

A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul

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2 The palace and the populace

The acquisition of the great Byzantine capital spurred Mehmed II on to a great effort of revitalisation: encouragement of commerce, transfer of population to the city, and a major building programme. One of his first actions was to build a palace, later to be known as the Eski Saray, almost immediately superseded by the imposing palace of Topkapı, erected on rising ground in the centre of the city overlooking the sea and dominating the landscape. From here the sultans were to run the affairs of state until the mid nineteenth century, when they transferred to the palace of Dolmabahçe, which they considered at that time more suited to the modern age. The sultans who ruled from here were the focal point of power, their lives a reflection of the magnificence, wealth and power of the empire. They embodied the prestige of that empire and their imperial pomp sustained it. The populace approved of, admired or were dissatisfied with their sultans. Greatly respected, Süleyman I's death in 1566 provoked deep distress and the people were much moved by the elegy composed for him by the great poet Baki.¹ The execution of his son Mustafa, much loved both by the common people and by the upper echelons of society,² caused great grief and the production of many poems written in his memory;³ while the crowds for the funeral of Murad IV (1623–40) were so great that it was difficult to clear a pathway to the grave, and the day of his death was one of such grief that it was like doomsday.⁴ Murad III's (1574–95) greeting of the Muslims with 'total respect and indisputable humility' at the crowded Friday prayer in Ayasofya in December 1574 was greeted with a great roar of approval,⁵

¹ Selaniki Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî*, 2 vols., ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara, 1999), I, p. 53.

² İbrahim Peçevi, *Peçevî Tarihi*, 2 vols., ed. Murat Uraz (Istanbul, 1968), I, p. 18.

³ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 162–3.

⁴ Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir Efendi, *Topçular Kâtibi 'Abdülkâdir (Kadrî) Efendi Tarihi (Metin ve Tahlil)*, 2 vols., ed. Ziya Yılmaz (Ankara, 2003), II, p. 1143.

⁵ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 104.

his fame as a generous, just, fair and wise ruler noted by Gerlach, a priest with the Habsburg embassy.⁶

It could perhaps be argued that the presentation of such popular sentiment should simply be disregarded as eulogistic rhetoric in official chronicles or acts of flattery aimed at attaining concrete reward – an island governorship in the case of Kritoboulos, the author of a history of Mehmed II. But such judgements also appear in anonymous chronicles not so inclined to sycophancy and much more given to critical comment, or in western sources, such as Gerlach's comment on Murad III, where the influence of the court was not involved. Such opinions were important, for an Ottoman sultan could not rule in Istanbul by ignoring its people. The relationship between the sultan and the city was a symbiotic one: the city was the capital because of his presence, and his power as a successful sultan was influenced by his reception by its populace. To this end, all sultans invested heavily in pageantry and display, in being both seen and accessible, a source of justice and of reassurance of success for the people of the city and of the empire as a whole.

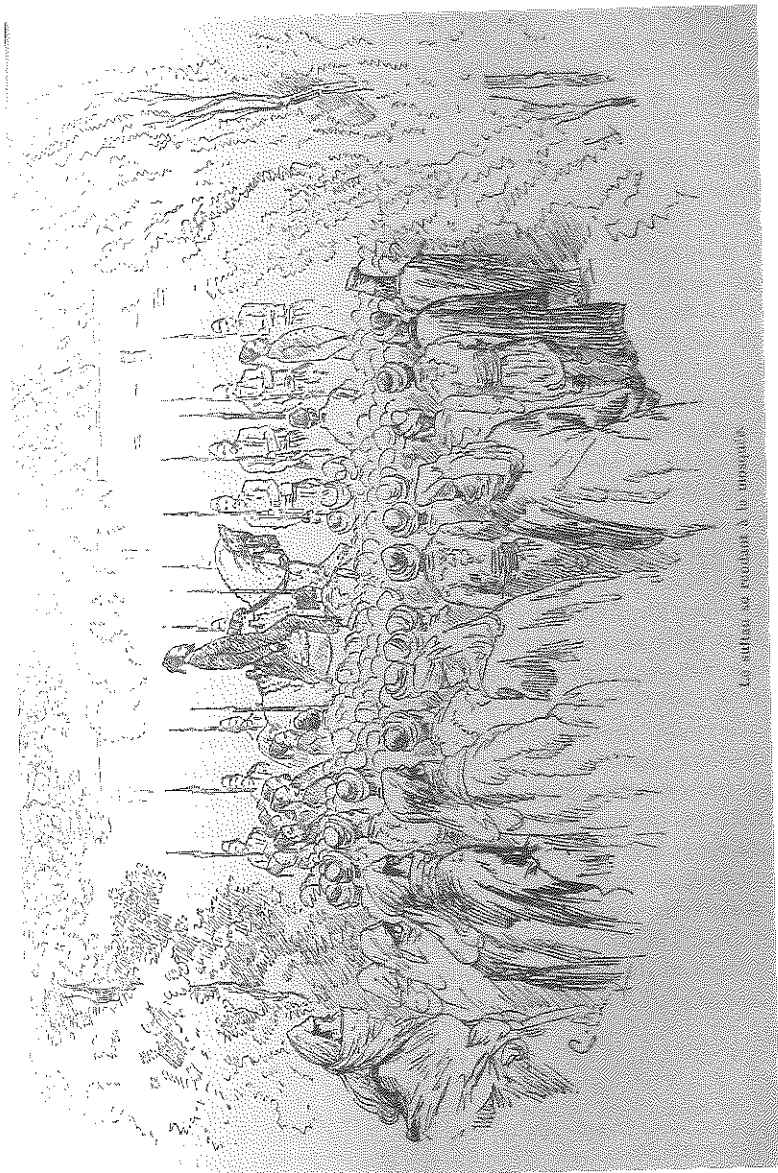
The omnipresent sultan

It has often been argued that with the conquest of Constantinople and the acquisition of a traditional imperial capital, the Ottoman ruler became more remote, withdrawing behind the high walls of the Topkapı palace and adopting a style of regality which emulated in part the Byzantine tradition of an inaccessible and distant caesar.⁷ The person of the sultan himself became less important, and as the symbolic role of the house of Osman took over, the significance of the individual sultan decreased.

This presumption may come, at least in part, from the many western observers' accounts which, from the fifteenth century onwards, present the Ottoman sultan as a distant and secluded figure who rarely left the sanctuary of his palace or appeared in public. That this was the case is, interestingly, contradicted by Luigi Bassano, himself a westerner present in Istanbul in the 1530s, who commented that the sultan processed to the Friday prayer each week, appearing before the people and greeting

⁶ Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü 1573–1576*, 2 vols., trans. Türkis Noyan (Istanbul, 2007), I, p. 359.

⁷ See, for example, Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé. Essais sur les morts, dépositions et événements des sultans ottomans XIV^e–XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2003), p. 35; Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Crisis and change, 1590–1699' in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1994), II, p. 616.



