.
[716] COATES, 2005, p. 643.
[717] JAWORSKI, 1993, p. 34.

There are certain places where silence makes its presence felt, where it can be "heard" more easily, and where it can emerge as a sweet, soft, continuous, and anonymous sound.[718] But there are also spaces in which it assumes a sharp and harsh character. Silence appears in ceremonies, processions, church and liturgy, museums, hospitals, prisons, and educational institutions: in short, in situations requiring "civility, politeness or submission."[719] In such contexts, there is a community that must, or is expected to, remain silent, one that can break the silence only with permission or invitation, and an authority figure who often demands respect.[720] Corresponding concrete examples include children at school or prisoners in jail.[721]

In examining the concept of silence within the context of power, it is crucial to move beyond the conventional understanding of silence as mere absence of sound. As Jaworski suggests, silence encompasses a wide range of communicative phenomena, including linguistic, discoursal, literary, social, cultural, spiritual, and meta-communicative dimensions.[722] This expanded perspective enables a more comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between silence and power, challenges the dominance of conventional conceptualizations, and invites a deeper analysis of its multifaceted nature.

As can be understood from this background, silence is not solely defined in the sense of the absence of sound or noise. The focus of the remainder of this section is therefore on "silence as a metaphor for communication" or "as part of communication". Within this approach, the emphasis is on how silence organizes and regulates social relations. In this final chapter of the study, I will follow this framework. I will first examine where, how, and with what function silence was observed (or "heard") within Ottoman palace and court culture. Subsequently, I will turn to the moments of absent voice in the 1582 festival and explore how silence functioned as a means of representing power.

4.4.1. Silence at the Ottoman Court

In early modern Ottoman court culture, silence held multiple meanings and served a variety of purposes. It was considered a virtue in courtly education, associated with refined manners and elegance. Courtiers were expected to discern when to speak and when to remain silent, as

[718] CORBIN, 2018, p. 4.
[719] CORBIN, 2018, p. 55.
[720] CORBIN, 2018, pp. 55–58.
[721] FOUCAULT, 1995; GILMORE, 1995.
[722] JAWORSKI, 1997, p. 3.

silence signified self-control and sophistication. Authority was marked not only by the ability to produce sound but also by the power to command silence, demonstrating respect.[723] Silence was often strategically employed to assert dominance, maintain control, and convey authority, while also cultivating an air of mystery and intrigue.

Silence played an important role in courtly rituals and ceremonial events, creating a sense of awe and emphasizing the grandeur of the occasion. It functioned as a form of non-verbal communication, conveying messages and intentions without words. In the politically charged environment of the court, silence also facilitated covert communication, enabling courtiers to navigate complex power dynamics and maintain secrecy.

Thus, silence operated simultaneously as a language of seriousness, respect, and intrigue. Courts were hierarchically organized, with different expectations of silence based on social rank: active silence, in which individuals deliberately refrained from speaking, was often associated with higher-ranking courtiers, while passive silence, in which one was denied the opportunity to speak, was more common among lower-ranking individuals. In this sense, silence was closely linked to power. For the purposes of this study, I divide the silence in the Ottoman palace into two categories: "the silence in the sultan's presence" and "the silence of the sultan".

Silence in the Sultan's Presence

Corbin mentions that there are places, "where silence makes its subtle presence felt, where it can be heard more easily". Topkapı Palace in the Ottoman capital can certainly be categorized as one of these places.[724] Nina Ergin conducted a study of sound and silence in Topkapı Palace, together with its architectural landscape, drawing on musicological perspectives to explain its potential functions. She notes that silence was a courtly tradition, especially practiced in front of the sultan.[725] The hierarchy and respectful presence of silence, discussed in the previous chapter, were fully displayed in the ruler's presence.[726] This clearly highlights how power controlled the sonic atmosphere of the palace, demonstrating that such control depended not on the use of sounds but also on how silence was organized and directed.

[723] GARRIOCH, 2003, p. 18.
[724] CORBIN, 2018, p. 4.
[725] ERGIN, 2015, p. 111.
[726] GARRIOCH, 2003, p. 18.

Within the confines of Topkapı Palace, silence was not merely a suggestion but a strict rule, particularly in the presence of the sultan. Maintaining absolute silence was considered a mark of respect and deference, serving as a tangible demonstration of the sultan's authority and power. The prohibition on speaking in front of the sultan not only created an atmosphere of reverence but also emphasized the sacredness of his position as ruler of the empire. This practice had been a longstanding tradition in Ottoman court life since the construction of Topkapı Palace.[727]

The importance of silence in the sultan's presence cannot be fully understood without considering the use of sign language as a form of verbal but non-vocal communication.[728] From the 15th century onwards, the Ottoman court began employing mutes (*bizebani*), particularly as attendants in private meetings and as executioners.[729] Their deafness and muteness ensured the confidentiality of state secrets. This practice, initiated during the reign of Mehmed II, persisted for centuries and contributed to the establishment of an additional communication network within the palace. The sign language developed by the mutes became a valuable skill and was integrated into the palace's broader system of silent communication.[730] Consequently, the use of sign language was not limited to interactions with the sultan; its significance extended beyond the mutes themselves and was known and understood by courtiers, harem women, and other inhabitants of the palace.[731]

The mutes' sign language was not limited to basic gestures but constituted a comprehensive system of communication, encompassing a wide range of signs and expressions. Their presence underscored the importance of non-vocal communication, further emphasizing the significance of silence within the palace's social structure. These methods were employed to convey messages, give instructions, and engage in conversations without spoken words. Drawing on period narratives to assess the status of this practice during the reign of Murad III, M. Miles concludes that by 1583 the mutes were using a well-developed sign system.[732] Sir Paul Rycaut, who served under Heneage Finch, the British Ambassador from 1660–1667, and spent over fifteen years in the Ottoman Empire, wrote about the mutes in the

[727] ERGIN, 2015, p. 111.
[728] SAVILLE-TROIKE, 1995, p. 4: "The place of silence in an integrated theory of communication."
[729] DİKİCİ, 2006, p. 40. For a study on the iconographic examples of the mutes in the palace, see: RICHARDSON, 2017.
[730] MILES, 2000.
[731] DİKİCİ, 2006, pp. 65–66.
[732] MILES, 2000, p. 128.

palace. His account exemplifies how Europeans were impressed when observing the Sultan's deaf servants communicating through signs:

> But this language of the *Mutes* is so much in fashion in the *Ottoman* Court, that none almost but can deliver his sense in it, and is of much use to those who attend the Presence of the Grand Signior, before whom it is not reverent or seemly so much as to whisper.[733]

The Ottoman court culture incorporated several elements of intentionally staged silence. This was particularly evident in the sultan's parades. Almost all European visitors to the Ottoman palace who witnessed the atmosphere surrounding the Sultan's presence associated the silence they encountered with order, obedience, and discipline.[734] For example, the French diplomat Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, who visited the palace in 1573, described this deliberate and absolutely "non-accidental" silence as follows:

> We watched with great pleasure and even greater admiration as a formidable number of Janissaries and other soldiers stood along the wall of this courtyard, their hands clasped before them like monks, in such silence that we seemed to behold not men but statues. They remained motionless in this manner for more than seven hours, without any of them ever so much as making a gesture to speak or move. Indeed, it is almost impossible to conceive of such discipline and obedience without having seen it. Their garments, though so different from our own, seemed less strange to us as than this silence, which led me to believe what I had once read in the history of Rhodes.[735]

Fresne-Canaye also remarked on the striking silence that accompanied the Sultan's passage, underscoring its role in shaping an atmosphere of discipline and reverence:

> As the Grand Seigneur passed by, an extraordinary silence reigned everywhere; one might have said that his very gaze, like that of Medusa, turned men into marble or mute fish. For they firmly believe that their lord is the shadow and breath of God on earth, having learned nothing from their youth in the seraglio except obedience and the respect owed to the emperor. And by this unique discipline they are always increasing their power, to the great shame of all Christians.[736]

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[733] RYCAUT, 1668, pp. 35–36.
[734] NECİPOĞLU, 2014, pp. 93–97; ERGIN, 2015.
[735] FRESNE-CANAYE, 1897, p. 64: "[Nous regardions] avec grand plaisir et plus grande admiration ce nombre effrayant de janissaires et d'autres soldats se tenant tous le long du mur de cette cour, les mains jointes devant eux à la manière des moines, dans un tel silence qu'il nous semblait voir non des hommes, mais des statues. Et ils restèrent immobiles de la sorte plus de sept heures, sans que jamais aucun fît mine de parler ou de bouger. Certes il est presque impossible de concevoir cette discipline et cette obéissance quand on ne l'a pas vue. Leurs habits, pourtant si différents des nôtres, ne nous paraissaient pas si étranges que ce silence, qui me fit croire à ce qu'autrefois j'avais lu dans l'histoire de Rhodes."
[736] FRESNE-CANAYE, 1897, p. 127: "Sur le passage du Grand Seigneur, le silence était extraordinairement profond partout : on eût dit que son seul regard transmuât les hommes, comme Méduse, en marbre ou en poissons

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the sultan's appearance before his subjects or foreign guests was regarded as a blessing. Since the *Kanunname* of Mehmed II, the sultan had become a figure rarely seen, difficult to approach, or seldom heard. As Ergin noted, "[the silence] was marking the special nature of the occasion and the sultan's presence."[737] As Fresne-Canaye's narration illustrates, the capacity to silence a crowd of several thousand individuals for several hours was itself a striking demonstration of power.

