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FRAMING THE OTHER, FRAMING ONESELF: *LĀS/LĀZ* AND *ŞIRF /SİRF* IN THE EARLY OTTOMAN (PSEUDO-) HISTORICAL TEXTS**

Abstract: The goal of this paper is to contribute to the broader question of how producers of the early Ottoman (pseudo-) historical texts processed and interpreted the diversity of the ethno-political entities that Ottomans encountered during their European expansion (beginning around 1350). It address this issue by focusing on the specific case of Serbia and the Serbs. An examination of the contexts of Slavic words in relevant Arabographic texts produced before 1500, which are in some way linked to Serbia, demonstrates that *Lās/Lāz* and *Şırf/Sirf* were among the key concepts for narrative structuring, and it is these that will be the focus of the analysis. Although noted by modern historians, these two terms have usually been mentioned only in passing, treated as synonyms, and no attempts at comparison with other ethno-political entities have been made. I argue, first, that the continuous engagement with these constructs within the examined discourse indicates the unique prominence of late medieval Serbia in the Ottoman historical memory of the time. Second, I aim to show that these two terms were subject to changing interpretations by Ottoman (pseudo-) historians. These interpretations, as might be expected, varied in response to shifting political realities, but may also have been shaped by the poorly understood forms of agency exercised by both known and anonymous members of the Serbian/South Slavic nobility, who mediated between pre-Ottoman and emerging Ottoman conceptual and ideological frameworks.

Key words: Ottoman Arabographia, late medieval Serbian nobility, Serbs in the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman (pseudo-) historiography.

Анстракт: Овај рад настоји да допринесе проучавању ширег питања како су аутори раних османских (псеудо-) историјских текстова обрађивали и тумачили разноликост етнополитичких заједница са којима су се Османлије сусретале током

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европске експанзије која је почела око 1350. године. Питање се разматра кроз случај Србије и Срба. Преглед контекстâ словенских речи у релевантним арабографским текстовима насталим пре 1500. године, које су на неки начин повезане са Србијом, показује да су *Lās/Lāz* и *Şırf/Sirf* били међу појмовима кључним за обликовање наративâ, те ће они бити у фокусу анализе у овом раду. Иако познати савременим историчарима, ова два термина се најчешће помињу само успутно, третирају се као синоними, а поређења са другим етнополитичким ентитетима нису вршена. Овај рад, под један, заговара тезу да континуирана употреба ових конструката у разматраном дискурсу указује да је касносредњевековна Србија представљала нарочито значајну карику у развоју османског историјског сећања. Други циљ рада је да се покаже да су два термина били предмет променљивих тумачења од стране османских (псеудо-) историчара. Тумачења су, очекивано, варирала у складу са променама политичких околности, али се могу посматрати и као резултат слабо истражених, различитих облика утицаја анонимних и познатих припадника јужнословенског и српског племства у процесу усклађивања постојећих, пре-османских и настајућих, османских концептуалних оквира.

Кључне речи: Османска арабографија, касносредњевековно српско племство, Срби у османском царству, османска (псеудо-) историографија.

In the days following the Battle of Varna (November 10, 1444), one of the presumably talented literati from the circle of sultan Murād II (r. 1421–1444, 1446–1451) was ordered to compose a rhetorically powerful epistle proclaiming and celebrating the sultan's victory over the enemies of Islam. Written in Persian and addressed to Cihānşāh Mirzā (d. 1467), ruler of the Ḳaraḳoyunlu monarchy in Tabriz (1438–1467),[1] the document has been used in modern reconstructions of the events before and after the battle. Beyond its factual value, the epistle can also be viewed as a testimony to the kind of occasion, stylistic conventions, and types of information deemed worthy of representing the authority of one Muslim ruler before another in the 15th century. The letter opens with praise of God and Muḥammad, formulated so as to introduce both the main theme of the composition and the key concepts that

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[1] Whether the epistle was actually dispatched remains unclear, as the surviving version is riddled with errors made by a scribe cum calligrapher who was not always certain of the meaning of the words he transcribed. A part of the text of the epistle and a discussion about it is in Adnan Sadık Erzi, "Türkiye Kütüphānelerinde Notlar ve Vesikalar II", *Belleten* 14 (1950) 595–647, esp. 620–631; Another part of the epistle was published by Lájos Fekete, "Das Fethname über die Schlacht bei Warna (Zur Kritik Ferīdūns)", *Byzantinoslavica* 14 (1953) 258–270; Erzi noted that the preserved draft was also copied in two compilations of important (royal or otherwise) letters made by Ferīddūn Aḥmed Beg (d.1583, *Münşeʾātü ʾs-Selāṭīn*) and Sārı ʿAbdullāh Efendi (d. 1660-6, *Düstūrüʾl-inşāʾ*).

inform the rest of the text.[2] In this case, the concepts point to the principles of the divinely ordained Islamic socio-political order. Thus we see that the composer observed a well-established rule of the Islamic theory of eloquence (ar. ʿilmuʾl-balāġa).[3] This rule cut across pragmatic, didactic, and aesthetic literacy domains and textual genres, as well as linguistic boundaries within the late-medieval and early modern Arabographia,[4] which, in case of the early Ottoman society rested on three interacting languages: Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. It is reasonable to assume that Cihānşāh Mirzā was fully familiar with such conventions.

The epistle then turns to more dynamic circumstances of a specific historical context:

> And from the first rising of the glad tidings of the sultanate [...] *I* have exercised my sword [...] in scattering and confounding *the infidels* who are as low as the earth [...]. In every year and in every circumstance, *the victorious armies of Islam* have encountered sometimes *the pig-headed Albanians* (*Arnavūd-e ʿunūd*), while sometimes the host of believers have fought *the Vlachs who are full of hypocrisy* (*Aflāḳ-e por nifāḳ*). Sometimes they have settled accounts with *the contemptible infidels of Istanbul* (*kefere-ye Estānbūl-e maḫẕūl*), and sometimes opposed *the ill-omened Hungarians* (*ṭāʾife-ye Ongorūs-e manḥūs*), who are worshippers of idols, rejecters of the sacred texts and of the consensus, enemies of the religion of the Prophet and deniers of Muhammad's message. Sometimes they made treaties and agreements with *the wicked and debauched vagabonds* of *Karaman* (*Ḳaramān*), who in truth are *the highway-robbers of the religion of God* and *enemies of the men of faith*. [...] One of these divine victories and favours of the All Merciful was like this. [...][5]

Cihānşāh Mirzā could easily grasp the complexity of Murād II's holy wars from the number of actors invoked. He may also have known that *Ḳaramān*

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[2] For the summary, I used articles cited in fn 1. as well as the translation to English in: Colin Imber, *The Crusade of Varna, 1443–45*, Aldershot 2006, 189–195.

[3] The technical term for this stylistic tool is, in Ottoman parlance, *berāʿet-i istihlāl*. It can be tentatively translated as "a powerful/loud opening/first voice". See: Nasrullah Hacimüftüoğlu, "Berāat-i istihlâl", TDVIA online, accessed March 1, 2025.

[4] By Arabographia, I mean the practice of recording texts by the use of the Arabic script, as well as the smaller or larger corpuses of texts produced in this way.

[5] See C. Imber, *The Crusade of Varna*, 189–190. The italics and quotations of original phrases are mine. When quoting from published sources, I keep transliteration of the author/editor. When I consulted manuscripts, and these were mainly the available versions based on which published editions were made, I used the transliteration system of *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (for Turkish) and DMG (for Persian and Arabic). Discussion of variation in orthographic solutions is important, but is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper.

was a metonym for Ḳaramānid dynasty whose one member, Ibrāhīm II (1423–1464), then ruled this independent statelet (emirate, beylik) of central-south Anatolia, founded much before the Ottoman one. Whether or not he believed that the Ḳaramānids were "bad Muslims", he might have asked whether such accusations targeted Ibrāhīm II alone or his subjects as well. The "infidels of Istanbul" were famous all over Mediterranean and beyond, and would likewise have resonated with him. What remains to consider are the labels like *Arnavūd*, *Aflāḵ*, and *Ongorūs* which designate diverse *entities* cast as Murād II's opponents. The battle of Varna, described in the rest of the letter, was the latest one in an obviously long sequence. It can be argued that this part also reflects rhetorical convention more than factual reporting. But the date and the place of the battle are provided, and the two main villains are "named": *Ḳırāl-e Ongorūs* (the king of Hungary) and *Bābūs-e Manḥūs* (the ill-omened Pope).[6] The composer of the letter clearly invested some effort in fashioning them, along with *Arnavūd, Aflāḵ,* and *Ongorūs*, as negative figures. Yet these descriptions remain general, functional, and limited – sufficient only to mark them as enemies of the just Muslim ruler together with a group of Muslims.