3. The sultan going to the mosque, in Edmondo di Amicis, *Costantinople* (Paris, 1883), p. 213.

them: 'Thus the Gran Turco is seen every Friday, in contrast to the liars who say that he never lets himself be seen'.⁸

This view of an increasingly distant and remote ruler does not represent the reality of sultanic power as displayed in Istanbul or reflected in the Ottoman accounts. Highly visible, the sultan constantly appeared before the Istanbul populace, who, 'addicts of spectacle and pageantry',⁹ were continually involved in one way or another in imperial pomp and display. Indeed, according to the sixteenth-century Ottoman writer Latifi, the people of Istanbul were so used to seeing high and exalted personages that for them mere common men had less value than a dog.¹⁰ Public criers constantly called their attention to the imperial nature of the city, announcing sultans' orders, or issuing instructions, informing them of wars or the death or accession of a sultan,¹¹ as they did for example, for Selim II in 1566, shouting out that now the period of Sultan Selim Han had begun.¹²

The sultan appeared every Friday, with rare exceptions such as Murad III, who stopped doing this towards the end of his reign, a decision for which he was severely censored by the contemporary chronicler Selaniki.¹³ During the procession to and from the mosque, the sultans were greeted by the people whom they saluted in turn and whose petitions they received. They visited the tombs of their ancestors, went to Eyüp at the time of their accessions, visited their ministers or the female members of their family at Eski Saray, the old palace where the women of previous sultans lived, and took pleasure trips on the Bosphorus or to the numerous gardens and pavilions within and outside the city. They moved house; the royal household of Selim III (1789–1807) moved each year in late April or early May from Topkapı palace to Beşiktaş palace for the summer, and back again for the winter at the end of September or beginning of October. They went hunting, they inspected the imperial fleet or visited the troops. On all these occasions they were on display, seen and often accessible.

Such display served to ensure legitimacy; to emphasise, at some times more than others, the religious role of the sultans, who were to use the title

⁸ Luigi Bassano, *I costumi et i modi particolari de la vita de Turchi, descritti da M. Luigi Bassano da Zara* ([Roma], 1545), f. 13v.

⁹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 8.

¹⁰ Latifi, *Evsâf-ı İstanbul*, ed. Nermin Suner (Pekin) (Istanbul, 1977), pp. 66–7.

¹¹ Abdi, *1730 Patrona İhtilâli Hakkında Bir Eser Abdi Tarihi*, ed. Faik Reşit Unat (Ankara, 1943), p. 50; Destari, *Destâri Sâlih Tarihi. Patrona Halil Ayaklanması Hakkında Bir Kaynak*, ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal (Ankara, 1962), p. 32; Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 714; Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, pp. 116, 159; Ahmed Cavid, *Hadika-ı Vekâyi'*, ed. Adnan Baycar (Ankara, 1998), p. 69.

¹² Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 42. ¹³ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 444–5.

of caliph at various times from the mid sixteenth century until the abolition of the caliphate in 1924; to demonstrate military might and victory; and to present luxury and wealth, an impression that was not lost on visiting ambassadors and others, often overawed by the magnificent richness of this seat of Ottoman power. Even in the dying days of the empire, when the population had become heartily fed up with it,¹⁴ pageantry was maintained, clearly considered important in legitimising sultanic rule to the last.

Far from gaining legitimacy from any aura of invisibility, the sultan's legitimacy was thus inextricably bound up with his being seen. Even Murad III, a sultan more reluctant than most to appear in public, did come out of the palace, even if, on rare occasions, according to Domenico, his physician, 'so that the people may see him and not have thoughts of rebellion against him'.¹⁵ This need for visibility was as true for the post-1453 empire as it had been during the early days of the state when, partly due to the lack of a law of succession, an invisible sultan spelt unrest and instability. It was for this reason that the ministers went to such lengths to conceal the death of Mehmed I in 1421, when the sultan, on his deathbed and aware that he would expire before his son Murad II arrived, warned them not to reveal his death but to prepare for trouble. Despite the ministers' attempts to run affairs as if nothing untoward had happened, the soldiers became uneasy, asking, in the words of the early Ottoman chronicler Aşıkpaşazade, 'what has happened to our leader? He does not appear'. The ministers' reply that the doctors would not allow the sultan to come out did not prove satisfactory. Instead, the sultan made an appearance, with a young man placed behind the corpse to move its arms. Seeing the sultan apparently stroking his beard, the *ağas* (leaders) of the janissaries (infantry troops originally recruited through the *devşirme*, the compulsory levy on Christians, particularly in the Balkans) returned to their affairs and the corpse was quickly hoisted up and whisked back into the palace.¹⁶

It was not merely a matter of being seen that was important, but being seen in the capital. Just before the grand vezir İshak Paşa retired to Thessalonike, he advised Bayezid II (1481–1512) that if he wished to remain sultan for a long time, the most important thing to do was to stay in Istanbul and not to leave except for a very good reason.¹⁷ The impact on

¹⁴ Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Öresi* (Istanbul, 2003), p. 149.

¹⁵ Domenico, *Domenico's Istanbul*, trans. M. J. L. Austin and ed. Geoffrey Lewis (Wiltshire, 2001), p. 28; 'Relazione di Giovanni Moro, Bailo a Costantinopoli, 1590', in Luigi Firpo (ed.), *Relazioni di ambasciatori Veneti al senato*, vol. XIII *Costantinopoli (1590–1793)* (Turin, 1984), p. 332.

¹⁶ Aşıkpaşazade, *Chronik*, bab 81, pp. 84–5.

¹⁷ Richard F. Kreutel (ed.), *Hanîvaldanus Anonimi'ne Göre Sultan Bayezid-i Veli (1481–1512)*, trans. Necdet Öztürk (Istanbul, 1997), p. 15.

the city of a prolonged sultanic absence became clear when the sultans began to reside in Edirne during the latter part of the seventeenth century. Without the sultan, the city suffered. 'Half burnt and half in ruins', due to the lack of attention from officials, the world of the capital was taken over by fools and rogues, while Ahmed II's (1691–95) grand vezir dedicated himself to hunting rather than to government.¹⁸ Mustafa II (1695–1703) did not attend to or show concern for either the order of Istanbul or the condition of its population. Istanbul was left alone, abandoned and disordered, neglected and forgotten.¹⁹ Although ambassadors negotiating peace were received in Istanbul, the sultan Mustafa II returned again to Edirne as soon as an agreement had been concluded, abandoning the capital once more. It was evident, as Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa wrote, that Istanbul would remain far from the eyes of the men of state.²⁰

In contrast, Edirne thrived. New quarters sprang up, caravansarays and houses were built. From Mehmed IV's reign (1648–87) onwards, Edirne slid more and more into becoming not the second city but the capital, replacing the primacy of Istanbul. It was in Edirne now that the major royal events took place. Mehmed IV had his sons Mustafa II and Ahmed III (1703–30) circumcised there, for which fifteen days of celebrations were laid on. Three thousand poor boys were also circumcised at the state's expense and food given to both rich and poor.²¹ Shortly afterwards, his daughter Hatice Sultan was married, to the accompaniment of another fifteen-day period of festivities.²²

By the time Mustafa II came to the throne the change was even more pronounced. He had his sons circumcised there and even removed his mother from Istanbul to Edirne on his accession in 1695.²³ His three, very young daughters, aged four or five, were married there, and the construction of new palaces ordered for them. The grand vezir Hüseyin Paşa presented the sultan with a mansion he had bought on the banks of the Tunca river, to which a new pavilion and pool were added, an event which agitated the population in Istanbul, for they perceived this as

¹⁸ Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), *Anonim Osmanlı Tarihi (1099–1116/1688–1704)* (Ankara, 2000), p. 52.