The silence of Topkapı Palace was therefore not simply the absence of sound or noise, but a presence in itself. This was particularly evident in the *İkinci Avlu* (the Second Courtyard), where administrative tasks were carried out and foreign ambassadors were received. Necipoğlu argues that this courtyard was an ideal space for official and administrative affairs, likening it to a theater stage. The sultan was not physically among the "actors" of this stage, which consisted entirely of state officials. Yet his presence was represented symbolically through several elements: the door leading to the *Üçüncü Avlu* (the Third Courtyard), where he resided; the latticed window; and the *Adalet Kulesi* (Tower of Justice) overlooking the *Divanhane* (Council Hall), from which he observed the administrative center of the empire.[738] The closer one came to the sultan—the embodiment of power—the greater the silence became, reinforcing the symbolic bond with him. For this reason, the second and third courtyards were spaces where even a whisper could hardly be heard.

Therefore, the silence was not confined solely to the sultan's immediate presence, but extended its influence throughout the palace, evoking an atmosphere of awe and reverence. Dimitrie Cantemir, the Ottoman vassal prince of Moldavia who spent 22 years in the imperial capital at the end of the 17th century, captures this active yet quiet atmosphere in a single passage from the second volume of his book on Ottoman history:

> Here [in the Ottoman palace], no one can utter a word unless he is asked, they cannot speak to each other; no one can cough or dare to sneeze, no matter how much he may need to. If anyone wishes to say anything to anyone, he can only speak in the language of the dumb, that is, by sign. None of the court servants wear shoes and walk about on the tips of their toes, but their steps are so measured that even if one has to run, he must be so light and careful that he cannot be heard. For anyone who makes the slightest noise is severely punished.[739]

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muets; car ils ont pour très ferme opinion que leur seigneur est l'ombre et le souffle de Dieu sur la terre, n'ayant rien appris dès leur jeunesse dans les sérails que l'obéissance et le respect qu'on doit à l'empereur. Et par cette unique discipline ils vont toujours augmentant leur puissance, à la grand honte de tous les chrétiens."

[737] ERGIN, 2015, p. 127.

[738] NECİPOĞLU, 2014, pp. 90–91.

[739] KANTEMIR, 1979, pp. 309–310.

Based on these examples, the silence (or silencing) of court figures in Ottoman palace life represented respect, obedience, discipline, and order. More broadly, silence also appeared in the Ottoman society as an integral aspect of restrained behavior. As Merinos Sariyannis demonstrates, in the Ottoman context, taciturnity complemented seriousness and the moral value of self-control, encompassing maturity and even religious devotion.[740] Quoting Katip Çelebi, Sariyannis notes that adherence to this principle required one to "keep silent".[741]

The Silent Sultan

> He [the sultan] does not attend the council in public, but listens through a small latticed square window, from which he can clearly hear and perceive everything that is happening and being discussed (yet he himself can be seen or noticed by no one). Everyone must always remain anxious that he might be present. What is thus deliberated, both in spiritual and in secular matters, is put on paper by the Chancellor and the Secretary, and then executed by the Cadileschians, the Vizier Pasha, or the Beglerbeg.[742]

This was how Hans Jacob Breuning described the invisibility of the Ottoman sovereign. The sultan was particularly known for his seclusion, exemplified in the "exaggerated" case of Murad III. This transformation in governance and its accompanying practices began during the reign of Mehmed II and was influenced by traditional Persian and Byzantine principles. The increasing focus on the authority of the sovereign led to the monarch becoming progressively separate from the public, both physically and symbolically. Topkapı Palace was planned entirely according to this principle, constructed as a palace complex outside the city and isolated from the subjects.[743] Within this isolated complex, architectural planning reinforced the sultan's seclusion, so much so that even palace employees saw him only rarely.

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[740] Sufism is also based on silence and tranquility or serenity The only sound used in the journey of turning inward and away from the ego is silence itself. On the reflection of this in Sufi literature and the use of silence as an effective means of communication in Mevlana's poetry, see: ABDOLLAHIFARD & TÜRKBEN AYDIN, 2020.
[741] SARIYANNIS, 2022, p. 489.
[742] BREUNING, 1612, p. 51: "Welcher ober wo solchem rath / nicht offentlich beywohnet doch durch ein viereckig fenster in audienz so wol vergittert alles was fürlaufft und gehandelt wird (doch das er von niemand geschen oder vermerckt weden kann) deutlich anzuhören unnd zuernemmen. Müssen alle jederzeit in sorgen stehen / das er gegenwertig. Was nun angehörter massen / so wohl in Geistlichen als in Weltlichen Sachen gehandelt / das wird durch den Canzler und Secretarium auffs Papier gebracht / und durch die Cadileschier, Vezier Bassa oder Beglerbeg."
[743] FODOR, 1994, p. 79.

However, while the sultan's presence was not visible, it was keenly felt. Similarly, his voice was not heard directly, yet his authority was sensed through his intentional silence.[744] As Breuning's insight demonstrates, speech is not the only indicator of communication; the absence of speech does not imply the absence of communication.[745] Even if the sultan was never seen, and perhaps never even present at the small, latticed window, he continued to exercise his power and dominance silently.

The main developments in the perception of the Ottoman monarch occurred during Süleyman I's reign. In the early years of his rule, Süleyman introduced the practice of remaining seated when receiving ambassadors, marking a departure from the previous customs. During these audiences, he occupied a throne rather than the formerly used sofa and maintained silence or only offered brief remarks, further emphasizing his regal presence and authority.[746] Additional changes during this period, along with the adoption of a new behavioral style in audiences, served to elevate the image of the monarch to mystical proportions. The sultan, as a sacred figure,[747] embodied the convergence of earthly power and divine authority. His decisions were believed to be guided by divine wisdom, and his role extended beyond political leadership to encompass spiritual guidance and protection.

This notion of the "sacred emperor" can already be observed in Byzantine times. In his article "The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order", George Ostrogorsky writes about the awe surrounding the emperor: "Everything is perform in awe-inspiring silence, not a single superfluous word is spoken, unnecessary noise is allowed to break the solemnity of the moment when the emperor appears before his people."[748] Here, as in the case of the later Ottoman sultan, there is an atmosphere that is defined and crowned by silence. Ultimately, silence is associated with God, "creation" and the unknown phenomenon of death.[749] It is a quality attributed to the sacred and the sublime.

In addition, the sultan would demonstrate his power by prolonging time. What is meant by this, is that the sultan decelerates time according to his will, thereby adding a temporal

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[744] As Adam Jaworski puts it, "[...] speech is intentional, so is silence." See: JAWORSKI, 1993, p. 77.
[745] JAWORSKI, 1993, p. 46.
[746] FODOR, 1994, p. 80.
[747] I mentioned in the "Sultanic Power" section of the study that one of the characteristics of the sultan is to be a sacred figure.
[748] George Ostrogorsky argues that the concept of the divine origin of the ruler's power developed from the initial concept of the "god-emperor" and gradually gained acceptance in the Christian Byzantine empire. See: OSTROGORSKY, 1956, pp. 2–3.
[749] CORBIN, 2018, pp. 68–70; 108–115. Schafer also reminds the death related silent: "Man fears the absence of sound as he fears the absence of life. As the ultimate silence is death, it achieves its highest dignity in the memorial service." See: SCHAFER, 1994, p. 256.

dimension to his "tactical-symbolic silence".[750] Friedrich Seidel, who was imprisoned in 1593 after Murad III declared war on Austria, and accompanied the delegation of ambassadors to Istanbul, describes in detail in his book how they were released in 1596. According to his narrative, the first command they heard upon entering the palace was to "wait for the sultan's decision". After recounting their interrogation and interactions with other palace officials during this waiting period, Seidel specifies the duration of their wait: "from morning to afternoon". This period of waiting finally concluded with one of the meetings described in Breuning's account, in which the Sultan did not attend in person but, according to tradition, observed the proceedings from the window.[751]