This paper, however assumes that, for Murād II and his circle the, labels pointed out and their cognates carried meanings beyond the immediate rhetorical use. Within Ottoman society, and among the readers of Arabographic texts, they likely evoked condensed knowledge drawn form nearly a century of experience in observing, being engaged with and rationalizing the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Europe. Here I want to stress that "Ottoman" is not an analytical category but a descriptive shortcut. Who counted as "Ottoman" at a given time remains an overarching question. In line with this, one of the broader aims of this paper is to ask how we might explain to Cihānşāh Mirzā what exactly *Arnavūd, Aflāḵ,* and *Ongorūs* (all exonyms) signified for Murād II and what they had meant to his predecessors and successors. One certainty, which, however, demands emphasis, is that these groups were not perceived merely as undifferentiated infidels. At this time, Ottoman historical memory was far more layered than a simple Muslim-infidel binary suggests. Consider, for example, the context-sensitive term *Türk* – both endonym and exonym within Arabographia – which was not synonymous with *Muslim*. This raises the question: what combination of explicitly stated or discursively constructed features – language, ethnicity, statehood, subjecthood, or moral character – did such designations evoke in the Ottoman imagination, insofar as this can be reconstructed from surviving texts?

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[6] Fekete wants to read *Bābūs* as *Yanos* since the text is unvocalized. This would stand for Janos (Hunyadi), but Janos Hunyadi appears as Slavic-sounding *Yanḳū* in all Ottoman texts of the time.

The most obvious starting point for addressing this question are (pseudo-) historical texts and compositions,[7] though these should not be studied in isolation from other literacy genres of aesthetic or pragmatic literacy.[8] This paper draws on a wide survey of such material, focusing in particular on the references to the entity we today call "Serbs" and the land now known as "Serbia" – neither of which appears in the epistle. We know, however, that Murād II could have mentioned "Serbs" had he wished to provide Cihānşāh Mirzā with a fuller account of the events leading up to Varna. The issue is not whether he omitted them, but how he might have referred to them, to what extent his categories would overlap with ours, and why these overlaps and discrepancies matter.

To illustrate a gap, I provide the following fictional outline reconstructed from modern fact-focused historiography: Murād II could have described how a coalition of infidel forces (*a crusade*) disrupted his plan to retire after passing the throne to his (*second*) son, Meḥmed (*the Conqueror* [sic]). He might have noted that the retirement seemed possible following a peace-treaty with the (*Hungarians*, *the King Ladislaus*) in the summer of 1444 (*Treaty of Edirne and the Peace of Szeged*). He could have added that in 1439, he fought some infidels (*Serbs*) and seized their main fortress (*Smederevo*), forcing their (*Serbian Despot, Đurađ Branković, r. 1427–1456*) to withdaw to the large estates granted earlier to his predecessor (*Stefan Lazarević, knez 1389–1402, despot 1402–1427*) by the (*Hungarian*) crown. He might have explained that that this 1444 peace restored (*Đurađ*) as a semi-independent ruler paying tribute to (*himself, the Ottomans*). That the settlement included the release from captivity of the two sons of the (*despot*), (*Grgur and Stefan*), whom he had blinded after they plotted against him (*in 1441*) and this after being allowed

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[7] By "historical texts and compositions" I mean works that self-pronouncedly aim to address past events and occasionally contain historiographical elements. In Ottoman context, such works are often given titles that include the word *tārīḫ* ("history") or *tevārīḫ* ("histories"). The prefix *pseudo-* is used here to refer to a somewhat different category of texts that are not primarily historical in nature but nonetheless devote sections to particular events or are structured around a sequence of events.

[8] Arguably, the quoted epistle belongs at the intersection of pragmatic and aesthetic literacy. As another clearly pragmatic example from the same period featuring the similar labels, though with different connotations, one can quote a slave manumission deed, also issued by Murād II just after the abdication (between July November 1444). By this deed Murād II freed fifteen slaves who were captured in one of his (or his father's) holy wars and converted to Islam under his custody. The freed slaves were *Arnavudī* (5, Albanian?), *Bosnevī* (4, Bosnian?), *Sāsī* (2, German?), *Lāzī* (3, Serbian?), and *Eflākī* (1, Wallachian?). The deed was verified by Meḥmed bin Farāmurz (better known as Molla Hüsrev) appointed by Murād II's 12 year old son, the new sultan, as *kadı ʿasker* (millitary judge). Halil İnalcık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*, Ankara 1954, 215–217.

(*in 1439*) to control some parts of their exiled father's domain as vassals of (*the Ottomans*). And he might have emphasized that these two were brothers of his (*Orthodox Christian, Serbian*) wife (*Mara Branković, ca. 1420–1487; bethroted in 1431, married in 1435*).

In reconstructing similar outlines, the fact-focused modern historiography has been, comparatively, the most eager to consult sources in a wide variety of languages in search of hard data. The source material sholars use is often shared with disciplines like philology or historical linguistics, which, while invaluable, often deal with words and discourses in *a language* interacting with another one, rather than paying attention to socio-political aspects and historical embeddedness of the interactions among concrete actors. The terms I italicized are more or less standard in modern surveys, but I put them in brackets to warn that these are the products of accumulated knowledge. Besides, by nature of their work, historians are often forced to engage with translation and transliteration which imply a specific kind of decision making about *the correct* names of places, people, and institutions in *a language* chosen to adequately serve the intended audience. It goes without saying that interpretation is key to these procedures as well.[9] Ottoman Arabographers, of course, engaged in comparable processes, but within a multilingual environment that required constant negotiation and management. This being an understudied reality, the modern fact-focused narratives often obscure the original, context-sensitive processes of meaning-making. Labels for ethno-political entities reflecting the perceptions of diversity on the ground, are too often treated as self-explanatory, a presumption this paper challenges. The heteroglossia of the texts under examination has generally been neglected. For example, the fact that most of the "foreign" words in Ottoman historical texts, when viewed in their entirety, often "sound Slavic", has not been considered significant.

My survey of (pseudo-) historical Arabographic texts produced before 1500 focused on South Slavia[10] shows that the semantic profiles of words relatable to the region are immediately transparent only in case of toponyms (like *Smederevo* as a name of a fortress), whereby one needs to be careful even with

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[9] For example, Imber would not be wrong had he chosen "obstinate" when translating *Arnavūd-e ʿunūd*. Instead he has chosen equally correct "pig-headed" which, however, may carry a different tone than the former solution depending on the reader's sensibilities. Further: the translation of *Eflāk* as "Vlach" (rather than "Wallachians", which is more commonly used in recent historiography) is arguably more sensitive to the philological issue of word origin. "Vlach" probably entered Ottoman discourse via (Old) Church Slavonic word for "Roman", "a speaker of Romance language".

[10] A version of the database resulting from this survey can be found at https://zenodo.org/records/17115048.

personal names and titles. As is well known, this does not mean that the discourse was not structured and that the Ottoman historians or scribes were constantly "making mistakes."[11] Importantly, terms most immediatly relatable to Serbs and Serbia, *Lās/Lāz* and *Ṣırf/Sirf* (and less often *Serf* and *Sarf*), emerge as key concepts Ottoman Arabographers used for narrative structuring in the period observed. Modern historians know these terms but usually treat them in passing and as straightforward synonyms. I argue, however, that this was not always the case and that the ways in which they were used at the level of the whole discourse carry broader implications which I will try to explain.

My analysis of these designations and their contexts also keeps in view that the immediate producers of such texts were not the only agents shaping them, nor can their audiences be defined solely by the languages of composition. It is enough to recall the many captives taken in Ottoman wars against "infidels". Many learned Turkish under new social and political conditions, becoming "Ottomans" of a sort. Some were in a position to read or hear Ottoman (pseudo-) historical texts evoking the ethno-political entities they used to belong and/or belonged to, and some perhaps contributed to their production. The key question, therefore, that emerges from this paper and that invites further research is: how can we know whether they and other non-native speakers of Turkish, Arabic, or Persian left an active or passive imprint on the emerging Ottoman conceptual frameworks – and, even more importantly, how can we demonstrate that they did not? Before I turn to these questions, I will explain how the existing literature informs this paper.

A Historical Confluence and the Historiographical Rifts

When the Ottomans crossed the Dardanelles around 1350, they moved from Asia Minor into the Balkan peninsula, a region they called *Rūm-ili*, "the land of the Romans (in Europe)." By then it was clear that the Ottomans had established an ambitious polity. The crossing also exposed them to new patterns of ethno-linguistic diversity. Were the Balkans in general, and South Slavia in particular analogous to more familiar Greko-Byzantine continuum in this respect? Could familiar categories be applied, or did the Ottomans need to

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[11] Understandably, the various aspects of the observed texts have been well studied by modern scholars. The references to some foundational works are cited throughout the paper. Copyists are often "blamed" by historians for corrupt transcriptions of words from languages "foreign" to Ottoman Arabographers (for, from all we know, there has been no transliteration in production of early Arabographic texts). On a different note, Slavic is a language which has not been studied in the historical departments of the Republic of Turkey, something which is obvious in many published editions of texts.

learn new ways of describing and governing? These questions intersect with the evolving meaning of being "Ottoman" in the 14th and 15th centuries.