¹⁹ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 225.

²⁰ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-i Vekayiât, Tahvil ve Metin (1066–1116/1656–1704)*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan (Ankara, 1995), p. 783.

²¹ İszade, *İsâ-zâde Târîhi (Metin ve Tahvil)*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (Istanbul, 1996), pp. 137–43.

²² Nabi, *Nabi'nin Sumâmesi. Vakaayi'-i Hutân-ı Şehzadegân-ı Hazret-i Sultan Muhammed-i Gâazi Li Nabi Efendi*, ed. Ağâh Sırrı Levend (Istanbul, 1944), pp. 22–71.

²³ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 108.

the beginning of *yahs* (the great summer houses in Istanbul on the Bosphorus) in Edirne, signifying the weakening of Istanbul's position.²⁴

All this led to mutterings and discontent in the capital. There was gossip about the expenses for the weddings of the sultan's daughters, and rumour had it that every household in Istanbul would be taxed to pay for them.²⁵ Important religious officials and other high-up people complained that such expenses were a waste of the money of the state treasury. It was also, in effect, turning Edirne into the empire's capital.²⁶ While spending the winter there was permissible,²⁷ or even prolonged periods hunting there as Mehmed IV did, total sultanic absence from the capital, stripping it of its prestige and its pageantry, was unacceptable. For the contemporary Ottoman historian Naima, Mehmed IV, despite his long absences from the capital, had never abandoned Istanbul; returning from time to time, he had 'not left its people in despair'. Mustafa II, in contrast, had 'completely wiped the city from his mind', making it known that Edirne would be his city of residence. Hearing this, the people of Istanbul 'lost all hope and desire, and fell into despair'.²⁸ The era ended in 1703 with what became known as the Edirne incident, when the people of Istanbul, united, according to Naima, by their despair at their city's loss of centrality,²⁹ revolted, in part, against the failure of the sultan to reside in his capital.

It is perhaps significant that Ahmed III, the first sultan to come to the throne in Istanbul after the interval in Edirne, whose entry through the Edirne Kapı after his accession ceremony at Eyüp greatly pleased all, rich and poor alike,³⁰ went every Friday to a different mosque,³¹ so ensuring a high level of visibility in different parts of the city. Perhaps for the same reasons, Mahmud I (1730–54), who succeeded in the aftermath of the Patrona Halil revolt and the overthrow of Ahmed III, also went to a different mosque each Friday in the period immediately after his accession, at first to the Fatih mosque and then to the new Valide Sultan mosque and the Bayezid mosque.³² Mahmud II (1808–39), succeeding to the throne in a similar period of upheaval, went to different mosques for the last prayer at night during Ramazan of 1808.³³ It should be noted, however, that other sultans, too, adopted this policy, Mehmed III going first after his accession to Ayasofya for Friday prayer,³⁴

²⁴ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 225. ²⁵ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 225.

²⁶ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 783. ²⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 66.

²⁸ Naima, *Târih-i Na'imâ*, 4 vols., ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara, 2007), IV, pp. 1886–7.

²⁹ Naima, *Târih*, IV, p. 1887. ³⁰ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 822.

³¹ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 262. ³² Destari, *Tarihi*, pp. 22–4.

³³ Cabi Ömer Efendi, *Câbi Târihi*, 2 vols., ed. Mehmet Ali Beyhan (Ankara, 2003), I, p. 264.

³⁴ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 440.

and subsequently on following Fridays to the Süleymaniye and Bayezid mosques.³⁵ It may therefore have been a practice designed to achieve high profile for a new sultan in general, not merely when the sultan had succeeded in a period of difficulty.

Whether this was the case or not, what remained significant was the presence of the ruler in the capital. The absence of the sultan reduced the city, for without him, or at least without Murad IV in the words of the contemporary historian Peçevi, 'the world was powerless and weak and the people were like soulless shells', their souls returning to them and their faces lighting up only on his return from the Yerevan campaign in 1635.³⁶ 'The world experienced new life and endless joy' when Süleyman I returned from fighting in Iran in 1554,³⁷ the population having several years earlier responded with similar delight at his return from campaign when the streets and markets overflowed with festivities to celebrate his triumphant entry.³⁸

While the sultans' absences were usually related to campaigns, and their returns thus bound up in expressions of victorious triumph, the sultan was not merely a military figure. From the mid sixteenth century, sultans began to employ the title of caliph, although it was not one they made a great deal of use of until times of trouble encouraged them to clutch more firmly at religious legitimacy. The presence of the sultan as religious leader was thus also significant, and it was to see 'the face of the caliph of Islam' that the rich pilgrims from the European territory of the empire stopped in Istanbul on their way to Mecca. They watched him as he processed to or from the Friday prayer, and if they did not manage to obtain a good sighting of him they would stay in the city for another week, or even longer, until they did.³⁹

While it was undoubtedly the case that the position of sultan carried with it an inherent aspect of spiritual sanctification, this was not necessarily linked to the title of caliph. Bayezid II, who died in 1512, was referred to as 'Veli', a saint, a holy man. According to Hoca Sadeddin, a *şeyhülislam* (head of the religious establishment) under Mehmed III who gave the information as proven fact not rumour, soil from Bayezid's grave cured many diseases and any prayers made over his tomb would be accepted.⁴⁰ This spiritual power can also be observed in a much earlier period, when

³⁵ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 449, 454. ³⁶ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 494.

³⁷ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 182. ³⁸ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 103–4.

³⁹ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât*, ed. Yusuf Halaçoğlu (Istanbul, 1980), p. 58; Taylesanizade, *Taylesanizâde Hafız Abdullah Efendi Tarihi: İstanbul'un Uzun Dört Yılı (1785–1789)*, ed. Feridun M. Emecen (Istanbul, 2003), p. 332.