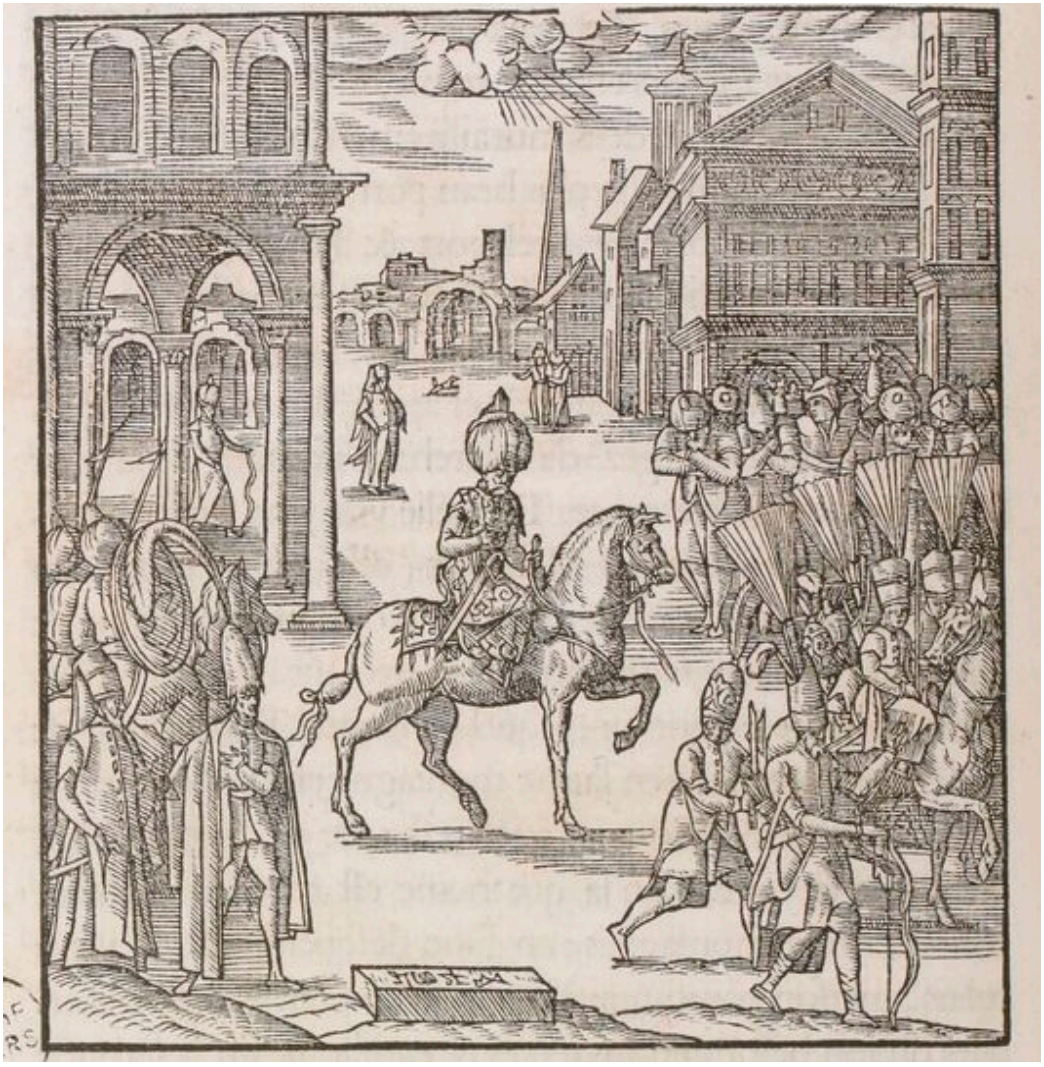

Fig. 45: Sultan Süleyman I's procession to Hagia Sophia. THEVET, 1556, p. 60.

[750] Here I refer to Saville-Troike's definition of attitudinal silence, which functions as "mystification". SAVILLE-TROIKE, 1995, pp. 16–17.
[751] SEIDEL, 1711, pp. 74–76.

Waiting for the sultan in a moment of silence, when time seemed to freeze, was also present in other palace practices, such as the sultan's procession. F. André Thevet's account, which Gülru Necipoğlu interprets as a description of Süleyman I's journey from the palace to Hagia Sophia,[752] provides an example of both his entourage and the sultan proceeding in awe:

> [...] of marvelous magnificence accompanied (as I myself witnessed) by the great lords and various officers of his court. First the Janissaries, numbering about seven thousand, go before him all on foot, in such good order that one does not pass another: carrying the Turkish bow in hand and the golden quiver at the side, well furnished with damascene arrows, they march in wonderful silence, their old and venerable Captain walking after them. [...] In the manner that I have described to you, he proceeds to the said mosque with such beautiful order and such silence that, apart from the sounds of the horses' steps, you would say that there is not a soul in the streets, although there is an almost infinite multitude of people of various nations watching him pass.[753]

Before moving on to the phenomenon of silence at the 1582 festival, I would like to address another sensory aspect of communication and the representation of power within the deliberate atmosphere of silence the sultan established with his subjects: bodily experience. For this, I will focus on sultanic audiences, and particularly the practice of hand-kissing as a demonstration of the sultan's power. In the 16th–17th centuries, sources prominently mention this act. However, it is important to note that the term encompassed a wide range of gestures, including kissing the sultan's hand, arm, the hem of his robe, and, in some cases, even his foot.

During this period, the practice of hand-kissing carried multiple meanings, symbolizing respect, reverence, and submission towards those in positions of power.[754] An example illustrating the point of physical contact with the divine figure in the ceremony comes from Ali Ufki, who was at court during the reigns of Sultan İbrahim (r. 1640–1648) and Mehmed IV. Ali describes the reception of the sultan by visiting dignitaries for the traditional Eid celebration based on "credible sources that have informed him":

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[752] NECİPOĞLU-KAFADAR, 1985, p. 115.

[753] THEVET, 1556, pp. 60–62: "[...] d'une mirable magnificence accompagné (ce que i'ay vù) des grans Signeurs & diuers oficiers de sa court. Premierement les Iannissaires, qui peuuent entre en nombre de sept mile, vont deuant lui tous a pié, en si bon ordre que lun ne passe pas l'autre: portant larc Turquoise en main & le carquois doré au coté, bien garni de flesches damasquines: & cheminent avec merueilleux silence, leur Capitaine pitaine vieil & ancien marchant apres eus. [...] En la maniere donq que vous ay dit, il va à sadite Mosquee avec un si bel ordre, & silence tel, que, hors le trac des cheuaus, vous diriez qu'il n'y ha ame par les reus:iaçoit qu'il y ait une multitude quasi infinie de diuerses nations, qui le regardent passer."

[754] Hedda Reindl-Kiel points out that the physical and tactile manifestation of power and reverence, kissing (or face-rubbing), could vary depending on the rank of the person. See: REINDL-KIEL, 2019, pp. 198–200.

As soon as the day dawns just a little bit, the sultan comes out of the Has Oda [privy chamber] and sits himself down on the already majestically prepared throne. To his left hand stands the *Kapı Ağası, who* first gives the sign to the sons of the Tatar khan. [...] the sultan takes three steps towards them (as I was told by trustworthy persons) and they bow deeply in reverence, saying: Eyyamı şerif, may these days be happy to you. They then kiss the Sultan's hands, and he in turn lightly touches them with his fingers. Afterwards, they withdraw, and the Sultan sits on his throne again.[755]

Fig. 46: Grand vizier kissing Sultan Murad III's robe during the Eid ceremony in the Second Courtyard, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fols. 159v.–160r.

[755] UFKİ, 1667, pp. 57–58: "Als dann / so bald es nur ein wenig zutagen beginnet / kombt der Kayser aus dem Has oda heraus / und sezet sich auff den/bereits bedeuten Majestaetisch zugerichten Sessel nider. Auff seiner lincken handt stehet der Kapa Agassi, wellcher erstlich denen Tartar-Chamischen Söhnen […] das Zeichen gibet. denen der Kayser (wie mir von glaubwürdigen Persohnen ist erzehlt worden) drey Schritt entgegen gehet / und sie sodann mit tieffer Reverenz sich neigendte sprechen: Ejami Scherif, nemblich / es senen euch dise Taeg glückseelig / und küssen ihme darauff die händt. Der Kayser aber berühret sie ebenfals mit seinen Fingern / alsdann gehen sie zurück / und sezet sich der Kayser widerumb auff seinen Sessel."