In South Slavia – a geo-linguistic region divided among independent and semi-independent polities – Ottoman territorial expansion brought about major political transitions. Modern South-Slavic historiographies, framing these transitions as a sequence of "conquests", tend to privilege outcomes over processes.[12] Their interpretations echo the surviving testimonies of literate contemporaries, who sought to rationalize the ill fate of the Christians. Contemporary South Slavic commentaries, mostly authored by churchmen, depict Christian polities as weakened by internal strife and unable to resist Ottoman incursions. One by one, these polities reached a point of no return – typically following catastrophic battles in which much of the aristocracy, the pillars and ideologues of statehood, were decimated. At each turning point, clerical authorities focused on preserving the integrity of the Church and the Christian flock in the time of crisis. South-Slavic historical texts – understood as compositions structured around dated events – appear from the mid-14th century, with the crucial caveat that the extant examples are mainly of Serbian provenance. Combined with other Cyrillic literary texts (monuments of the national literature) and documentary texts (witnessing the statehood just lost), these annals (sr. *letopisi*) are mainly used for reconstructing sequences of events leading to the "falls" of the late medieval states, and occasionally to explore the attitudes of the conquered toward their conquerors.[13]

From the Ottoman side, modern historians have tended to consult these Cyrillic sources only for factual data. When juxtaposed with Ottoman historiography, Christian ways of recording history are usually observed through Greco-Byzantine models. Slavic ideas and developments are explained away as derivative.[14] A

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[12] This is slowly changing. See, for example, historiographical discussions in Oliver Jens Schmitt ed., *The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans: interpretations and research debates*, Wien 2016.

[13] See, for example, the three installments of Ivan Dujčev, "La Conquete Turque et la Prise de Constantinople dans la Litterature Slave Contemporaine", *Byzantinoslavica* 14 (1953) 14–54, and 16 (1955) 318–329, and 17 (1956) 276–340; Dušan Korać & Radivoj Radić, "Mehmed II, 'the Conqueror', in Byzantine Short Chronicles and Old Serbian Annals, Inscriptions and Genealogies", *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 45 (2008) 289–300. Novel and valuable is a discussion found in Александар З. Савић, "'Незнабошци дођоше у достојање твоје' (Пс 8, 1): Идентите и другост у српском политичком дискурсу епохе османских освајања", in: *Политички оквири колективних идентитета: Сведочанства српског средњовековља*, Смиља Марјановић-Душанић et al., eds, Београд 2024, 77–114.

[14] I have made a similar and other observations relevant for this discussion, with different concerns, but based on the there cited primary sources and secondary literature in Marijana Mišević, "An Episode 'the Rise' of Ottoman Multilingualism", in: *Formation and circulation of knowledge in the Ottoman Empire: A connected and transcultural history of Ottoman Muslim and Orthodox communities*, ed. by Hasan Çolak, Syracuse University Press, forthcoming 2025.

degree of the Byzantine influence on Ottoman socio-political thought has also been noted, but mainly in relation to the period after the conquest of Constantinople (1453) when Ottomans had gained the "imperial" confidence, when the empire had truly and irrevocably "risen", and when it started competing with other empires with universalistic pretensions.[15] Yet before 1453 the Ottomans had already conquered a wide area of the South Slavic dialect continuum, building their state on the ruins of not only Byzantine, but Bulgarian and Serbian empires as well. By prevailing consensus, however, South Slavic conceptual frameworks had no significant influence on Ottoman ideas and practices.

This consensus is reinforced by a particular reading of Ottoman sources. The Ottoman literate elite in general, and (pseudo-) historiographers in particular transpire as almost exclusively interested in the immediacy of the building of Ottoman institutions and the process of "melting" in what was to become the imperial pot, and thus generally unconcerned with pre-Ottoman realities and socio-linguistic diversity on the ground. The Ottomanists dealing with the investigations of the "originally Ottoman" political theory have traced its origin to the early 15th century, though its mature, so-called "classical" form has been mainly reconstructed based on 16th-century sources discussing the ideal world order (tr. *nizām-ı ʿālem*). According to this theory "ethnicity" mattered when it comes to domestic slaves only,[16] and this because slaves of

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[15] This confidence manifested itself, first and foremost through adoption of non-Islamicate titles by the rulers and the implied appropriation and adaptation of Byzantine legacy, the interest in "Greek knowledge", cosmopolitanism of the court and government which gathered people of numerous linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as an increasing reliance on converted slaves (kul and/or devshirme) who were staffing the standing military forces. All of these trends are considered landmarks of the second rule of Meḥmed II (1444–1446; 1451–1481), sustained, with more or less zeal, by his immediate heir, Bāyezīd II (1481–1512).

[16] Summarizing Kınalızāde ʿAlī's (d. 1572) conception of a "king as a physician" (itself relying on "The Nasirean Ethics" from the 13th century, known also to Ottoman Aḥmed Amāsī in early 15[th]century, and Tursun Bey, the chronicler, in the late 15th century), Gottfried Hagen, for example, writes: "[...] the socio-political order is divinely ordained and therefore largely beyond human influence. Humans may disrupt or upset the order, but it is not their calling to establish it; in other words, there is only one form of social order, not diferent ones for diferent states or periods. Secondly, social groups and government are universal categories and in no way specific to any culture or nation, just as cultural, ethnic, religious or other diferences among the subjects are not part of the theory, not even the distinction between nomads and sedentary folk so pervasive in other theories. On this level of abstraction, the author does not even need to theorise the legal distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims, and diferences of ethnicity are of interest only when it comes to domestic slaves." Gottfried Hagen, "The order of knowledge, the knowledge of order: Intellectual life", in: *The Cambridge history of Turkey*, Vol. 2, *The Ottoman Empire as world power, 1453–1603*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi & Kate Fleet, Cambridge 2013, 407–456, 437. The same passage is cited in a book entirely

different origin had to be managed differently within the household due to their various (character) traits. The languages did not matter either, since, by default, the slaves had to learn Turkish at least.

When it comes to Arabographic (pseudo-) historical texts before ca. 1500, the general concensus seems to have been that "genuinely Ottoman" historiography "emerged" in the late 15th century – with the appearance of comparably elaborate and detailed (dominantly prose) narratives in (simple) Turkish solely dedicated to the history of the Ottoman dynasty. A lot of effort has been invested in explaining the discrepancies and overlaps among different story-lines, tracing the intertextual connections, etc. The most influential source critiques have demostrated that these texts were admixtures of older written compositions, some of which were lost already in the late 15th century,[17] eye-witness accounts and orally transmitted information. More or less successfully, scholars went on to identify these segments in what has survived.[18] The provenance of the smaller narrative fragments (elite, popular, court-sponsored, produced by anonymous singers of epics and story-tellers) or information that stands out as unique is not always solved or commented upon.[19] The instability of the corpus – multiple

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dedicated to Ottoman political though, which I used to write this paragraph: Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, Leiden 2007, 90 and *passim.*

[17] Halil Inalcık and Victor L. Menage have been the chief authorities in he studies of "the rise of Ottoman historiography". These two scholars, among other things, delineated what is to be considered reliable histori(ographi)cal text, and what is of secondary value from the perspective of the recontruction of the history as events and Ottoman political ideology. They also argued for the existence of two, ideologically distinct textual traditions, remaining unchallenged until recently. See: Halil İnalcık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography", in: *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis & Peter M. Holt, London 1962, 152–167; Victor L. Menage, "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography", in: *Historians of the Middle East*, 168–179; Victor L. Ménage, *A Survey of the Early Ottoman Histories, with Studies on Their Textual Problems and Their Sources*, 2 vols. (doctoral dissertation, University of London, 1961); Murat Cem Mengüç, *A Study of 15th-Century Ottoman Historiography* (doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2008).

[18] Positive example is Dimitri J. Kastritsis, ed. and transl, *An early Ottoman history: the Oxford Anonymous chronicle (Bodleian Library, Ms Marsh 313)*, Liverpool 2017.

[19] Besides that, the chronicles whose composers are not known (known as "anonymous chronicles"), for example, are commonly treated as being close to the voice of the populus. The case of the manuscript known as *Oxford Anonymous 313* (see Ibidem, 1–11) which was in actuality meant to be submitted to the court, is a good example of how relative, pre-16th century simplicity of Turkish can be misleading in terms of audience intended and the sites of usage of a text. Anonymous chronicles in their extant form are sometimes described as aiming to entertain the wider, illiterate populace through oral performance. Another argument related to chronicles is that some of these voiced the opposition of the centralizing efforts of the dynasty. These voices, however, never go openly against the ruling sultan and the legitimacy of the dynasty as a whole is never questioned. In other words, it is not impossible that most of these texts were produced by and for the elite which pursued two goals: formulating its *memory of the past* and developing *it's* Turkish language for the purpose.

redactions of similar contents and scattered unique fragments – has been acknowledged but not systematically explored. Overall, the conventional treatments of narrative corpuses remain bounded by language and script.