⁴⁰ Hoca Sadettin Efendi, *Tacü'r-Tevarih*, 5 vols., ed. İsmet Parmaksızoğlu (Ankara, 1999), IV, p. 105.

the grave of the nephew of Osman (d.c.1324), Aydoğdu, was believed to have the power to cure sick horses if they were walked around it three times.⁴¹ This spirituality was also attached to sultans at a much later period. Cabi, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, ascribed it to Mahmud II, recounting two stories of two separate women who went blind after cursing the sultan because of the bad quality and scarcity of bread. As a result of these events, 'this saintliness and power of sanctity of the sultan was thus seen by all and was a well-known truth'.⁴² It was also generally believed that if the sultan prayed at the funeral of someone who had died of plague, the plague would leave the city. Rumours were rife that Mahmud attended prayers for funerals in Ayasofya in Ramazan 1812, and one might argue that his appearance at such funerals in a time of great plague was calculated with this popular belief in mind.⁴³ Sultans themselves could deliver effective curses, that of Ahmed III after his removal from the throne having the power, according to the contemporary Abdi, to bring disaster or death to those cursed.⁴⁴

At the end of the empire, even if mocked, such belief in the divine power of the sultan continued. When a major fire broke out in September 1918, Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin) (1918–22), following the tradition whereby sultans oversaw firefighting personally, prepared to attend the blaze. His chief secretary Lütfi Simavi suggested that he should do so dressed in military uniform, as this would have a good effect on the people. The grand vezir and the chief of police were informed of the sultan's imminent arrival. The sultan retired to have a bath and prepare, deciding to dress in civilian clothing as donning a military uniform would take too long. By the time he was ready, Lütfi Simavi informed him that the fire was now under control and about to be put out.

The sultan smiled knowingly and replied, 'we'll get there just at the right time'. There is a conviction among the people that if the sultan goes to a fire, the fire will immediately be extinguished. With the sultan present, officials and fire-fighters redouble their efforts and as a result the fire is put out as fast as possible, and this is attributed to the sultan's spiritual power!⁴⁵

In part bound up with religious duty, if not with being caliph per se, was a role which all sultans were expected to fulfil and one which was noted and commented on by the people. This was the role of dispenser of justice, as essential to the persona of the good sultan in the post-1453 world as it had

⁴¹ Aşıkpaşazade, *Chronik*, bab 17, p. 22. ⁴² Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, pp. 603, 604–5.

⁴³ Cabi, *Târîhi*, II, p. 891. ⁴⁴ Abdi, *Târîhi*, p. 50.

⁴⁵ Lütfü Simavi, *Son Osmanlı Sarayında Gördüklerim. Sultan Mehmed Reşad Hanın ve Halifenin Sarayında Gördüklerim*, ed. Sami Kara and Nurer Ugurlu (Istanbul, 2004), facsimile pp. 150–1, quotation p. 151.

been for the early rulers of the Ottoman state. Well before the conquest of Constantinople, Bayezid I (1389–1402) had conducted justice, sitting in the early morning in an open space raised above the people. Those who had grievances could present them to him.⁴⁶

The concept of immediate justice from an accessible ruler was part of the style of Ottoman rule in Istanbul where the sultan received petitions in the *divan* (the council of state), on the streets as he moved round the city or went to and from Friday prayer, or as he relaxed in one of his many pavilions. Just as Bayezid had observed the populace from his broad eminence, so too did the sharp eyes of Murad III shoot into every corner of every street, watching the people as they approached with their petitions.⁴⁷ Such people could be Muslims, Christians or Jews, like those who waited in the streets to present their petitions to Murad III as he rode by,⁴⁸ or the people of Galata who rode across the water to accost him as he relaxed in the Sultan Bayezid Han Kasrı, a pavilion on the shore below Topkapı, and to complain about their *kadı* (judge and important official), Abdülkerim-zade Kadı Abdullah, whose dismissal they thus secured.⁴⁹ Just as the inhabitants of Galata protested about their *kadı*, so did the Greek Orthodox community turn to the sultan to intervene over their patriarch, this time in an attempt to keep him rather than have him removed.⁵⁰ They appealed to him also to judge in matters of extortion, such as that which extracted sixteen thousand ducats from Metrophanes at a rate of two thousand ducats per annum in the eight years of his patriarchate.⁵¹

It was for justice that many people came to the city, going to the *divan*, where they waited many days to present their grievances,⁵² or approaching to hand in their petitions during the sultan's procession to and from Friday prayer. Such complaints concerned the ill treatment and oppression meted out by the *timar* holders (those who held land grants in return for military service), depredations by bandits, unjust tax collectors, suffering due to famine and poverty, or attack from across the frontiers of the empire, which could lead to enslavement of women and seizure of goods, as it did for the people of Babadağı on the Danube in 1595, who warned Mehmed III that the honour of the Muslims was being trampled.⁵³

⁴⁶ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Merkez ve Bahriye Teşkilâtı* (Ankara, 1988), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, II, p. 602. ⁴⁸ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, II, p. 524.

⁴⁹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 237.

⁵⁰ Ahmet Refik, *Hicri On Birinci Asrda İstanbul Hayatı (1000–1100)* (Istanbul, 1931), p. 44, *hüküm* 84.

⁵¹ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 407. ⁵² Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, pp. 249–50.

⁵³ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 481.

The enormous volume of petitions which bombarded Mehmed III and threatened to engulf Murad III, who was assailed by thousands of them every time he left his palace,⁵⁴ indicates that there was a belief in their effectiveness and in the power of the sultan to find solutions. It also shows to what extent power was personal: all could access it, and all could, at least in theory, expect satisfaction. If there was corruption in the system, which there most conspicuously was, this, in the popular imagination, related to the ministers, not to the sultan. Evil counsel perverted justice, not the sultan, who remained above criticism – at least in most cases.

Petitions clearly did have an impact, as in the case of Kara Hızır, the apparently very corrupt *subaşı* (the official in charge of order in the city) of Istanbul, against whom Süleyman I received a deluge of complaints in 1545 and who was in consequence removed from his post.⁵⁵ This effectiveness, while pleasing to the petitioners, was less so for the sultan's ministers. The level of trust that existed between them and their master was often slim, if not non-existent. Ahmed III, when removed from the throne in 1730, advised his successor Mahmud I not to trust anyone except himself and to change his vezirs often,⁵⁶ a policy adopted also in the following century by Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), a very untrusting sultan. Selim III (1789–1807) clearly had little faith in his own officials and issued frequent instructions for the removal of those he had reason to believe were not doing their jobs properly. He had good reason for his suspicions, for they were instrumental in his removal and failed to inform him of the initial revolt that led to his downfall.⁵⁷ After his deposition, he advised his successor, Mustafa IV (1807–08), never to trust his ministers.

As sultan Mustafa was coming from the *kafes* [the secluded quarters of the palace where the princes lived] and as sultan Selim was leaving the throne room, they met each other and embraced and wept. Sultan Selim said 'my son, go and sit on the throne, may it bring you good luck because this is the fate it brought me' and kissed him on his forehead. Mustafa kissed his feet. Selim continued his words 'I will give you some advice. Never indulge your servants and do not believe their words. They destroyed me and this is the result. Take a lesson from this'.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Halil İnalçık, 'Adâletnâmeler', *Türk Tarih Kurumu Belgeler*, II/3–4 (1965), p. 105; Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 277.

⁵⁵ Halil Sahillioğlu (ed.), *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951–952 ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (Istanbul, 2002), pp. 215–16, hüküm 281.