Tactile gestures such as hand-kissing play a significant role in power dynamics, often carrying symbolic meaning. These gestures can convey authority, dominance, submission, or intimacy, depending on the context and cultural norms. For instance, kissing the hand of a powerful figure, such as a sultan, can symbolize respect, loyalty, and submission to their authority. More broadly, touch has the potential to establish and reinforce power relations, as it can create a sense of connection, control, or vulnerability. Similar to the dynamics of silence, the interpretation and significance of tactile gestures vary across cultures and contexts, highlighting the complex and multifaceted relationship between touch and power.

Jointly with the element of silence, this example further demonstrates how the sultan's appearance should be considered a form of communication. As aptly stated, "[...] one can utter words without saying anything."[756] The sultan's non-vocal performance could thus convey multiple meanings through its sensory dimensions.

4.4.2. Silence in the 1582 Festival

Silence is a constant presence that carries significance at all times. While some instances of silence are readily apparent and recognizable, others may remain concealed amidst a multitude of words, requiring careful attention to uncover their meaning.[757] Such focus is necessary to discern the moments of silence within the 1582 festival, an event full of colors, visual and auditory displays, smells, tastes, and tactile richness, all interwoven with complex layers of sound. Here, I follow both the notion that "silence is never absolute", as Schafer summarizes by quoting John Cage,[758] and the perspective that silence does not signify emptiness or a state of "devoid of sense",[759] but rather is loaded with meaning. Moreover, I treat silence as an event with its own intrinsic value and interpretive potential.[760]

Moving in Silence: The Sultan's Procession

First of all, one must question the existence of meaningful silence in the presence of the sultan. As emphasized in the previous section, silence was a characteristic required not only of the

[756] John Searle's work *Speech Acts* (1969) quoted in SAVILLE-TROIKE, 1995, p. 6.
[757] JAWORSKI, 1993, p. 8.
[758] SCHAFER, 1994, p. 256. Here Schafer expands on John Cage's quote "There is no such thing as silence. something is always happening that makes a sound".
[759] PISTRICK & ISNART, 2013, p. 507.
[760] ZGRAJA & URCHUEGUÍA, 2021, p. 9.

sultan himself, but also of his subjects when in his presence. There are several examples showing that respectful and obedient silence, regardless of the size of the crowd, was carefully observed during festivities. In this context, it appears that the sultan made his presence felt and imposed silence on the crowds even before he actually appeared.

An anonymous eyewitness describing the 1530 festival noted how he found this "incredible": "In the square, the Janissaries, that is the soldiers on foot, and the *sipahi*, that is the soldiers on horseback, were stationed at different points, maintaining such silence that it was a remarkable sight to behold."[761] Similarly, Marino Sanuto expressed his admiration for the silence and order he observed at the same festival: "This multitude, despite the difficulty of avoiding noise and disorder, stood orderly and with such silence and reverence while awaiting the presence of the Grand Signor that it was a sight impossible not to admire."[762]

The silent display of authority over people was also evident at another circumcision festival a century later. In 1675, John Covel, the embassy chaplain of King Charles II of England (r. 1630–1685), attended the circumcision celebrations for Prince Mustafa. He described not only the soldiers but also the "mass of the people" in general waiting around the ceremonial grounds and expressed his amazement at how "they were silenced and put in order, as if they were in a ritual".[763] These examples again underline the meaningful sound, and silence, of waiting for the sultan.

Similarly, the process of waiting is also reflected in the sultan's procession at the 1582 festival. The public celebrations formally began on the day when Sultan Murad III, together with his son, Prince Mehmed, left the Old Palace, where the private festivities had first taken place. The Sultan then rode on horseback to the festival grounds and took his seat in the special pavilion prepared for him. All narratives consistently emphasize that the celebrations commenced only with Murad's appearance, marking his presence as the signal for the beginning of the shows, banquets, and entertainments. It is therefore appropriate to begin the analysis with the Sultan's procession.

As already seen in the examples of the *mehter* and the Sultan's procession, the arrival of the Sultan and the Prince Mehmed to the festival grounds was greeted with great enthusiasm and its vocal echoes. Mustafa Ali reports that after the Sultan's arrival, the voices of the people

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[761] ÖZKAN, 2004, p. 92: "In la piazza restorono posti in diversi canti li ganizzeri, che è la militia à piedi, et li spachi che è quella da cavallo, con tanto silentio, che era una cosa mirabile da vedere."
[762] SANUTO, 1899, p. 443: "La qual moltitudine, non ostante la difficultà de non far strepiti et desordeni, stavano talmente ordinati et con tanto silentio et reverentia ad aspettar la presentia del Gran signor, che fo un veder non senza admiration."
[763] COVEL, 2017, pp. 133–134.

were raised, while İntizami emphasizes that these voices resounded with cries of "Allah Allah!", filling the entire atmosphere with excitement.[764] Palerne, in turn, describes the shouts of "vive les Sultans!" and the applause that erupted when Sultan Murad and the Prince entered Atmeydanı.[765] Thus, none of these sources suggest that the crowd greeted them in silence, waiting in orderly tranquility. However, in both Palerne's account and other festival reports, the expression "when they came to the square" indicates that the applause and acclamations only began with the actual appearance of the Sultan and his son. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the Sultan's procession from the palace to Atmeydanı was not silent, nor can it be ruled out that the crowd in the square had been waiting in perfect stillness beforehand.

As in the earlier narrative of Süleyman I's journey to Hagia Sophia, the appearance of Sultan Murad and Prince Mehmed on horseback, and the power they projected through symbols, remained highly visible: in the garments they wore, the weapons they carried, particularly those adorned with precious stones and gold, and the entourage that completed the magnificent procession. Among those accompanying the Sultans were Janissaries, high-ranking officers, and soldiers. Leading them were the so-called *Deliler* (literally "lunatics"), who demonstrated their courage and endurance by stabbing their bodies with javelins and knives, a spectacle that astonished the onlookers.[766]

The Ottoman sources provide rich material for metaphorical depictions: Mustafa Ali likens the Sultan's appearance in Atmeydanı to the sun, while İntizami evokes imagery of the light or illumination. Furthermore, the silent and upright posture of both the Sultan and Prince Mehmed is compared to the *nahıl*s brought to the festival grounds. The sonic dimension of the radiance the Sultan cast upon his subjects was, however, marked by silence, just as within the palace. Throughout what Palerne called the Sultan's "magnificent march", the applause, shouts, and prayers of the crown were met by the Sultan's own wordless, silent presence as he sat upon his horse.

The figure of the sultan above his subjects, untouchable and inaudible, shares similarities with the Byzantine emperor. Stefan Burkhardt lists the characteristics of the "ideal emperor" as follows: "exempt from all human discomfort, silent and unresponsive, speaking only through

[764] ALİ, 1586, fols. 14v.–15r. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, pp. 109-110; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 381–385); İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 3r. (ARSLAN, 2009, p. 125).
[765] PALERNE, 1606, p. 454.
[766] ATASOY, 1997, pp. 24–27. To read this astonishing scene from another observer, see: LEBELSKI[2], 1584, para. 4.

the *Logohetis*[767] [i.e. through intermediaries], and himself commanding silence."[768] All of these attributes are certainly reflected in the strategic communication—and "strategic silence"[769]—of the Ottoman sultan, particularly in the attribution of superhuman qualities, sacredness, and an unresponsive, silent stance. This silence allowed the sultan to be visible to his subjects while remaining isolated and separated from them.[770] Throughout the procession, the Sultan's muted presence was represented by another source of sound: his powerful, impressive, and glamorous musical ensemble, the *mehter*. In other words, this ensemble had become his voice, his word.