When it comes to combining historical texts with pragmatic administrative documents on the one hand, and interpreting the ways in which Ottomans perceived ethno-linguistic and ethno-political diversity on the other, a model developed by Halil İnalcık remains foundational. İnalcık was among the first historians who clearly demonstrated that early Ottoman governors were not merely a predatory force bent on territorial acquisition.[20] Using early census records (*taḥrīr defters*), he showed that sultans pursued "methods of gradual conquest". These included intimidation, vassalage, incorporation, and finally the introduction of a stable bureaucratic and judicial system, often with the cooperation of local medium and petty nobility.[21] Parallel to all these phases, the process of the Islamization took place, first in Asia Minor, and then in the Balkan peninsula. Most consequential conversions to Islam were those of the powerful local magnates and their entourages, after which the conversion of wider local groups would ensue.[22] These same methods were applied all until the territorial expansion was possible.

İnalcık's goal was thus to identify common principles underlying diverse cases, rather than to emphasize diversity. But how did the Ottomans themselves conceive of the entities subjected to these "methods"? Were they states, peoples, or particular social groups? İnalcık devoted much of his writing to "Greeks" within Ottoman society, apparently the first "Europeans" to become

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[20] In 1954, İnalcık follows Nicolae Jorga along these lines, adding his own qualifications, as well as Ladislas Hadrovics who, in 1945, wrote a book dedicated to the history of Serbian church under the Ottoman rule. See Halil İnalcık, "Stefan Dušan'dan Osmanlı Imparatorluğuna", in: idem, *Fatih devri. Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*, Ankara 1954, 139.

[21] Halil İnalcık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest", *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954) 103–129. Ottoman judicial system was based on state-wide applied sharia and sultanic will expressed through orders (*fermāns*), whereby local nuances and customs were recognized in the law-codes (*ḳānūn*s and *ḳānūn-nāmes*) usually accompanying local tax registers. Also, in the early period after the conquests, Ottomans behaved rather conservatively when it comes to local institutions, administrative divisions and customs, especially if an area was conquered by surrender. See, for example, Halil İnalcık, "Greeks in Ottoman Economy and Finances 1453–1500", in: idem, *Essays in Ottoman History*, Istanbul 1998, 379–389. The prevailing interpretation is that the Ottomans provided political stability and just governance, reduced the tax burden on the peasantry, and granted tax exemptions or privileges to entire corporate groups that cooperated with the new regime.

[22] Köse Mihal, a Greek from Asia Minor who rode with ʿOsmān I, being the first known example and the most quoted model. The Islamization was not forced on free non-Muslims, but rather, induced by the new authorities.

part of its fabric.[23] Alongside Italians, Jews, and Serbs, Greeks largely remain self-explanatory in his works. Terms such as the "(Old) Serbian state" and "Serbia" (*Sırbistan*) appear in his well-known article on Christian *timariots*. In the same place, İnalcık offers a footnote with guidelines on Ottoman terminology that seems to cut across both administrative and narrative genres:

> Ottomans, for the most part, named *a country* [or region; province] *they first came into contact with* (tr. ilk temasa geldikleri bir memleket) by using the name or title of the ruler of that country at the time. In this way, the compounds like Kostandin-ili, Şişman-ili (Bulgaristan), Laz-ili (Sırbistan), Kıral-ili (Bosna), Hersek-ili, Lukaç-ili (in Bosna), Karli-ili were formed. These names, in general, reveal to us the names of *the first tributary lords of these lands* (tr. bu memleketlerin haracgüzar olan ilk beylerinin isimlerini ifşa etmektedir). The names of regions in Albania strongly support this hypothesis: Balşa-ili, nāhiyet-i Bogdan Ripe, vilāyet-i Pavlo Kurtik, nāhiyet-i Kondo Miho, Yuvan-ili […][24]

One detail a careful reader may notice is that none of İnalcık's examples concern Greek-speaking areas; Grecophone Europe was, as noted, *Rūm-ili* to the Ottomans. While İnalcık's main point is clear, glossing *Lāz-ili* (the land of Laz[ar Hrebeljanović]) as "Serbia" is somewhat reductive. After all, was not Kostandin-ili (the land of Kostantin Dejanović, an Ottoman vassal after 1371) also some form of "Serbia" before the rise of knez Lazar? Perhaps İnalcık meant "*Lāz-ili* in Serbia," but then – where exactly was this land, and who spoke for it?

Of trajectories of Slavic/Serbian speakers in the Ottoman state before 1500, we can mainly speak in general terms only. It is well-established that in the late 14th and throughout the 15th centuries, many members of the late-medieval South-Slavic aristocratic and noble families were affected by or actively involved in Ottoman expansionist politics and state-building.[25] These individuals have generally been treated as mediators in the Ottoman takeover: more or less willing but relatively loyal followers of Ottoman policies, eventually serving

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[23] See, for example, Halil İnalcık, "Mutual Political and Cultural Influences between Europe and the Ottomans", in: *Ottoman Civilization*, Vol. 2, ed. Halil İnalcık & Günsel Renda, Istanbul 2002, 1058–1065.

[24] H. İnalcık, "Stefan Duşan'dan", fn. 91, 159. The second part of the compound, *il*, means "land, country". The italics are mine. Note below how the case of *Lāz* as reflected in historical texts squares with this proposal.

[25] Heath Lowry most famously made this observation in 2003, but limited his analysis to proving that these people were not "only Turks", i.e. that some of the highest Ottoman officials were of Greek and Slavic noble origin during the period of the rise. These have all been long known facts well before Lowry's systhematic study, the main aim of which was to establish a counterpart of the notorious "Wittek's thesis" and its scholarly derivatives. See, Heath W. Lowry, *The nature of the early Ottoman state*, Albany 2003.

as guardians of their old privileges and beneficiaries of material assets acquired through engagement with Ottoman affairs. Their cultural and intellectual influence at the Ottoman court, and in society more broadly, has typically been interpreted in historiography as adaptation and integration following a more or less radical break with the literate and literary traditions in which they had originally participated. Scholarly attention has so far been dedicated to some prominent individuals who ended up becoming members of the sultanic household and whose trajectories and biographies are relatively well-known, the most famous and only examples being Mara Branković and Maḥmūd Pasha (Angelović).[26] As these cases show, Serbian noble families were often ethno-linguistically mixed, and some members were educated or literate before joining circles close to the sultan.[27] It is therefore plausible that, over time, individuals familiar with local written traditions beyond the Arabographic corpus transmitted knowledge derived from these traditions.[28] Maḥmūd Pasha, alongside Meḥmed II, became a major patron of Ottoman (pseudo-) historians in the mid- and late 15th century. The question is not whether he knew about the Serbian and Greek past, but rather how we are to interpret the (in) significance of this fact.

Constructing the *Lāz* in a Universal History

A common starting point in discussions of early Ottoman historiography is Aḥmedī's *İskendernāme* (d. 1413), a versified encyclopedia that includes a section devoted to the Ottoman dynasty and its *gāzī* sultans. Although some copies omit the Ottoman section, the work quickly became a classic among Ottoman readers and influenced later chroniclers. Notably, it contains no dates.[29]

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[26] Михаило Ст. Поповић, *Мара Бранковић*, Београд 2014; Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)*, Leiden 2001; Tatjana Katić, "Mahmud Pasha's Origins and the Angelović Family in the Light of New Evidence", *Initial. A Review of Medieval Studies* 12 (2024) 197–207.

[27] In case of Mara Branković who remained Christian, there is no doubt about this. From all we know, Maḥmūd Pasha (Angelović) was enslaved as a child, and chances that he was literate at the time are probably lean. Nevertheless, his Christian mother and brother of noble Greco-Serbian origin remained in his vicinity. Arabographic "legend of Mahmud Pasha" portrays him as a smart young man versed in Christian theology.

[28] For my consideration of this issue on the example of Konstantin Mihajlović who is still mistakenly treated as a janissary, see M. Mišević, "An Episode in "the Rise" of Ottoman Multilingualism".

[29] *İskendernāme* is a narrative poem (*mesnevī*) written in Turkish. It is an encyclopedic work featuring the exploits of Alexander the Great (Alexander III of Macedon, 336 B.C. – 323 B.C.) as a leitmotif and organizing principle. Is is interspersed with discourses on theology,

Aḥmedī narrates Ottoman history by tracing the dynasty's succession and briefly describing each ruler's exploits.

I will return to this work later, for there are good reasons to believe that the first Ottoman attempts to record their history took the form of tables (tr. *cedvel*) of back-dated events with short descriptions. These tables were part of the so-called "royal calendars" (tr. *taḳvīms*), the earliest extant example of which dates to 1421, during the reign of Meḥmed I (1413–1421).[30] The calendars themselves were annual almanac-prognostications, containing astronomical, astrological, and calendric material prepared by court astrologers at the turn of each solar year.[31] The genre was adopted from the wider medieval Islamic tradition, probably via other beyliks. Produced annually by different individuals, the tables show striking similarities in periodization and event selection, suggesting reliance on shared templates. Their audience seems to have been limited to the court, as the completed calendars were dedicated and presented to the sultan, possibly also to princes. Each new list built on its predecessors. As long as the lists were embedded in the prognostication calendars, they were updated with recent events.[32] While developments of the moment considered *major* were known to all compilers, the selection of details seems to have depended on individual access to information and personal interest.[33] There are also indications that lists of events – derived from or modeled on these tables – circulated independently, perhaps produced outside courtly circles.