⁵⁶ Abdi, *Tarihi*, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Oğulokyan, *Georg Oğulokyan'ın Ruznamesi. 1806–1810 İsyanları. III. Selim, IV. Mustafa, II. Mahmud ve Aledar Mustafa Paşa*, trans. and ed. Hrand D. Andreasyan (Istanbul, 1972), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Oğulokyan, *Ruznamesi*, p. 11.

In this climate of mutual distrust, ministers regarded petitions with suspicion and disliked the practice of handing petitions to the sultan during his procession to Friday prayer. Petitions had the potential to reveal ministers' own wrongdoings and, in consequence, they 'feared paying for their bad deeds with their lives', in the words of the early seventeenth-century Venetian ambassador Ottaviano Bon.⁵⁹ Indeed, in 1693, both the grand vezir and the *defterdar* (chancellor of the exchequer) fell victim to the hundreds of petitions that were handed to the sultan at every *divan* and on every Friday as he went to Friday prayer.⁶⁰ Officials therefore tried, where possible, to block such petitions, not always successfully and sometimes with disastrous results. The janissary *ağa* was removed from his post by Mehmed III at the beginning of his reign, after he had seen the janissaries preventing the people of Ruse and Silistria from approaching him after Friday prayer.⁶¹ This perhaps also accounts for the remark by the anonymous author of an eighteenth-century chronicle that one of the duties of the grand vezir was to analyse petitions with caution, not accepting their claims at face value but bearing in mind motivation such as revenge or desire for favour or reward. Petitions, the writer cautioned, should always be carefully investigated.⁶² Writing two centuries earlier, the ex-grand vezir Lütü Paşa also advised that petitions should be thoroughly investigated, and that punishments of important officials for small offences should be proportionate to the crime, for if they were excessive this would encourage people to misuse petitions for their own personal motives.⁶³ This would certainly have been a point of view agreeable to ministers, for whom very careful checking, if not total destruction, would often have been desirable.

The high-profile presence of the sultan in the city was manifest also by the reverse practice: the presence of the disguised sultan – a practice which both kept the sultan informed about the true state of affairs in the capital (a further source of worry and irritation to the ministers), and gave an omnipresent aura to his person, for the sultan could be present even if not seen. This strengthened the popular belief in the sultan as an all-seeing being, who was informed about and cared for the condition of his people in the city. It also carried a more threatening message, making sedition or anti-government gossiping inadvisable.

Disguised variously as a *sipahi* (cavalry soldier), *sofıa* (religious student), bombardier, sailor, guide or man responsible for the upkeep of

⁵⁹ Ottaviano Bon, *A Description of the Grand Signor's Seraglio or the Turkish Emperours Court* (London, 1650), p. 94.

⁶⁰ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 47. ⁶¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 463. ⁶² Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 39.

⁶³ Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, 'Lütü Paşa Âsafnâmesi (Yeni Bir Metin Tesisi Denemesi)', in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (Istanbul, 1991), pp. 68–9.

water conduits,⁶⁴ sultans toured their city accompanied by a special bodyguard, checking military establishments, social conditions, the implementation of fiscal measures or praying among the people in the mosques. While Mahmud II prayed⁶⁵ or, together with the grand admiral, inspected equipment at the dockyards,⁶⁶ and Ahmed I (1603–17) observed the army in Üsküdar,⁶⁷ Ahmed III checked the janissary barracks⁶⁸ or went to see if fiscal measures introduced in 1704 after currency changes and the punishment of counterfeiters were being carried out.⁶⁹ Selim III, constantly out and about, was usually much displeased by what he saw. The city was overcrowded and people were rioting over bread; there were too many lepers and beggars on the streets; sailors behaved disgracefully, and the brawling of the *softas* was unacceptable.⁷⁰ Mahmud II was himself witness to the pressures caused by bread shortages during his tours of the city in disguise at the beginning of the following century.⁷¹

That the sultan, and indeed other officials such as the grand vezir,⁷² wandered the city in disguise was known to the foreign diplomats and other westerners in the city, who found it most peculiar. 'It appears strange', wrote Charles Pertusier in the early nineteenth century, 'that the prime-minister of an empire, so vast, should demean himself by putting on a disguise, and going about with a view to finding out what is going on. Our astonishment will be more increased, when we learn that even the Sultan himself does this'.⁷³ Western curiosity amused Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin), who heartily enjoyed the account given by Lütfi Simavi of the interest of one foreign ambassador.

Every day there was a new rumour that the sultan was going around in disguise and inspecting the government officers incognito, and talking to the people in the markets and the coffee houses. On one occasion an ambassador during a conversation with me had even brought up the subject and wanted to know the truth about this. I did not give a direct answer but contented myself with saying that the sultan was very active. I learned afterwards that this ambassador took my words to

⁶⁴ Enver Ziya Karal, *Selim III'ün Hat-ı Hümayunları – Nizam-ı Cedid – 1789–1807* (Ankara, 1988), p. 95; Mehmet Ali Beyhan (ed.), *Saray Günliği (1802–1809)* (Istanbul, 2007), p. 23.

⁶⁵ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 259. ⁶⁶ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 213.

⁶⁷ Safi, *Mustafa Sâfi'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârih'i*, 2 vols., ed. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (Ankara, 2003), I, pp. 162–3.

⁶⁸ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 265. ⁶⁹ Özcan, *Anonim*, pp. 283–4.

⁷⁰ Karal, *Hümayunları*, pp. 96–7, 105. ⁷¹ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, pp. 597–8, 604–5.

⁷² Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 260.

⁷³ Charles Pertusier, *Picturesque Promenades in and Near Constantinople, and on the Waters of the Bosphorus* (London, 1820), pp. 128–9.

mean that it was true and told this to many other foreigners. I reported this to the sultan and we both laughed.⁷⁴

The impact of the populace

Often presented as distant and shadowy figures immured in Topkapı palace, men whose individual significance paled as the centuries progressed, the sultans were also credited by western observers with possessing absolute and arbitrary power, a popular view still encountered in some depictions of the Ottoman ruler. For observers from the West in the fifteenth century, it was this characteristic that marked the Ottomans out as something different and 'oriental', as Niccolò Tignosi put it in his *Expugnatio constantinopolitana*.⁷⁵ For Machiavelli in *The Prince*, the arbitrary power of the Ottoman sultan contrasted with the negotiatory power of the French king, and formed a dividing line between the system of governance in the West and that in the East.⁷⁶

Arbitrary power, and its corollary of cruelty and barbarity, coloured many of the western accounts of the Ottoman empire. For some, such depictions were applied to an individual sultan, such as Mehmed II, who was perceived by many as being especially cruel – perhaps a reaction to his particular success in shattering the world vision of Christendom and seizing Constantinople. The Genoese merchant Jacopo de Promontorio, who commented on the sultan's ability arbitrarily to put to death any of his officials or subjects,⁷⁷ related a story, repeated with some additions by the sixteenth-century historian Spandounes, demonstrating the true character of the ruler. In the story, Mehmed forbade anyone to touch a juicy young melon growing in the palace gardens. 'But one of the boys who followed him as personal servants, provoked by childish gluttony, picked it and ate it. The Emperor turned round and, not finding the melon or the culprit, was determined to find him by any means; so he had the stomachs of fourteen of the boys opened. It was the fourteenth who proved to have eaten the melon'.⁷⁸ Spandounes also related the fate of a *kadı* from Bursa, who, having been found to have taken bribes, was brought to Istanbul and skinned alive. His son replaced him, but was warned that should he commit any offence, he would suffer the same fate. 'The carpet on

⁷⁴ Simavi, *Gördüklerim*, facsimile p. 152.