Silence during the Celebrations

As the Sultan settles into his specially prepared pavilion, what İntizami repeatedly calls "the sublime pavilion, the place of justice", he positions himself above the surroundings. The festive narratives all describe vibrant and multifaceted panoramas of celebrations that lasted for more than a month. However, written descriptions of the Sultan's voice are remarkably scarce. Even the voluminous and highly detailed accounts of İntizami, Ferahi, Mustafa Ali and Haunolth place greater emphasis on the performers rather than on the Sultan himself. Çiğdem Kafescioğlu describes the transmission style used by İntizami in his account *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* as follows:

> While other authors depict the performers, artisans and other professionals participating in the festivities and processions, Intizami inserts the voice and gaze of the city dwellers into the text. [...] Intizami gives their own voices to the many tradesmen and demonstrators participating in the festivities. He presents the demonstrators' addresses to the sultan, to each other, to the spectators, sometimes as part of the narrative, and sometimes through poems that he places in the mouths of the artisans watching in the square, referring to the group or community he is talking about.[771]

This very pertinent observation begs the question: what about the Sultan's voice, how was it portrayed, or was he given a voice at all? The most frequent mentions of the Sultan, both in İntizami's and in other Ottoman and foreigner accounts of the festival, occur when the demonstrators come to his presence. According to this regularly repeated scene, the artisan

[767] A title in the Byzantine bureaucracy.
[768] BRUKHARDT, 2014, p. 177: "[…] zum einen das Ideal des von allen menschlichen Unannehmlichkeiten enthobeben, reaktionslos schweigenden Kaisers, der nur durch den Logotheten sprach und auch Stille gebot."
[769] JAWORSKI, 1993, pp. 105–106.
[770] SENNETT, 2022, p. 217.
[771] KAFESCİOĞLU, 2019, pp. 21–23.

processions and other performers arriving at Atmeydanı advanced directly under the balcony where the Sultan was seated and displayed their skills. This scene was sometimes accompanied by prayers for the Sultan's peace, luck, and longevity. It was part of this cyclical performance that each person curtsies. In fact, it is claimed that this curtsy, the most symbolic bodily gesture of respect and obedience to power, was performed not only by humans but even by animals at this festival. Palerne's narrative recounts an elephant bowing before the Sultan's power:

> […] one might say that this animal possesses more judgment than all the others; for when it was brought before the Lord, it [the elephant] immediately raised its head and looked up, and then, as a sign of humility, bowed it very low […], and knelt down.[772]

The compositional structure of the pictorial depictions of the festival has already been mentioned as an additional source of information for the event. The figure of Sultan Murad, depicted in the upper left corner of all the miniatures, is both isolated and remarkable. In the visuals, Nakkaş Osman and his team attempted to convey the actions and movements of the figures on the Atmeydanı stage by depicting certain stages of motion. For example, Sezer Tansuğ illustrates the scene of the looting of dishes with a three-stage depiction of figures standing, bending, and half-bent as they lift the dishes and straighten up.[773] Similar efforts to visually reflect movement can be seen in other performance examples as well. However, when it comes to the Sultan, a striking difference emerges: he is depicted in virtually the same position in almost all the miniatures in the book. Although his clothing changes from miniature to miniature, his idol-like sitting posture, the curled position of his right hand, and the placement of his left hand on his knee remain consistent. (Fig. 47)[774] This portrayal presents him as a stoic and silent figure above the turmoil of the festival.

[772] PALERNE, 1606, p. 481: "[…] lon tiér que cest animal a plus de iugement, que tous les autres: de fais testant amené deuant le Seignur, dressa incontinent sa teste & regard en haut : & puis en signe d'humilité, la baissant fort basse, […] se mettent à genoux."
[773] TANSUĞ, 2018, p. 150. Arzu Öztürkmen makes a similar conclusion while analyzing the depiction of dance figures in text and image: "The dance images depict frozen moments from movement sequences, often where energy is at its peak." See: ÖZTÜRKMEN, 2011, p. 82.
[774] To confirm this, the festival miniatures in the other sections of the study can also be examined.

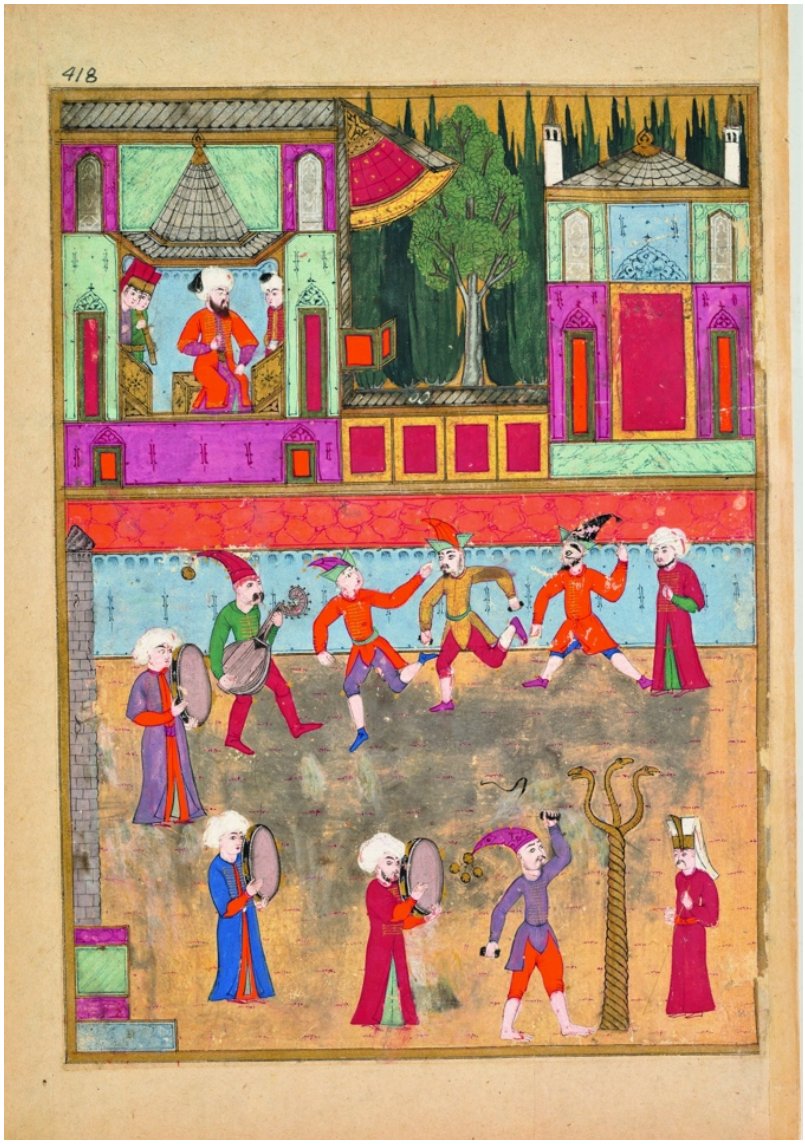

Fig. 47: Sultan Murad III watching musicians and jugglers, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 418r.

There is only one scene in which this highly static figuration breaks: the gold and silver scattering moment.[775] (Fig. 48) In this scene, the Sultan's throne is not depicted. Instead, the Sultan is shown standing, with his right hand raised, distributing gold and silver to the crowd below his balcony. Although not miniaturized, the moment of scattering, through which the Sultan displays his generosity or appreciation following a performance, includes valuable objects such as gold rings, silver cups, and coins. Indeed, the written narratives consistently

[775] TANSUĞ, 2018, pp. 159–160.

describe this scene of the Sultan. On occasion, the people also express their gratitude for his generosity: "Vive Sultan Amurat!"[776]

Yet, a short anonymous narrative provides information that challenges the static characterization of Murad based not only on visual depictions but also on other narratives. In this account, a reenactment of a battle between Persians and Turks seems to have elicited a reaction from the Sultan: "The Sultan and Ali Pasha received the spectacle with approval."[777] Importantly, the phrase "beifällig aufnehmen" indicates that the performance was favorably received, rather than suggesting any audible response such as applause. Thus, while this report hints at the Sultan's engagement with the spectacle, it does not contradict the broader pattern of his silence but rather underscores the subtle, measured ways in which he could demonstrate approval.

We know that the Sultan only missed some performances during the festivities for reasons such as going to prayer. Apart from that, as one anonymous narrator stated, "he was always being present", especially during the night to watch the fireworks.[778] According to the same report, the sultan was not visible in his cathisma-like balcony built for him to watch the celebrations, at least in a sitting position. Remember that he was almost always sitting when he was on the balcony, yet the source states that "The balcony of which I speak is covered above with lead, in a half-pyramid, and has glass windows in front and at the sides, so that his Majesty cannot much seen when sitting down."[779] Therefore, although the sultan could observe the performances and perhaps judge them favorably, the account does not provide evidence that he produced an audible response. This reinforces the understanding of the sultan as a silent, almost untouchable presence during the festivities.

We should recall, in this context, the Sultan's silent observation of imperial council meetings at Topkapı Palace through a closed latticed window. The sultan did not reveal himself, yet the palace officials conducting the meeting were fully aware of his presence. Whether or not he was truly observing, they were certainly exposed to the sense that they were under his scrutiny. The detail regarding Murad's position provided by the Italian report mentioned earlier is not very different from this: from the festival ground, the Sultan was

[776] PALERNE, 1606, p. 461.
[777] FUGGER, 1923, p. 64: "Der Kaiser und Ali Pascha nahmen das Schauspiel beifällig auf."
[778] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 2: "[…] alli quali e stata sempre presente S(ua) M(aes)tà [...]" The same expression appears again here: p. 3.
[779] LA VIGNE[1], 1582, p. 3: "[...] e il poggio ch'io dico cop(er)to di sopra di piombo a mezza piramide, et ha dinanzi et dalle bande vedri in modo che poco si può vedere S(ua) M(aes)ta sentando poi bassa, e tanto spinge in fuori […]"

largely hidden from view. Seated quietly on his isolated balcony, the Sultan remained largely hidden from the view of the crowd below. His presence was nonetheless perceptible to those assembled, ensuring that he continued to make his authority felt and "heard", much as he did in Topkapı Palace.