The oldest extant calendar from 1421, was produced in Persian.[34] The table starts with the Creation (of Adam), and continues with the history of the pre-

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mysticism, philosophy, geography, medicine, astronomy, and history. The text is unstable, the longest version containing 8754 couplets. It was dedicated to Süleymān Çelebi (Emīr Süleymān, d. 1411), a son of Bāyezīd I. See Aḥmedī. *İskender-nāme : inceleme, tıpkıbasım*, ed. İsmail Ünever, Ankara 1983; Ahmedi, *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids Against the Infidels*, ed. Kemal Sılay, Cambridge, MA 2004.

[30] That is 824. The other known examples are from 835 (1432), 843 (1439), 848 (1444), 850 (1446), 855 (1451), 856 (1452), 858 (1454). See: Osman Turan, *Oniki hayvanlı Türk takvimi*, Istanbul1941; idem, *İstanbul'un Fethinden Önce Yazılmış Tarihî Takvimler*, Ankara 1954; Nihal Atsız, "Fatih Sultan Mehmed'e Sunulmuş Tarihi Bir Takvim", *İstanbul Enstitüsü Dergisi* III (1957) 17–23; idem, *Osmanlı Tarihine ait takvimler I*, Istanbul 1961; idem, "Hicrī 858 Yılına Ait Takvim", *Selçuklu Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4 (1975) 223–28; Victor L. Ménage, "The 'Annals' of Murād II", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39/3 (1976) 570–584; idem, "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography", 168–79.

[31] Tunç Şen, *Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognosticatıon, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s–1550s* (doctoral dissertation, Chicago University, 2016), esp.16.

[32] Of the later examples, I checked the table in MS Esad Efendi 1978 for the year 915 (1510), and dedicated to Aḥmed bin Bāyezīd II; and the table in MS BNF Turc 182 for the year 982 (1575). They do not contradict what stands for the early 15th century examples (see below).

[33] Remarks such as "on this side" imply a perspective from either Europe or Asia Minor, and often introduce events specific to one region, revealing editorial choices about what deserved to be remembered.

Islamic prophets (as interpreted in Islam), life of Prophet Muhammad, the period of the four caliphates, and then, skipping the Umayyads, the period of the Abbasids. It then moves through the lives of the founders of the Mevlevī Sufi order and various events in Asia Minor and Middle East involving Turkic lords, to end with the "enthronement" of the Ḳaramānoğlu ʿAlī Beg which took place three years before, that is in 1418. Next two sections detail the history of the Seljuqs from the early beginnings until ca. 1295 and then history of the Ḳaramān state from the foundation until, again, 1418. Finally, there is a section with events concerning the Ottomans, starting with "the appearance" (per. *horūğ*) of ʿOs̱mān, his conquests etc. It is in this table that we find the earliest extant occurrence of the term *Lās*, in an entry which reads:

> From the time [of the attack; of the appearance of; the bid for power by] *Lās* and the late Murād Beg's martyrdom and the enthronement of his son Bāyazīd Ḫān and the conquest of the province of Ṣāruḫān, 34 years have passed.[35]

The scholar who first published this text in Persian, and translated it to modern Turkish, applies different solutions for the word *horūğ* in two structurally same phrases *horūğ-e ʿOsmān* and *horūğ-e Lās*, making it sound as two completely different concepts: "appearance," or more precisely "a bid for political power" in case of ʿOs̱mān, and "attack" in case of *Lās*. The word having the multiple meanings, the connotation obviously depends on the readers preferences and knowledge. In any case *Lās* here obviously stands for *a person* who perhaps did the same foundational thing as ʿOsmān did (attack?) while founding an independent state, and who, undoubtedly had to do something with the martyrdom of Murād (Beg, Murād I /Muraad I/, r. 1362-1389). When *Lās* is observed in the context of the whole section, several important details come to the fore: the first European *location* mentioned is (the town of) Gelibolu – as an object of conquest (per. *fath*); (after killing his brother) Meḥmed I took over "the governance" together with the control of the "*velāyet-e Rūm*" which here, most probably, stands for all the lands the sultan controlled; in the entry for the year 1418, the second *location* in Europe is

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[34] This fact, combined with an observation that this is the only example of a table mentioning the plague in Karasi (region, principality?) which occured in 1348-9 (749), may be an indication that Ottoman calendar makers took over some chain of events found in the texts produced in other beyliks of Asia Minor, Ḳaramān being another good candidate, next to Karasi. N. Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler*, 25; T. Şen, *Astrology in the Service of the Empire*, 286.

[35] Az gāh-e horūğ-e Lās va šahīd šodan marḥūm Morād Bek va ğolūs-e pasaraš Bāyazīd Ḫān va fatḥ-e valāyat-e Ṣāruḫān si va čahar salast. [34 years ago, that is the hijri 790, started on 12.01.1388), N. Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Takvimler*, 26.

mentioned: after crossing *the Danube river* (per. *Āb-e Ṭūna*), Meḥmed I fights *a group*, the *Aflāḳ*, while his army pillaged *parts of the* (Wallachian) *territory* (per. *baʿżī zemīn-e Aflāḳ*). In this way, *Lās* stands out in this composition as the only *person* having some sort of agency in Europe until 1421, and there is no indication his land was "conquered" around the year 790/1388.[36] Despite the fact that the enlisting of the event of *horūǧ* of *Lās* could be read as a mere boost of sultan-centric view, this is still a detail worth noting. Even more if we know that the tables in question described only events considered crucial in the larger scheme of things, that is—a selective view of the world history in which Ottoman sultans were contextualized as rulers among the important predecessors – *and peers*, *Lās* being one of them. Intertextuality between chronological tables and late 15th century narratives has been a subject of investigation, mainly for the sake of understanding the latter. What matters to me here, however, is that the tables chronologically preceeded these narratives. Before reviewing other extant examples, I will return to Aḥmedī.

Aḥmedī (around 1410) introduces the Ottoman actions in Europe by relating that already because of Orḫān, "pandemonium had befallen *Lāz*, and earthquakes the realms of *Üngürüs*". *Laẓ* here, apparently stands for either a group or a land, in paralel with *Üngürüs*, and is an anachronism (which will be taken over from Ahmedī by all historians who used his work), for during Orḫān's rule, Lazar was not a political factor. Orḫān then sent his son Süleymān to what is understood to be Europe, referenced by a dubious, apparently invented toponym *İsreyaḳa* (tr. the other side), to wage holy war and conquer "states, cities, and regions." When Süleymān died, and then Orḫān, Murād (I) also went to *İsreyaḳa* with the same purpose. After a long excursus of pedagogical value, we find Murād who, having conquered the whole of *Rum-ili* (the land of Greeks), coveted *Lāz* (a land, a country).[37] All infidels and Christians living "until the [border with the] west" joined their armies with those of *Lāz* (a person).[38] Murād fights *Lāz* and dies as a martyr. In the careers of Bāyezīd I and Emir Süleymān, *Lāz* (either as a person, country, or a collective) played no role.

In 1414, ʿAbdu'l-vāsiʿ (fl. 817/1414–1415) finished his *Ḫalīl-nāme*.[39] In his account of the event known as battle of Çamurlu, we learn that, when

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[36] The original literary and liturgical texts for the praise and veneration of Knez Lazar of Serbia, who was canonized as a saint soon after his death were produced between 1389 and 1420, i.e. when his son Stefan Lazarević (knez 1389–1402, despot 1402–1427) ruled Serbia parallel to the reign of Bāyezīd I, the Interregnum (1402–1413), and the reigns of Meḥmed I (1413–1421), and Murād II (1421–1451).

[37] Ahmedi, *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage* , 7 and 17–18.

[38] Gebr ü tersā ġarba degin her ne var Lāza leşker virbidiler bīşümār.

[39] *Ḫalīl-nāme* is also a *mes̱nevī*, combined with ghazals and qasidas, totalling 3693 couplets. This is the only known composition by the author. The main theme is the life of the Prophet İbrāhīm

Meḥmed I came to Europe, prince Mūsā was already ruling "on the other side". Meḥmed reaches *Lāz* and *Eflāḳ*, and "wanders around in harsh conditions", to eventually "charm" these two (collectives? persons?) into submission. Eventually, Meḥmed "became Sultan again in his own province", and:

> Just so did our king, Sultan Meḥmed, A true proof of the Muḥammadan religion, Meḥmed, Arrive and take the borderlands like the Mahdī. He took the lands (tr. il) of *Rūm*, *Lāz* and *Ūlġār*. The *Firenk*, *Eflāḳ* and *Sirf* and *Engürüs*, The *Ḳıfçāḳ* and *Tātār* and *Ūrūs*, He charmed into submission. Begs came to meet him. The Byzantine Emperor, a consul, and their betters. Along with them they brought there every day, Loads of gold and silver coins on beasts of burden.[40]

Sirf here stand as *a group* whose connection (grammatical, semantic) with land of the *Lāz* is not established. This can be due to ignorance, but also due to knowledge that the group designated by *Sirf* lived divided among different political units. Or it can be an element of a rhetorical device. Nevertheless, it is important to note that around 1414, some Arabographers had the idea of the "Serbs" or "Serbianness" which does not appear in the table from the calendar dated to 1421, nor in the five extant examples (all written in Turkish) from the reign of Murād II.