⁷⁵ Tignosi, 'Expugnatio', p. 106.

⁷⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe e Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio, con introduzione di Giuliano Procacci*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (Milan, 1960), pp. 26–7.

⁷⁷ Jacopo de Promontorio, *Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 91–2.

⁷⁸ Spandounes, *Origin*, p. 53; Jacopo de Promontorio, *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 92.

which he sat in the court at Bursa was the pelt of his late father'.⁷⁹ These stories highlight the level of credulity about Mehmed in the West, and perhaps also the terror that he inspired.

Not surprisingly, reality was different and the Ottoman sultans were not able simply to steamroll over opposition any more than their counterparts in the West, nor to act with total disregard for ministers, military men or the population in general. Even Mehmed II was forced to backtrack on his taxation plans after his conquest of Istanbul, when the population revolted against them by leaving the city.⁸⁰ His son and successor, Bayezid II, a less forceful figure than his father, had to reverse many of Mehmed's fiscal policies, faced with implacable opposition from those elements of society which had suffered under them, in particular the *ulema* (the religious establishment). No sultan could rule in disregard of the population of Istanbul, and the reactions of the people in the streets had an impact on the ruler and his ministers even to the point of influencing the choice of ruler. When Mustafa I (1617–18, 1622–23) was brought to the throne in 1617, his mental incapacity gave cause for concern, and it was for this reason that his accession was opposed by the chief black eunuch, Mustafa Ağa, a figure of great influence during the reign of Mustafa's predecessor Ahmed I. His objection was overruled by the *seyhülislam* Esad Efendi and *sadaret kaymakamı* (the official who represented the grand vezir in Istanbul when he was on campaign) Sofu Mehmed Paşa, who argued that the only alternative to Mustafa was the very young boy Osman, son of Ahmed I, whose accession at such a young age would provoke a reaction from the populace. If they did not place Mustafa on the throne it would be impossible, they said, to protect themselves from 'the tongue of the people'. Mustafa had been secluded in the palace, and it was hoped that once he had begun to have social contact his mental condition would improve and he would function normally.⁸¹ The promised beneficial effects of social contact did not materialise. Instead, Mustafa's appearance in Eyüp for the accession ceremony made it clear that he was not normal. The people 'did not look favourably on him and understood that he was not in his right mind'.⁸² His mental incapacity could not escape the notice of his vezirs, whose turbans he pulled off and whose beards he tugged when they came to consult him on matters of state, or of those who observed him throwing money to the birds and the fish as he took pleasure

⁷⁹ Spandounes, *Origin*, p. 54.

⁸⁰ Aşıkpaşazade, *Chronik*, *bab* 124, pp. 133–4; Neşri, *Çihannüma*, p. 181; Neşri, *Kitab-ı Cihan-nüma*, II, pp. 708–10; Tursun Bey, *History*, f. 53a–55b; Kate Fleet, 'Power and economy: early Ottoman economic practice', *Eurasian Studies*, 3/1 (2004), pp. 119–27.

⁸¹ Peçevi, *Tarih*, II, p. 452. ⁸² Peçevi, *Tarih*, II, p. 452; Naima, *Tarih*, II, p. 438.

trips in his boat. 'This situation was seen by all the men of state and the people, and they understood that he was psychologically disturbed'. He was removed from the throne and replaced in 1618 by the boy Osman.⁸³ Despite his decided drawbacks as ruler, Mustafa was brought back onto the throne again in 1622, after the overthrow and murder of Osman II. People compared the two unfavourably,⁸⁴ 'the present emperor being a foole' in the estimation of the English ambassador Sir Thomas Roe.⁸⁵

Popular reaction was also evident when it came to the Ottoman practice of fratricide, which appears to have begun in the reign of Murad I (1362–89) and which was justified as necessary for the stability of the state. As a result of the killing of Selim II's five 'innocent' sons on their father's death in 1574, 'God made the angels listen to the lamentations of the people of Istanbul and made the living people witness the meaning and heed the warning' of such slaughter.⁸⁶ Similar lamentation was heard twenty-one years later, after the strangling by Mehmed III of his nineteen brothers, 'innocent and sinless boys seized from their mothers' knees'.⁸⁷ John Sanderson, who saw the bodies pass by for burial, accompanied by seven vezirs 'in blacke, ould, bacest vestures', wrote in a letter that they were to be pitied 'beinge inosents [i.e. infants], though Turks'.⁸⁸ The strangling of these innocent victims⁸⁹ was a 'terrible deed [which] left no one without pain' or feeling compassion.⁹⁰

Although the impact of public lamentation may not in the case of fratricide actually have caused the abandonment of the practice, this being more related to the policy of keeping the male heirs in the palace and to the decline in the number of males available, public lamentation could have an effect. When, in 1614, Cossacks sacked the castle of Sinop, it was the grief of those who had fled to Istanbul and whose 'weeping and lamenting reached the heavens' which alerted Ahmed I, not his grand vezir and son-in-law Nasuh Paşa, who denied that any such disaster had occurred. The *seyhülislam*, however, confirmed it. To have lied to the sultan was not a wise move, and executioners were duly dispatched to Nasuh Paşa's palace. They arrived when Ahmed was there talking to the *paşa*. The sultan withdrew to the window, the minister was killed and his

⁸³ Peçevi, *Tarih*, II, pp. 452–3. ⁸⁴ Naima, *Tarih*, II, p. 496.

⁸⁵ Sir Thomas Roe, *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte from the Year 1621 to 1628 Inclusive (Containing ...)* (London, 1740), p. 150.

⁸⁶ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 102. ⁸⁷ Peçevi, *Tarih*, II, p. 361.

⁸⁸ John Sanderson, *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602*, ed. Sir William Foster (London, 1931), p. 141.