Fig. 48: Sultan Murad III's money scattering moment, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 47r.

The Unsaid and Silenced of the Festival

Of course, the information that Sultan Murad was not visible while seated on his balcony is valuable, yet the pictorial depictions present it differently. Nakkaş Osman and the other painters under his supervision followed a consistent compositional scheme for depicting the

Sultan at the festival. On the balcony in the upper left corner, the Sultan is shown at the center, highly visible; to his right are his viziers, and to his left, his son, Prince Mehmed. As in other miniature examples examined throughout this study, the Sultan is depicted as a full-sized figure, visible almost from his ankles, whereas Sultan Mehmed appears almost invisible. Contradicting the figure of the sacred sultan—untouchable, invisible, and inaudible, yet always felt—this depiction points to another dimension of silence at the 1582 festival.

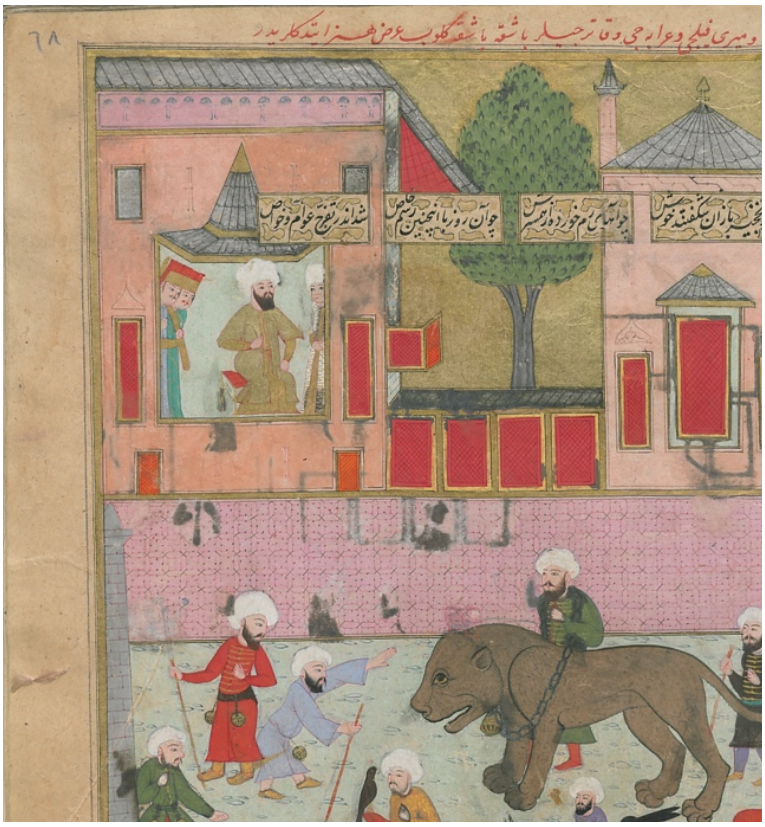

Fig. 49: Detail of Sultan Murad III watching shows with wild animals, from the *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II. LOKMAN, 1597, fol. 68r.

Recall that in analyzing this circumcision festival organized by Sultan Murad III as a "demonstration of power", I first discussed the festival's background, then its implementation, and finally how it was transmitted to later generations. In these sections, and in the discussion of the mountain model, I demonstrated how the perception of a performance and its reported success varies across different narratives, depending on the purpose of the sources, the process of observation, and the personal preferences of the observers. By addressing the concept of silence in this section, I now turn to the representation of power through silence during the festival. This will be followed by the silences that persisted or emerged after the festival, and

the figures who were rendered silent in the narratives. In this way, as I conclude my analysis of the festival in this final section, I return to the starting point and reiterate the central role of power in shaping the transmission of narratives.

As mentioned before, there are aspects of the festival that remain untold in the narratives. Others are omitted, either because they were not understood or perceived, or due to lack of evidence, as Corbin emphasizes. The focus here, however, is on what is consciously forgotten, ignored, or censored—that is, what is silenced. These moments, in which silence functions as an instrument of power, demonstrate that the historian's silence can stem from a deliberate refusal to record.[780] This can be interpreted as an example of "strategic silence".[781] Indeed, as Foucault notes in *Archeology of Knowledge*, what is left unsaid or omitted can carry profound meaning and power. Silence, in this sense, is not merely the absence of speech but a deliberate act that shapes and influences the narrative. According to Foucault, silence is present in both told and untold stories. In the told stories, it manifests as gaps, exclusions, or limitations within the narrative that restrict certain forms of expression or obscure certain meanings. Such silences often arise from societal norms, power dynamics, or the desire to maintain control over the transmission of knowledge.[782]

As Rodney G. S. Carter notes, "Not every story is told."[783] In the narration of the demonstration with the mountain model, choices such as Ottoman sources omitting the failure of the rain-soaked mountain, or foreign sources describing the failure without explaining its causes, can be considered conscious silences. These silences, what is said or left unsaid, what is depicted or left unpictured, play an active role in the construction, consolidation, and protection of power.

As Carter argues, the silence created first in the narrative and later in the archive reflects the ability of influential groups to shape and control the content and structure of archival records.[784] Those who hold power play a pivotal role in determining what is recorded and preserved, thereby exerting influence over what information becomes accessible to the public. In the case of the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, written, expended, and illustrated under the order of Sultan Murad and supervision of his subordinates, these actors shaped both the narrative and

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[780] CORBIN, 2018, p. 60. Adam Jaworski draws attention to the Polish word *przemilczenie*, meaning "not speaking about something" and/or "failing to mention something", for this type of silence, which he argues is particularly suitable for the political manipulation of others. See: JAWORSKI, 1993, pp. 108–109.
[781] JAWORSKI, 1993, p. 105.
[782] FOUCAULT, 1972, more specifically: pp. 106–117.
[783] CARTER, 2006, p. 216.
[784] CARTER, 2006, p. 217.

the historical understanding emerging from the archives, reflecting their power and control over the representation of knowledge and history.

On the other hand, silence can also be found in the untold stories, narratives that have been marginalized, suppressed, or overlooked.[785] These untold stories often belong to individuals or groups whose voices have historically been silenced or ignored.[786] In this context, I focus on the women of the 1582 festival, representing these silent voices.[787] The scarcity of attention given in the sources to the women in the sultan's family, his mother, his sister, and Prince Mehmed's mother, as well as to female figures among the guests and public spectators, has been noted by other researchers. Mustafa Ali, for instance, describes the presence of women in the festivities, including the female figures in the artisan processions and among the demonstrators, indicating that the celebrations involved broader participation than is usually acknowledged.[788]

Women were present at the 1582 festival, as evidenced in Haunolth's account, where women influenced by the procession of Sufis and dervishes began to sigh, cry, and scream like in pseudo devotion; in Ali's story of a woman dressed as a soldier who was spotted on horseback watching the festival and subsequently imprisoned; and in Peçevi's narration of prostitutes summoned by some cavalrymen to their chambers.[789] In fact, it was the events that followed the presence of these women in the room in question, a fight between Janissaries and cavalry soldiers that resulted in the death of a soldier, that effectively marked the festival's conclusion.[790] In other words, while women were certainly present, their presence rarely extended beyond the telling of a few incidents. In the celebrations that Özgen Felek termed "men's festivities", women's visibility was limited, if not entirely ignored. This marginalization is also evident in the miniatures of the festivities. Among all the human figures

[785] For a study of silencing in historiography and the selection of archival documents that lead to intentional or unintentional silencing in the interpretation of the historical sources, see: SOMEL, NEUMANN & SINGER, 2011.
[786] FOUCAULT, 1972.
[787] On the silencing of women in narration, see: JAWORSKI, 1993, pp. 118–122.
[788] Özcan summarizes these narratives of Mustafa Ali eloquently in her study questioning the publicity of Atmeydanı. See: ÖZCAN, 2009, pp. 9–13.
[789] HAUNOLTH, 1595, p. 487; ALİ, 1586, fols. 57r.–57v. (ÖZTEKİN, 1996, p. 190; ARSLAN, 2008, pp. 494–495); PEÇEVİ, 1992, p. 66.
[790] Felek aptly interpreted this situation as "even though women were prevented from 'ruining' this performance by men, the festival was ultimately spoiled by two women." See: FELEK, 2019, p. 168. While Felek's this article reveals the manhood and masculinity aspects of the festival, it also offers a thorough interrogation of the existence of women.

depicted, the number of women is very small, appearing in less than half of the miniatures, and their portrayal begins only in folio 197 of the book.[791] (Fig. 50)

Fig. 50: Detail of women figures watching the performances. Four veiled women are depicted in the foreground, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*. İNTİZAMİ (T), 1588, fol. 197v.