In the first of these, from 1431 (835), *Lās* is still *a person* and did a *horūğ*, in an entry similar to the one from 1421. The rest of the entry on the year 790 is the same. Murād II conquers whole of Rūmeli in 1422 (825) after a battle with the false pretender to the throne, and in 1426 (830), *Lās-vilāyeti* (the province of *Lās*) is conquered. The table for 1439 (843) gives 1389 (791) as the year of Murād I's martyrdom, but there is no mention of *Lās*, although some

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(Abraham), from birth until death. Two versions of the work assumed to have existed based on the extant copies. Specific sections diverting from the main theme are: A section (53 couplets) dedicated to the reasons for writing; A "historical" section (193 couplets) focused on the battle (of Çamurlu) fought between Meḥmed I (Çelebi Sultan Meḥmed, r. 1413–1421) and his brother, (Prince) Mūsā (d. 1413). This section is absent in some versions of the work; A section (567 couplets) narrating the ascension (ar. *miʿrāj*) of Prophet Muhammad into heaven where he greeted the earlier prophets and then spoke to God in a miraculous night journey. This section is preceded by an exposition on the descendants of Abraham, Muhammad being one of them. Abdülvasi Çelebi, *Halilname*, ed. Ayhan Güldaş, Ankara1996; Translation to English of the historical part is in Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of: 1402–1413*, Leiden 2007, 221–232.

[40] This is the translation by Kastrisis, but I inserted the original names of the entities mentioned based on SK Microfilm 2677 (copy of MS Dāru'l Kutubi'l-Miṣriyyā T 82). The original reads as follows: Nitekim şāhumuz sulṭān Muḥammed/Muḥammed dinine bürhan Muḥammed/ Varup Mehdī gibi Ucātı ṭutdı/ Bu Rūm u Lāz u Ulġar ilin utdı/Firenk Eflāḳ u Sırf u Engürüsi/ Dahı Ḳıfçāḳ u Tatar u Urusi/ Müsaḫḫar ḳıldı ḳarşu geldi begler/ Tekür u Gencelüsi dahı yigler/ Araya yükler ile aḳçe altun/Getürdiler ṭaşınur şöyle her gün.

other entries overlap with the table from 1422. *Lās-vilāyeti* is here conquered in 1427 (831) together with its fortresses.[41] 1437 (841) is the year when the fortress of *Semendire* (Smederevo) was conquered, and that is the last entry in this table.

The last two calendars from Murād II's time are those for the years 1444 (848) and 1446 (850) and they use the appelation of *Lāz*. In the 1444 one, the entry on *ḫurūc* (tr.) and its consequence is reintroduced. Meḥmed I crosses the Danube into *Eflāk* in the same way like before. The entries on European affairs in the early reign of Murād II start with the death of *Lāz oġlı* (the son of *Lāz*) in 1428–29 (832), and the conquest of *Güğercinilik* (calque of sl. *Golubac*) upon which *Engurūs* attacked the army of *Rūm-ili* and then ran away. In 1438-39 (842) Murād II conquered *Selānik* (Thessaloniki). He then attacked and conquered the *Semendire*, and unsuccessfully attacked *Belġrād*. In 1440–41 (844), "during the time of Murād II," governor-general of *Rūm-ili* Şihābu'd-dīn Pāşā conquered the fortress of *Novābirī* and its town together with some other places and provinces held by the infidels. In the same year the frontier-lord, İsḥāḳ Beg also took some lands.[42] In 1443 (847), *Vılḳ oġıl* (the son of Vuk) and *Yanḳū* and the army of *Engurūs* attacked the *Rūm-illeri* (the lands of *Rūm*); Murād II fights them, they go away, he goes to Edirne and makes peace with (some) "infidel kings", *Engurūs* and *Vılḳ oġlı* and *Yanḳū* by relegating to them some "fortresses and places" from *Rūm-ili*, and then "puts his son in his place".[43] Calendars, therefore operate with the construct "the land of a person" and are very terse, but each subsequent one is enriched by new details. The selection and patterns of events outlined in calendars remains fixed when transferred to other, updated versions and more detailed, later narratives which are known as chronicles proper.

The tables in question were produced both before and after the Battle of Varna (1444). Before continuing, let me remind that the concept of *Sırf*/*Şırf* was not used in the calendars before 1444, and add that this stands for all known examples from Murād II's time, as well as those produced for Meḥmed II. For a while thus, *Ḫalīl-nāme* from 1414 remains the only source mentioning Serbs as a collective. The discourse, however, is not static, as already noted. As

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[41] Lās vilāyeti ve ḳalʿaları fetḥ oldı.

[42] Ve Murād Ḫān zamanında Novābirī ḥiṣāri ve şehri ve baʿż yerlerin ve vilāyetlerin kāfirler elinden *Rūm-ili* begi Şihābu'd-dīn Pāşā elinde fetḥ olaldan berü {Ūc-İli begi İsḥaḳ Beg elinde baʿż yerler fetḥ olaldan berü } dört yıldur.

[43] [...] ve Vılḳ oġıl g. ve Yanḳū ve Engurūs çerisi gelub Rūm-illerin ġayet ḥarāb idelden {ve Murād Ḫān çoḳluḳ çerisiyle lā-yuḥṣā ḳarşū varub çoḳ ceng ve ḳılıc ve ḳıtāl idelden ve kāfir çerileri gidub Murād Ḫān Edirne şehrine gelüb taḫtında culūs idelden berü [...] } ve Murād Ḫān ve kāfir melikleriyle ve Engurūs ve Vılḳ oġlı ve Yanḳū'yla muṣālaḥat idub Rūm-ilinden baʿżı ḥişārlar ve yerler verdi ve oġlın Murād Ḫān kendü yirine dikub [...]

the older entries are transferred to updated versions, a lot of details get to be added about the previously recorded events. With these additions, the numbers of mentioned places conquered in Europe grows, but most of them are Slavic and located in Lazar's and/or Vuk Branković's lands. The *persons* indexed "on this side", in addition to *Yankū* (Slavicized Janos) are, by the rule, heirs of Knez Lazar Hrebeljanović and their rivals. Other contemporary example which illustrates the continuous addition of details to the discourse as a whole belongs to a different genre, but, is encyclopedic, and in a manner of calendars, covers the larger periods of time then the title itself suggests. That is Żaʿīfī Muḥammed Gelībolulu's *Ġazavātu' Sulṭān Murād İbn Muḥammad Ḫān*, dated to 1446–1447 where we find a synonym for, till then, repetitive *Vılḳ oġlı*: *Yorgi*.[44] In the chronological table from 1451 (855), the entry for 1425-6 (829) "informs" that, when sultan Murād came to "the land of *Lāz*" that year, he took it out from the hands of *Lāz-oġli Koca Desbūt* (the Grand Despot, the son of *Lāz*). And took over "the power of governance" over his land (*vilāyetini fetḥ etdi*).[45]

In 1459, a court historian Şükrullāh finished his *Behcetü't-Tevārīḫ*, a universal narrative history written in Persian and covering the period from the creation to 1421. He submitted the work to Maḥmūd Pasha Angelović. The novelty of this encyclopedic work is dating, right or wrong. Obviously following Aḥmedī's anachronism, Şükrullāh reports that the news of Orḫān's military success (in Asia Minor?) reached *Lāz* and *Üngürüs*, and scared them: they were constantly under precaution. Şükrullāh adds (compared to Aḥmedī) that the news spread from Bursa, probably intending to embellish his discourse by some extra information, and this by hinting that Bursa was the seat of the Ottoman sultan at the time. One day, Orḫān thought that he could call *these* infidels to faith, and if they did not except, destroy them. With this in mind he sent his son Süleymān to cross the sea, to Rūmeli. With fourty of his soldiers who also crossed, Süleymān took two fortresses by force (*Od Gönlek* and *Iksamilye*). The news of this as well also reached *Lāz*, of all. The next European

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[44] This work is often described as the first extant work in the genre of *ġazavāt-nāme* after Aḥmedī. The only extant manuscript has missing folios in the beginning and is incomplete at the end. It consists of 2566 couplets and contains 49 couplets in ghazal and qasida form with differing meter. The work includes the sections of *tevḥīd*, *münācāt*, *naʿt* and *sebeb-i teʾlīf*. It also contains a number of stories, one of which is taken from Rūmī's *Maṣnawī*. It has 232 couplets in common with the *Dānişmend-nāme* (14th century legend of Dānişmend Ġāzī, a hero of the Byzantine-Turkish frontiers in Anatolia) dispersed inside the text, and of course the story of Murad II's campaigns. See: Mehmet Sarı, *Gelibolulu Żaʿīfī Muḥammed: Ġazāvat-ı Sulṭān Murād Ḫān: İnceleme (Ses Değişmeleri, Benzeşmeleri ve Uyumlar) Metin – Sözlük* (doctoral dissertation, Istanbul University, 1994).