⁸⁹ Naima, *Tarih*, I, p. 79. ⁹⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 436.

body buried on the order of the sultan next to İbrahim Paşa, the grand vezir of Süleyman I, who had suffered a similar fate.⁹¹

Influenced by public lamentation, the sultans were also forced to take into account the corrosive current of rumour which flowed through the city like blood through veins. The power of rumour could affect the markets, as plans for a campaign sent speculators hurrying to stockpile in anticipation of price rises.⁹² It frightened the sultans and the grand vezirs alike, with one grand vezir, Alemdar Mustafa Paşa, acknowledging at the beginning of the nineteenth century the anxiety caused him by the report of a janissary plot against him. The provider of this rumour was imprisoned and, once the rumour had proved unfounded, killed, Alemdar Mustafa Paşa commenting, 'just think what kind of seditious words he might produce for the people of Istanbul'.⁹³ Alemdar Mustafa Paşa responded firmly to scurrilous coffee house conversation,⁹⁴ and it led Mahmud II to ban people coming together to gossip in the mosques as if they were coffee houses.⁹⁵

Mosques – not merely places for prayers but also for seditious rumour⁹⁶ – coffee houses, barbers' shops and wine houses were hives of gossip and rumour about state affairs and the performance of officials.⁹⁷ While Selaniki might regard the gossipers in the coffee houses in the late sixteenth century as idle and worthless people whose lies and calumnies knew no end and no limits, the impact of rumour could not be underestimated, and he himself acknowledged that on occasion some of what was said was true.⁹⁸

For Selaniki, the prevalence of rumour was the responsibility of the ministers who failed to prevent it, something which he remarked would never have happened in an earlier age.⁹⁹ This was the case, for example, with those rumours which began to circulate in January 1595 about Murad III's health. According to Selaniki's account, those who were 'clear-headed and intelligent among the population' advised that in the current climate of difficulty and instability, and in order to protect the honour of religion and the state, people should not gossip in this way. The sultan was in fact seriously ill, but this was not revealed by the officials. The doctors announced that the sultan's bladder condition had worsened due to the coldness of the weather, but that the medicine they were giving him was having an effect, which it was not. The mother of

⁹¹ Peçevi, *Tarih*, II, p. 443.

⁹² Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 670. ⁹³ Cabi, *Târihi*, I, pp. 186–7, quotation p. 187.

⁹⁴ Cabi, *Târihi*, I, pp. 223–4. ⁹⁵ Cabi, *Târihi*, I, p. 252. ⁹⁶ Cabi, *Târihi*, I, p. 257.

⁹⁷ Cabi, *Târihi*, I, pp. 174, 178–9, 214, 220, 221, 223–4, 224–5, 229.

⁹⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 707–8. ⁹⁹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 421.

Mehmed, who was very soon to become Mehmed III, summoned her son from Manisa and the pretence that the sultan was not seriously ill was continued, his death being concealed even from the vezirs.¹⁰⁰

Rumour could either simmer or explode into a mass reaction. It could force the *şeyhülislam* into upholding the complaints of mosque-goers, fired up by members of the *ulema*, that the sultan was not going on campaign and so allowing Muslim women to be enslaved by infidels, and backing the popular reaction demanding that soldiers be sent to support the fighters of Islam on the frontiers, to whom money, food and munitions should be sent.¹⁰¹ It could compel the sultan to respond, justifying his military decisions and his diplomacy. Mehmed III was forced to reply to complaints circulating among the janissaries and the coffee house-goers about his failure to attack Pec, a campaign they argued that all supported and were willing to participate in. Mehmed countered this criticism, announcing that he was intending to launch an offensive against Pec, but recalled the unworthy behaviour of his troops in the last campaign when they had fled. Expressing his hopes that God would help him as he had before, his message contained a veiled concern about a repetition of such behaviour.¹⁰² Even Süleyman I was not immune from public rebuke, when he came in for angry criticism about the amount of money he had lavished on hosting Alkas Mirza, the brother of the Safavid ruler of Iran, Shah Tahmasp. The populace, annoyed that Alkas Mirza, a non-Sunni who was there simply to save his own head, having fled after intriguing against the shah, was distinctly unhappy to have the Persians, blasphemous deniers of the true belief, among them. The sultan's response was to claim that he had done what was necessary for the honour of the state, concluding that 'If he [Alkas Mirza] betrays us, then it will be in the hands of God'.¹⁰³

Even at a much more personal level, sultans were the object of gossip to which they needed to be seen to respond. Persistent rumours that Rüstem Paşa, who was to marry Mihrimah Sultan, the daughter of Süleyman I, had leprosy resulted in a doctor being summoned to check him for lice, it being believed that lice were not found on lepers. Declared to have lice, Rüstem Paşa was permitted to marry.¹⁰⁴

While the population gossiped incessantly and about everything, 'saying whatever fell onto their tongues, lies and calumnies for their own benefit', in the words of an eighteenth-century anonymous historian,¹⁰⁵ the palace collected reports on what the people were chattering about. The

¹⁰⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 425–6, quotation p. 425.

¹⁰¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 525. ¹⁰² Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 707–8.

¹⁰³ Peçevi, *Tarih*, I, p. 146. ¹⁰⁴ Peçevi, *Tarih*, I, p. 20. ¹⁰⁵ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 111.

sultans themselves were in a position to pick up information on their trips round the city in disguise. High-up officials, too, used disguise to collect information, though not always successfully, the *kaymakam* Rüşti Paşa being recognised when busy collecting information in disguise in a coffee house in 1813 and his questions being answered accordingly.¹⁰⁶ Spies were employed to pass on information on conversations in popular venues such as coffee shops, *hamams* and barbers' shops. In 1808, a barber's shop in Beyazıt was closed as a result of the report made by a state official in disguise on its clientele's discussions of state affairs.¹⁰⁷ The report of a female spy in the Sultan Bayezid *hamam* on the conversation of women there who were talking about state affairs led to the arrest and imprisonment of the women involved.¹⁰⁸ In the reign of Abdülhamid II, spying produced an enormous quantity of information, all collected and recorded in the voluminous spy reports kept in the Yıldız palace, as people reported on their neighbours and fed pernicious rumours to the palace.¹⁰⁹ Mischief makers could whisper into the ears of high officials of state and so destroy the object of their gossip. One feeble-minded old man was seized and imprisoned at the end of the sixteenth century after he had fallen into the company of scoundrels and heretics with bad beliefs and bad characters, denizens of the coffee house, and about whom such mischief makers reported. Accused of claiming to be a mahdi, he was eventually hanged, his fate sealed in the coffee houses of Istanbul where 'he fell onto the tongue of strangers... tongues wagged and the story circulated'.¹¹⁰

It is possible that the palace itself indulged in reverse or counter-rumour. In a letter dated July 1622 to Mr Secretary Calvert, Sir Thomas Roe wrote, 'Wee have now bene 14 daies in a calme... I know not to whatt to impute the late quietness, whether to their ramazan or lent now beeing; or to the policy of some, who have spread abroad prophecies, that the 15th of this moneth, if any motion, the streets should runne with bloud'.¹¹¹ Silence was not always a good sign. In September 1623 Roe reported that all seemed calm and quiet, but continued, 'the most disordered assume a face of obedience, (which I once thought banished this citty) and choose rather submission to lawers, then threatened destruction; the calme is as violent as the storme: the first actions showe peace; butt so, as to prepare for necessity of warre'.¹¹² Roe was not apparently the only ambassador to be aware of the significance of silence:

¹⁰⁶ Cabi, *Târîhi*, II, p. 947. ¹⁰⁷ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 224. ¹⁰⁸ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 392.

¹⁰⁹ Asaf Tugay, *İbret. Abdülhamid'e Verilen Jurnaller ve Jurnalciler. Jurnalcilerin Tam Listesi* (Istanbul, n.d.).