The women of the harem also observed the festivities, but their positions were organized so that they could not be seen. On the right side of the Sultan's balcony, the prince's mother, sister, and their entourage of women were seated in the adjacent mansion, next to the Sultan's lodge. The sultanas, however, were not depicted in Nakkaş Osman's miniatures, as they watched the celebrations behind red latticed windows.[792] (Fig. 49) Women were largely overlooked in both the written narrative and the visual depictions of the festival. Indeed, the imperial women, invisible behind closed windows, exemplify those who are absent and silenced.

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[791] Terzioğlu interprets the information that the depiction of female figures in the miniatures of the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* began only halfway through the book as "as the festival progressed, some restrictions on female spectators were lifted". See: TERZİOĞLU, 1995, p. 94.
[792] There is only one exception to how these windows are depicted. The latticed windows mentioned there are depicted open: *Zübdet'ül-eş'âr*, fol. 10r. For the miniature see, Fig. 10.

The importance of silence at the Ottoman court and its profound impact on the 1582 festivities was visible, audible, and sensible. Historical accounts reveal how silence functioned as a powerful instrument both behind the walls of Topkapı Palace, where the sultan was rarely seen, and in the public celebrations organized by Murad for the circumcision of his son, Mehmed. Silence emerged as a crucial element within the complex mechanisms of power, accentuating the distinctive practices that contributed to the idealization of the sultan.

The stark contrast between the resounding noise of the festivities and the Sultan's tranquil silence further underscores the power dynamics at play. It demonstrates that communication operates through all modes of expression, activity or inactivity, words or silence.[793] Every action, or deliberate lack thereof, carries meaning, enabling the Sultan to project authority and command through his carefully chosen form of expression.

Sezer Tansuğ likens this practice to that of the Byzantine emperors, noting how Sultan Murad III broke a tradition that had persisted even during the reign of Süleyman I by retreating to the pavilion without meeting any groups, political representatives, or other guests during the extended festival, thereby isolating himself.[794] The utilization of silence in the Ottoman court and during the 1582 circumcision festival was not merely a reflection of the Sultan's complex persona, but a deliberate means to assert his power and shape the narrative surrounding him. These events and observations highlighted the Sultan's attempt to position himself at the forefront, despite this seclusion, with the festival itself becoming a manifestation of his authority. As Ergin underlines, the Sultan's muteness was not only a sign of his otherworldliness and extraordinary power, transcending human comprehension and language, but also served to amplify the potential significance of his speech in shaping the fate of his subjects and visitors.[795] Through the Sultan's serene silence, the dynamics of power were further emphasized.

Following Michel Foucault's view that silence can function as a form of discourse and a tool to maintain power dynamics and control,[796] I interpret the Sultan's positioning and his "idol-like, mute appearance", reminiscent of the Byzantine emperors,[797] as a deliberate staging of power. As Foucault emphasizes, silence here surpasses the mere absence of speech; it

[793] WOLF, 2016, pp. 6–7.
[794] TANSUĞ, 2018, s. 117.
[795] ERGIN, 2015, p. 128.
[796] FOUCAULT, 1995.
[797] GRÜNBART, 2011, p. 217.

becomes a meaningful form of communication capable of conveying messages and producing effects. In this way, the Sultan talks, but through an intentional, untimely silence. Silence is thus deeply intertwined with power, manifesting as a by-product of identity and selectivity, while simultaneously participating in the veiling process that accompanies the exercise of authority.[798] Considering that even the way the festival is recorded contributes to this exercise of power, it becomes evident that the silence within the festival narratives form a potent element of the overall event. To the Sultan, the main actor in the script of this grandiose, prolonged, costly, and sensually impactful display of power, not words or speech, but silence has been inscribed.

[798] ACHINO-LOEB, 2006, p. 3.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study has examined the presence and perception of sound in all its forms within the context of a specific historical event. To explore how sound and power interacted and how this interaction functioned, I selected the imperial festival organized in Istanbul in 1582 for the circumcision of Sultan Murad III's son, Prince Mehmed as my case study. With its prolonged, richly detailed, and multisensory experiences that spanned nearly fifty days, the 1582 festival stands out as one of the most spectacular and extensively documented celebrations in Ottoman history. It represented a grand synthesis of politics, culture, and sensory experiences. The multifaceted festivities created a carnivalesque atmosphere, transforming Istanbul's ancient Hippodrome into a vibrant stage for performances ranging from circus acts to banquets, and from dance presentations to animal shows. A further distinctive feature was the inclusion of guild parades, which reflected the diverse social fabric of the Ottoman society.

One of the motivations behind this thesis was to examine the origins of the festival's magnificence narrative and to question its accuracy. To do so, it was first necessary to clarify the conditions that gave rise to such a grandiose celebration and to identify the historical, economic, and political foundations upon which it was constructed. In this process, the study naturally encountered questions in terms of interpreting the context and meaning of sound within political history and the sultan figure.

By examining the political and economic atmosphere of the period together with the role of Sultan Murad, this research sheds light on how the festival functioned as a representation of power. In doing so, the concept of power was analyzed within its specific Ottoman context, ensuring that it remained grounded in its historical and setting. Indeed, addressing the notion of power in the Ottoman world proved essential for understanding the significance of sound within this framework. The Ottoman Empire embodied the key characteristics of a great and enduring polity: the capacity to pluralize and legitimize its rule, to emphasize organizational strength, and to maintain authority through legitimacy. Moreover, the Sultan's central role was vital to sustaining imperial power and legitimacy. With his religious, military, traditional, masculine, and sacred attributes, the Sultan stood as both the bearer and the perpetuator of power. Complementing these traits were his generosity, his capacity for innovation balanced with adherence to tradition, his devotion to the law, and his responsibility to protect his subjects and uphold justice.

The imperial circumcision festival of 1582 has been a subject of scholarly inquiry since the first quarter of the 20th century, gaining more intensive attention from the 1960s onward. Despite this, a notable gap persisted in the study of music and sound, even though these elements played a pivotal role in shaping the festival's atmosphere. This dissertation seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive musicological investigation into the sonic environment of the circumcision celebrations. Approaching the festivities as a "sonic-social event", the research considers the sounds of the festival alongside the musical performances, thereby necessitating a more holistic understanding of sound in this context.

To analyze the sonic and sensory atmosphere of a festival that took place 440 years ago, it was necessary to focus on how the sources themselves, the "authentic period voice", [799] define it, and on how this event "makes full use of sensory imagery to create its effects".[800] For this thesis, the analyses are based on archival materials, accounts of chroniclers who observed the festivities or narrated them through previous reports, odes, European observers' descriptions, miniatures, and other visual depictions of the celebrations. In selecting these written sources, special attention was paid to contemporary eye- and earwitness accounts, with the focus on analyzing and interpreting existing narratives for research purposes rather than identifying new ones. As Stout, who provided one of the first comprehensive analysis of the festival, points out, a subject of such magnitude, with its multiplicity and diversity of written and visual sources, requires a comprehensive approach to analysis.[801]

According to Howes' concept of *sensescape*, the way we perceive the world around us is shaped not only by objective reality but also by our cultural background, values, and beliefs. This idea formed a key pillar for interpreting the examples under study.[802] Experience shapes identity, and in turn, our identities and experiences shape how we perceive a place, or more precisely, how we perceive particular sounds. At the 1582 festival in Istanbul's historical square, many different and previously unconnected people came together, each bringing distinct experiences of music and sound shaped by their own cultures, geographies, languages, and beliefs.[803] Consequently, their narratives must be evaluated within this context, with particular attention to perception, interpretation and transmission preferences.

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[799] FENLON, 2018, p. 120.
[800] TONER, 2014, p. 2.
[801] STOUT, 1966, p. 284.
[802] HOWES, 2005, pp. 1–17.
[803] BORN, 2013, p. 19.

The plan of the thesis was developed with these research motives, questions, objectives, and approaches in mind. First, the economic, social, and political condition during the reign of Murad III was examined. In addition, the characteristics of the ideal sultan were investigated, and the figure of Murad III as a sultan, and bearer of power was analyzed through contemporary narratives and with a broad scholarly literature. This discussion, forming the second chapter of the thesis, provides insights not only into the context in which the festival was organized, but also into the potential motivations for staging such a grand spectacle. The study further demonstrates that Murad III faced widespread criticism during his reign for perceived deficiencies in his sultanic qualities. Moreover, his period was often interpreted as one of "decline", both by contemporary chroniclers and later scholars, typically in comparison with the reign and persona of his predecessors, most notably Sultan Süleyman I. Accordingly, Murad III was in need of a display of splendor to assert his authority and legitimacy. Through the festivities of 1582, he accomplished this objective, even surpassing the celebrations organized by the sultans to whom he was being compared.