[45] [...] Defʿa: Sulṭān Murād Laz-ėline vardi. Lāz-oġli Koca Desbūt ėlinden çıkarub vilāyetini fetḥ ėtdi.

episode described is an event which, as will be seen, was poorly understood by chroniclers, but will gradually become developed in a way which shows that it corresponds to the Battle of Maritsa, after which Lazar became political bidder. *Lāz*, however, is here marked as the main actor (see below). Şükrullāh also provides an account of 1389 battle in Kosovo. In the manner of *Ḫalīl-nāme*, Şükrullāh mentions Serbs (*Serf*, in transliteration from Persian) when he counts Lazar's western allies preparing for the battle. This 1459 addition of "the battle of Maritsa," though under disguise, inaugurated a new structure of events that took place in Europe which then found place in the various, "Ottoman chronicles proper", in the late 15th century. With time this structure will be embellished with details and descriptions which will introduce the term Şırf/Sirf (also *Serf*, and *Sarf*) by bringing it into direct connection with the term *Lāz*, in a way which implies a constant influx of new information into the discourse, in result of which "Serbia" will emerge in Ottoman historiographical discourse as a defragmented entity, though subjugated to the Ottoman rule. As is known, the year 1456 is taken as the year of the final incorporation of Serbian principalities into the Ottoman state, which was concluded with important intervention by Maḥmūd Pasha Angelović.

The *Lāz-ili* in "Ottoman Historiography":
Known and Reframed as "Serbia"

That John Kantakouzenos helped the Ottomans cross the sea is something no Arabographic text talks about, at least not openly.[46] In the epic of ʿUmur Beg of Aydın, which was made available to the Ottomans at least in 1465 and which is part of the larger work adopting a universal history perspective, Kantakouzenos is hidden behind the figure of *Domestekōs*, who was ʿUmur Beg's vassal and in that capacity asked the Aydınids for help.[47] As already

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[46] Instead, chroniclers mention a random *kāfir* who helped Süleyman cross.

[47] See Adrian Gheorghe, "Mental Frames and Textual Strategies in Mid-14th Century Byzantine-Turkish Sources on the Beginnings of the Anatolian Turks in Europe", *Südost-Forschungen* 80 (2021) 1–18, 7 and passim. The epic is preserved as part of Enverī's *Düstūr-nāme* (1465), a Turkish work written in verse, in the genre of *mes̱nevī*. The work was presented to Maḥmūd Pasha Angelović. It consists of three parts: i) history of the Islamic prophets ii) history of the Aydınoğlus of Izmir iii) history of the Ottomans. See Mükrimin Halil Yinanç, *Düsturnamei Enveri*, Istanbul 1928; Enveri, *Le destan d'Umur Pacha (Dusturname-i Enveri). Texte, traduction et notes*, ed. Irene Melikoff-Sayar, Paris 1954); Necdet Öztürk, ed., *Fatih Devri Kaynaklarından Düstūrnāme-i Enverī. Osmanlı Tarihi Kısmı (1299–1466)*, Istanbul 2003; Betül Ademler, *Düstūrnāme-i Enverī (Dil Özellikleri-Metin)*(MA thesis, Sakarya Üniversitesi, 2007).

noted, in all other Arabographic texts, the people the Ottomans encounter after "crossing" are indeterminate infidels or fortress wardens (tr. *tekvūr*)[48] until they encounter *Lāz*. The story was gradually complicated by treating *Şırf* as a synonym with *Lāz*, and by using combinations like *Şırf leşkeri* (the Serbian army), for example. Where these texts differ is on the point of who of Ottomans was the first to cross the sea, and what was the first battle fought with the *Lāz* and/or Serbs and occasionally their allies. Also, Arabographic sources almost completely ignore the encounter with the "Bulgarians" as a collective. Şükrullāh mentions Bulgarians (*Ūlġār*) when he counts Lazar's allies preparing for the battle in 1389. Next to the Bulgarians, there are Wallachians, Hungarians, Czech, Albanians, and Croatians (*Arāvūt*), but Serbs/*Sirf* are also among these, as noted before, in the rhetorical manner of *Ḫalīl-nāme*.[49]

As noted, Şükrullāh, in 1459, marks a transition from the period in which *Lāz* of "the Battle of Kosovo," becomes *Lāz* of "the Battle of Maritsa": when the news of Süleymān's (the son of Orḫān's) capture of two fortresses by force reached *Lāz*, the accursed infidel (tr. *lanetli kāfir*) was cautious. He gathered the army, came to the plain of *Miġāl-ḳarye* (Malkara, eastern Thrace, north coast of the Sea of Marmara), and set up a tent there. The battle happened in the night and the infidels were decimated.[50] Şükrullāh also tentatively marks a transition from the period in which it is not clear how is *Lāz* to be connected to *Sirf* (as in *Ḫalīl-nāme*, and in his own work), to the period in which these become interchangeable. The bellow examples are chosen to illustrate this.

A lost theoretical narrative covering the period up to 1421was reused around 1484 by an author known to us as *Oxford Anonymous* only because the title page of his work is missing.[51] Similar to Şükrullāh, *Oxford Anonymous* reports that Orḫān was the one to whom it occurred to "cross the sea, perform the *ġazāʾ* against the infidels of Rumelia and invite them to Islam," and that this was

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[48] For the origin and meaning of the word see Hasan Çolak, "Tekfur, fasiliyus and kayser: Disdain, Negligence and Appropriation of Byzantine Imperial Titulature in the Ottoman World", in: *Frontiers of the Ottoman Imagination: Studies in Honour of Rhoads Murphey*, ed. Marios Hadjianastasis, Leiden 2014, 5–28.

[49] See translation to modern Turkish in Nihal Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihleri I*, Istanbul 1949, 39–70, esp. 56.

[50] See transliteration in Arabic script in Hasan Almaz, *Şükrullah B. Şihābeddīn Ahmed b. Zeyneddīn Zekī: Behcetü't-Tevārīḫ (İnceleme-Metin-Tecüme)* (doctoral dissertation, University of Ankara, 2004), 340 and passim.

[51] The work is dedicated to Bāyezīd II (1481–1512) to whom the author intended to submit his work. The work was allegedly composed upon the request of the sultan by a secretary employed in the court milieu who signed his name on the work. D. J. Kastritsis, *An Early Ottoman History*, 10–11.

done by his son Süleymān Pasha, with his father's permission and blessing.[52] Once Süleymān took *two* castles by force and stationed his soldiers there, the news reached *Lāz-ili* and distressed its infidels. In reaction, they gathered an army which first "came and camped on the plain of *Manīlıķ*."[53] At this point, we learn how the infidels exposed to *ġazāʾ* fared in general around this time, and what happened next in this concrete situation: "they [the people of Islam] responded by putting them to sword and enslaving their sons and daughters. On some days it would come to pass that one thousand infidels would join the faith." This defeat, *Oxford Anonymous* informs, opened a series of "conquests" in *Rūmeli*.[54] To conclude that this vague and garbled story relates about the Battle of Maritsa, one needs to figure that *Manīlıķ* is in fact Melnik, a place slightly northwest of Serres, which was the seat of Uglješa Mrnjavčević. In the passages dedicated to Murād I, this author uses *Serf iķlīmi* (Serbian region, country), and *Lāz* (person) is defined as *Serf begi* (Serbian lord).

In the chronicle of ʿAşıķpāşāzāde (fl.1480s and on)[55] Süleymān is the one who crosses the sea. At one point, he is helped by an indistinct infidel. Initially captured towns were treated with tolerance and cooperation. The encounter with *Serbian* soldiers occurs during the reign of Murād I, when *Serbian* infidels gathered the army with the intention of coming to Edirne.[56] The pattern is similar in Oruç Beg (fl.1502) and *Anonymous Chronicles*.[57]

Former "Serbianness" ("Greekness," etc.) of the powerful Ottomans are never signalled in Arabographic historiographical sources in the observed period, with the note that there can be found one exception to confirm the rule. When Ḫādım Yaʿķūb Pasha (d. after 1512), holding a position of *sancak-beyi* of Bosnia came out victorious from the famous battle of Krbava led against Hungarian Ban Derencsényi (tr. *Derencil Ban*) in 1493, he wrote an ode in honour of his great victory and sent it to Bāyezīd II. This ode was preserved in some chronicles commonly considered to have been authored by Oruç Beg. In

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[52] Ibidem, 69–70.

[53] Ibidem, 71. See also facsimile of the manuscript in Yaşar Yücel & Halil Erdoğan Cengiz, eds., "Ruhi Tarihi – Oxford Nushası", *Belgeler* 14 (1989–1992) 359–472.

[54] D. J. Kastritsis, *An early Ottoman history*, 72.

[55] Necdet Öztürk ed., *Āşıķpaşazāde Tarihi: Osmanlı Tarihi (1285–1502)*, Istanbul 2013. See also Александар Крстић, "Пад Србије из угла освајача: Ашикпашазаде и Дурсун-бег", in: *Пад српске деспотовине 1459. године*, ed. Момчило Спремић, Београд 2011, 303–320.

[56] N. Öztürk ed., *Āşıķpaşazāde Tarihi*, 66–76.

[57] See for example, Necdet Öztürk, ed., *Oruç Beğ Tarihi: Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım*, Istanbul 2007, 18–25; idem, *Anonim Osmanlı kroniği, 1299-1512*, İstanbul 2000, 20–29; Nihat Azamat ed., *Tevārīh-i āl-i Osman. Anonim tevārīh-i āl-i Osman: F. Giese neşri*, İstanbul, 1992, 17–25.

this poem, Ḫādım Yaʿḳūb compares his victory to that of Murād I at Kosovo, in 1389, and styles himself in the last verse as "Dervish Yaʿḳūb, a Bosnian Beg" (tr. *Benim Bosna Beği Dervīş Yaʿḳūb/ Ḫodā ʿavniyle iriṣdüm bu ada*). ʿĀşıḳpaşazāde who wrote before Oruç also relates about this event, but does not quote Ḫādım Yaʿḳūb's poem. Instead, he composes his own poetic illustration. ʿĀşıḳpaşazāde describes Derencil Ban as "one of the great bans of Bosnia and one of the great heroes loyal to Hungarian king" (tr."*Bosna vılāyetinun ulu banlarındandur ve Ungurus kıralınun ziyāde bahadırlarındandur.*").[58]

Maḥmūd Pasha (Angelović), however, is simply Maḥmūd Pasha in Ottoman narrative sources, and we have no evidence about his self-perceptions. Conspicuous, however, is the fact that a work written by Enverī under his patronage,[59] reaches out to the past in which *Sirf* fought with the Aydınids, and in which Voyvoda Momčilo, described as a *Sirf*, was trying to decide which side to take. [60] Together with these two episodes, the one relating about the prelude to the battle of Kosovo (which was in this version fough because of a woman), represent a certain detour towards chivalry which, if not entirely sidelines, then places a shadow on religious aspect of conflicts.

When it comes to women, things are different, and the only example that can be offered from this period is that of Mara Branković. Scholars often mention that "Turks" respected Mara Branković, the wife of Murād II, calling her, among other, *Despina Ḫātūn*. The sources in which this title can be found are decisions issued by central Ottoman government related to her property and church/monastery affairs in which she was involved apparently with the support of her stepson.[61] It seems, however, that some memory of Mara, more

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[58] The manuscripts in which this poem was preserved were all produced in the second half of the sixteenth century and later (the oldest dated being copied in December 1566). Oruç's version of the story of the Krbava battle (the one copied in 1566, and one copied in 1584 is much different from that provided by ʿĀşıḳpaşazāde. Oruç introduces the story of the battle by providing a short biography of Ḫādım Yaʿḳūb from which we read that he was of Bosnian origin, brought to the court during the reign of Meḥmed II, and later sent to Amasya to accompany prince Bāyezīd, the future sultan. Also unlike ʿĀşıḳpaşazāde, Oruç describes Derencil Ban as "one of the kings of Bosnia" (tr."*Bosna kırallarından bir be-nām kıral...*"). See, Aleksije A. Olesnicki, "Bošnjak Hadum Jakub, Pobjednik na Krbavskom Polju g. 1493", *Rad JAZU* 118 [264] (1938) 123–160; Hedda Reindl, *Männer um Bāyezīd: eine prosopographische Studie über die Epoche Sultan Bāyezīds II. (1481–1512)*, Berlin 1983, 346–358; N. Öztürk, ed., *Oruç Beğ tarihi*, 154–162 (based on BNF-MS Turc 1047); BNF-MS Turc 99, ff.144a-149a; BNF-MS Turc 117, ff. 127b-131b; N. Öztürk ed., *Āşıḳpaşazāde Tarihi*, 319-320.

[59] See fn. 47.

[60] B. Ademler, *Düstūrnāme-i Enverī*, 122, 146.

[61] For illustration, see М. Ст. Поповић, *Мара Бранковић*, 186.

precisely of the fact that she did not change faith and that she had influence on an Ottoman sultan, Murād II, did leave some impression on contemporary chroniclers. Scholars have so far noted that early Ottoman chronicles from the late 15th century evoked memory of a Serbian women of noble origin. This was, from what we know, not Mara, but Olivera Lazarević (died after 1444) who was married to Bāyezīd I (d.1402). There is, however, an indication that Ottoman chroniclers conflated the memories of Olivera and Mara. In ʿĀşıkpaşazāde, Olivera is remembered: (incorrectly) as the sister of "Vuk's son" (Đurađ Branković); (correctly) as "the daughter of *Lāz*" (Lazar Hrebeljanovic); a practicing Christian; someone who prompted Bāyezīd I to drink alcohol at the gatherings; and someone whose brother (i.e. Stefan Lazarević), on account of his sister's intimacy with Bāyezīd I asked that she was given *the town of Smederevo* as charity (tr. *sadaka*). Upon hearing the request, the sultan not only granted *Smederevo*, but also the important fortress of *Golubac* (tr. Güğercinlik). The *brother* also seems to have asked for a place transliterated by the editor of the chronicle as *Nigeoburnı*, obviously a corruption of Novo Brdo. The *Nigeoburnı*, the chronicler notes, was not granted as "charity". As is well known, and as the calendar producers knew very well, Smederevo fortress was built only by Mara's father, Đurađ Branković, the son of Vuk Branković. Both Golubac and Smederevo were unwillingly ceded to Đurađ after a peace treaty signed in 1444. Serbian sources claim that Đurađ also kept Novo Brdo in 1444. The cultural and mining center was permanently taken by the Ottomans in 1455.[62] Nevertheless, episodes like this serve as further confirmation of what Ottoman historians of the late 15th century who indulged solely in Ottoman history were interested in when it comes to the histories of the lands the sultans conquered.

Conclusion

A close reading of the early Ottoman Arabographic (pseudo-) historical texts suggests that the Ottoman exonym *Lāz* was initially constructed within the framework of universal history. Figure of *Laz(ar)* was portrayed as the first adversary of the Ottoman-Muslim state's expansion in Europe, and his land, *Lāz-ili*, was depicted as a state with sovereignty of its own and thus representing the first in a series of Ottoman (imperial) gains at the abstract level of "world history." With the growing presence of Slavic-speaking Ottomans

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[62] N. Öztürk, ed., *Āşıkpaşazāde Tarihi*, 94–95; SBB-MS Or. oct. 2448, f.110a; C. Imber, *The Crusade of Varna*, 6 and 202.

in the society, especially among aristocratic converts to Islam or those entering imperial service, discursive elements relatable to Serbia and Serbs gradually became more various and embedded in longer and more elaborate narratives. These groups, simultaneously the suppliers of information and the intended audience of these texts, likely influenced how Serbian involvement in early Ottoman history was represented after the fact. The watershed moment in this process occurs when the sub-discourse organized around *Lāz* was expanded with the concept of *Şirf* enabling a nuanced "fashioning of the Other" comprehensible to both conquerors and conquered, and, surprisingly or not, discoursively and anachronistically unifying the divided late medieval Serbian lands in the dawn of the early modern period.

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ПРЕДСТАВЉАЊЕ ДРУГОГ, ПРЕДСТАВЉАЊЕ СЕБЕ: ТЕРМИНИ *LĀS/LĀZ* И *ŞIRF/SİRF* У РАНИМ ОСМАНСКИМ (ПСЕУДО-) ИСТОРИЈСКИМ ТЕКСТОВИМА

Резиме

Овај рад анализира ране османске (псеудо-) историјске текстове из угла ширег питања о начинима на које су Османлије процесуирали и тумачили разноликост етнополитичких ентитетâ са којима су се сусретали у Европи. Значај ових текстова није ограничен само на наративни садржај, већ се огледа и у њиховој хетероглосији, која се између осталог огледа у присуству словенских речи, имена и фраза записаних арапским писмом. Корпус ових славофоних елемената дискурса посматран је као саставни део под-контекста за термине *Lās/Lāz* и *Şırf/Sirf*, то јест под-контекста у ширем оквиру османске историографије који је, у раду се сугерише, у знатној мери био обликован од стране познатих и анонимних појединаца српског порекла блиских централној власти. Детаљна анализа ових извора указује да је османски егзоним *Lāz* првобитно настао у оквирима универзалне историје. Лаз(ар) је овде приказан као први противник у Европу надируће османско-муслиманске државе, а његова земља у текстовима приказана као политички сувереена што је на нивоу дискурса чини првом у низу османских успеха на апстрактном нивоу „светске историје“. Са растућим присуством словенских говорника у османском друштву – посебно међу члановима српског племства који су подржавали османску политику или прелазили на ислам – елементи који се могу довести у везу са Србијом и Србима постепено су постајали разноврснији. У том процесу циркулисале су информације и детаљи који не само да су обогаћивали постојеће наративе, већ су и омогућили представљање „Другог“ које је било разумљиво како „освајачима“ тако и „освојенима“ интегрисаним у османско друштво. Изненађујуће или не, подељене касносредњевековне српске земље нашле су се обједињене не само у оквиру османске државе, него и на нивоу дискурса, анахроног, али вероватно и сврсисходног на начин који захтева додатно промишљање.