The third part of the study focused on the preparation, execution, and subsequent historical recording of the festival. Particular emphasis was placed on unpacking the multiple layers of the event, including its design, spatial organization, participants, and selected performances as deliberate manifestations of power. In this context, I examined the relationship between these practices and the representation of authority. Given my focus on sonic elements within the broader sensory atmosphere, I analyzed the festival's sensory aspects separately. This analysis leads me to propose that every detail of the festival formed part of a carefully orchestrated demonstration of power, with each element consciously designed to convey authority. In particular, the examined components were crafted to embody or reinforce contemporary notions of what constituted an ideal sultan.

The venue chosen for the festival was Atmeydanı, arguably the most historic and politically significant space in the city. A period-by-period analysis indicates that this choice was deliberate rather than incidental. Maintaining its importance from the Byzantine era through the Ottoman period and into the present day, Atmeydanı functioned both as a public space and a stage for imperial celebrations. This historical significance was reinforced by the festival, which brought together people from diverse nations and social classes under the gaze of the imperial order. Throughout the festivities, the Sultan conducted himself in ways that exemplified the qualities expected of him, presenting himself as generous, forgiving, just, and welcoming.

These and other festive elements together formed a tactical manifestation of power, transmitted through both senses and emotions. The festival engaged the visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory senses, while simultaneously eliciting emotions such as admiration, fear, awe, and excitement. Equally important to the festival's immediate impact was how it would be remembered and transmitted to subsequent generations. In this regard, the analysis of Ottoman authors, particularly the festival books, revealed a deliberately curated and biased account of the celebrations. The motivation behind these works, often produced under the supervision of the Sultan and his officials, or submitted for their approval, reflects the pervasive influence of power. As Emine Fetvacı notes, İntizami's *Sûrnâme* presents an idealized and controlled world in which the Sultan occupies the role of a generous and benevolent center, as if no problems existed within the palace or, more broadly, within his reign.[804]

The fourth and most extensive chapter of this dissertation was devoted to the sounds of the festival. Addressing the thesis' second key question, this chapter scrutinized the function and role of sound within the celebrations. Through a careful selection of sonic examples associated with different attributes of the Sultan, the research aimed to understand the intricate relationship between power and sound in an imperial spectacle. It is evident that the sonic atmosphere of Atmeydanı was dynamic and vibrant. This section first provided an overview of this auditory environment and highlighted significant sonorous examples, encompassing day and night sounds, the sounds of animals and mechanical devices, the sounds of people, and the musicians, with their diverse musical styles and functions during the festivities.

However, the festival's sounds and musical elements were not always perceived as beautiful; rather, their reception varied across different audiences. This variation is reflected in numerous contemporary narratives and formed the basis for analyses in the subsequent subsections of Chapter 4, which all examined the relationship between sound and power through focused case studies. The aim was to understand the impact of both real and imagined perceptions of sound on the sensory atmosphere of the festival.

The first case study explored the role of the military band, the *mehter,* at the 1582 festival and its connection to the powerful Sultan. This musical tradition had a longstanding standing association with the empire, as demonstrated by various examples discussed in this chapter. Yet the symbolic representation of the *mehter* was notably more intricate during the 1582

[804] FETVACI, 2013, p. 182.

festival than on other occasions. Performed loudly by numerous, and allegedly "masculine" instruments, the ensemble played a significant role in enhancing the Sultan's image, particularly as he had been criticized for lacking such qualities. As the symbol of the Sultan, the *mehter*'s loud and captivating presence was perceived as both "complex" and "discordant" by some, while inspiring awe in others. Moreover, the *mehter* served an important propagandistic function, attributing sanctity to the Sultan and acting as his representative voice, arguably countering contemporary doubts about his governance and leadership with its commanding and noisy presence.

The next case study focused on the so-called mountain model and examined how different festival narratives construct the perception of glory and magnificence. This example was selected after carefully consulting all festival narratives, which consistently highlight the mountain model as one of the most striking performances of the festival, both visually and sonically. The compelling aspect, however, was the significant variation in these descriptions, which differed not only in terms of appreciation but also regarding the specific components of the performance.

Analysis revealed a clear polarization in the narratives: Ottoman sources generally interpreted and reported the spectacle positively, emphasizing its impressiveness and success, while foreign accounts often presented contrasting evaluations. These discrepancies highlight the need to consider the context in which each narrative was produced, as well as the perspectives and expectations of their authors.

Moreover, understanding these differences requires attention to auditory and cultural factors. Variations in language, faith, and cultural background shaped how individuals experienced and interpreted the performance, influencing the transmission of their observations. In addition, the motivations of the authors, their intended audience, and the purposes behind their accounts significantly affected how the mountain model was recorded and remembered, ultimately shaping its place in the historical record.

Finally, the last section of Chapter 4 addressed the silence and silenced aspects of the 1582 festival, again highlighting the relationship between the Sultan, his voice, his speech, and power. Silence played a pivotal role at the Ottoman court and during the festivities, as historical accounts demonstrate its deliberate use as a powerful instrument both behind the palace walls and in public celebrations. In the lively and noisy atmosphere of the festival, the Sultan made his power felt precisely through his silence. Murad III remained the only static figure amidst this vitality, and his stillness emerged as a potent sensory and sonic tool of power—a mode of communication in its own right.

The Sultan's deliberate choice of silence not only demonstrated his authority but also shaped the narrative surrounding him. Indeed, the effect of silence often proved even more powerful than words, fulfilling a central criterion of the ideal sultan figure: otherworldliness, untouchability, and superior over all others. This analysis also extends to the silence within the festival narratives themselves. For example, the previously discussed festival books functioned as a carefully orchestrated display of power. What was silenced, whether particular groups of people or specific details deliberately omitted or overlooked, further exemplifies how power influenced both the narratives and the knowledge transmitted to future generations.

Given the ostensible purpose of the festival, the central figure should have been Prince Mehmed, since the celebrations were organized around his circumcision. However, a careful examination of all the festival accounts—particularly the Ottoman festival books—reveals relatively few narratives about the prince. The prince's procession is one of these rare mentions. This indicates that the 1582 festival was consciously constructed with Sultan Murad as "the most significant and visible performer". Accordingly, Murad, not Mehmed, emerges as the principal actor in this carefully orchestrated "arena for men".[805]

Stephan P. Blake, in his study of early Islamic ceremonies, also emphasizes the prominence of the sultan in Ottoman festivities, noting similarities and differences with the Safavid and Mughal empires. Even when festivities were ostensibly organized for the sultan's children, or other family members, they were primarily centered on the sultan himself.[806] This pattern is clearly visible in the 1582 festival and is particularly significant in the case of Sultan Murad. Many scholars interpret his insistence on foregrounding himself while marginalizing his son as a deliberate strategy to complete power. For instance, Sultan Murad ordered that Prince Mehmed's procession be performed alone, unlike usual, without any high-ranking administrator accompanying him. Levent Kaya Ocakaçan notes that Murad feared the janissaries might support Prince Mehmed against him. Thus, it can be argued that Sultan used this festival to demonstrate that he alone held authority.[807] Indeed, he designed an event in which he remained at the forefront, projecting his power even through silence and near invisibility.

In essence, this dissertation not only illuminated the grandeur of the 1582 Ottoman circumcision festival but also offered a nuanced exploration of the role of sound in imperial celebrations and its function in constructing a powerful sultan image. By bridging gaps in the

[805] FELEK, 2019, p. 161.
[806] BLAKE, 2017, pp. 100–104.
[807] OCAKAÇAN, 2018, pp. 61–62.

existing scholarly literature, it provides valuable insights into the intersection of politics, culture, and sensory experiences in the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the study examined the economic, social, and political structures of the late 16th century Ottoman Empire and, by extension, the ruling sultan. Demonstrating that the 1582 festival cannot be regarded merely as an entertaining celebration, this research contributes to our understanding of how power was represented and enacted at every stage and element of the festival. Its most significant contribution is the broader perspective it brings: while previous studies have primarily analyzed the festival in terms of musical performance, this dissertation considers music, noise, speech, and silence as integral components of its sonic atmosphere. Following this approach, the analysis demonstrates that the festival's sounds were far more than a peripheral element. Accordingly, the intent of this dissertation was to contribute to paving the way for musicology, history, and related cultural studies to evaluate early Ottoman music within a wider cultural and sonic context.

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