¹¹⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 703-4. ¹¹¹ Roe, *Negotiations*, p. 64.

¹¹² Roe, *Negotiations*, p. 179.

It is told that in the time of the janissaries when the ambassadors wrote their reports for their own states on events in Istanbul, the report of the Swedish ambassador was always correct. When the other ambassadors pressured him asking 'where do you get the correct information from?', he said 'my information is not based on rumour but is perhaps the result of thought and perception. The key to this is to think of the position in the Ottoman empire as if it were in Europe and then reverse it. For example, if you see the janissaries muttering and grumbling in the coffee houses, you report to your countries "in comparison to the European situation, Istanbul is on the point of revolution". But I, turning things upside down, write "there is security and order in Istanbul" and this turns out to be true, because by grumbling, the janissaries get things off their chests and they do not attempt to revolt. And when you see the janissaries reticent and silent you report that "now there are signs of ease and order in Istanbul" but I, however, on the contrary, come to the conclusion that this silence is the sign of revolution, and that the janissaries will continue in such silence for a while until they reach exploding point and then will suddenly attempt revolt and revolution'.¹¹³

By no means all-powerful, or the absolute ruler of Machiavelli, the Ottoman sultan was constrained to shape policy with the reaction of the people of the city in mind. Popular reaction had consequences – even to the extent of open revolt in the case of the Edirne incident, or again in 1730 when the lack of interest displayed by the sultan and his ministers¹¹⁴ was reflected in the behaviour of the *kaymakam*, who, unconcerned about the conditions in the city, spent his time planting tulips, according to popular perception.¹¹⁵ Sultans had thus to consider, respond to, appease or, on occasion, according to Selim III, frighten the people¹¹⁶ in order to ensure an equilibrium of power in Istanbul. One way in which they maintained this balance was through pageantry.

Pageantry

That feasting and festivity were essential to maintain order in the city and that the population had to be allowed enjoyment was realised by Selim II, who regarded making the people of the city joyful an essential element of successful rule and one that his ancestors had also followed. In this he was supported by his secretary Feridun Bey, who is credited by Selaniki with having pointed out to the grand vezir that 'by nature people cannot bear constant repression, they sometimes want release'.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât*, p. 57. ¹¹⁴ Abdi, *Tarih*, p. 26; Destari, *Tarih*, pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁵ Abdi, *Tarih*, p. 29. ¹¹⁶ Karal, *Hümayunları*, p. 97. ¹¹⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 61-2.

As Feridun Bey had realised, people's lives and levels of enjoyment were greatly enhanced by festivities and celebrations. Imperial pageantry coloured the city, whether for the birth of royal children, such as the twin sons of Ahmed II in 1692/93,¹¹⁸ İbrahim's (1640–48) son Mehmed IV, whose birth was particularly well received in 1642 and was followed by three days and nights of celebration,¹¹⁹ or Osman II (1618–22), for whom there were seven;¹²⁰ the marriages of the sultans' daughters or the circumcisions of their sons; military departures and arrivals; or religious festivities at the end of the holy month of Ramazan, the birth of the Prophet or the holy nights of Regaip and Berat, when the city was illuminated by lanterns and lamps strung out between the minarets.¹²¹

The city rang to a constant barrage of noise. Cannon were constantly going off, either for a royal birth, a circumcision or an accession. Ships saluted as they passed Topkapı palace, and cannon were fired for victories of one sort or another, or for Ramazan. Ahmed III ordered that they be fired three times a day for the birth of his first child, Fatma Sultan in 1704,¹²² and three days of cannon firing followed the birth of Abdülhamid I's son, Mahmud II.¹²³ The birth of Prince Mehmed, son of Sultan Mustafa III, was similarly greeted with cannon, which were fired all over the empire on the sultan's orders.¹²⁴ Abdülmecid (1839–61) ordered cannon to be fired for his accession in 1839,¹²⁵ and cannon roared from the imperial arsenal for the accession of Selim II in 1566.¹²⁶ When Murad III went to Eyüp for his accession, cannon were fired on all sides.¹²⁷ The imperial fleet contributed to this endless stream of explosions, saluting as they sailed past Topkapı palace or performing for the sultan. Sultans such as Mustafa III watched the departure of the imperial navy for the Black Sea, cannon blazing, from Yalı Köşkü,¹²⁸ or enjoyed a cannon display, as Mahmud II did when the navy performed for him off Beşiktaş.¹²⁹ The dramatic booming of cannon and crash of guns, designed to terrify the enemy as Kılıç Ali Paşa's fleet left Beşiktaş in 1572, was such that 'the eyes and ears of the heavens became blind and deaf'.¹³⁰

¹¹⁸ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 44. ¹¹⁹ Naima, *Tarih*, III, p. 953.

¹²⁰ Naima, *Tarih*, I, p. 289. ¹²¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 197–8.

¹²² Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 289. ¹²³ Taylesanizade, *Tarihi*, p. 82.

¹²⁴ Çeşmizade Mustafa Reşid, *Çeşmî-zâde Tarihi*, ed. Bekir Kütükoğlu (Istanbul, 1959), pp. 11–12.

¹²⁵ Ahmet Refik, *Hicri On Üçüncü Asırda İstanbul Hayatı (1200–1255)* (Istanbul, 1932), p. 33, *hüküm* 23.

¹²⁶ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 42. ¹²⁷ Gerlach, *Günliği*, I, p. 165.

¹²⁸ Çeşmizade, *Tarihi*, p. 82. ¹²⁹ Cabi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 202–3.

¹³⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 86.

Such displays were not always for mere amusement, or attempts at terrorising, for some had a more practical aspect related to naval training: to fire cannon was one thing, to hit the desired target was another. Selim III watched one such exercise as, the area having been cleared of any boats and the imperial ships dispatched to the safety of Beşiktaş, two corvets set out from the imperial dockyards and fired on a ship anchored for that purpose in the waters before the palace. Simultaneously cannon were fired from Tophane and the ship satisfactorily sunk.¹³¹

Not all the results of cannon salvos were as pleasing. When two galleys returning from Egypt in 1595 fired their cannon, the windows of the pavilion where Murad III was sitting broke, showering glass over the *divan* and the sultan. Such a thing had never happened before, according to the historian Naima, even though the huge galleys had regularly fired their cannon, causing the ground to vibrate as if in an earthquake. Agitated, the sultan interpreted this as a bad omen, foretelling that this would be the last time he would come to the pavilion.¹³² Aware of the possible negative effects of cannon fire, Mustafa III ordered there to be none until his heavily pregnant concubine had given birth, fearing that violent explosions might produce a miscarriage. No ship, merchant or naval, coming from the Black Sea on its way to the Mediterranean was to salute before Topkapı.¹³³ Mahmud II showed similar concern for his pregnant concubine in 1812, when he forbade a ship on its way to Tunisia from firing its cannon in front of Beşiktaş palace.¹³⁴

Apart from a constant booming of cannon, the city resounded to the banging and whooshing of fireworks, which frequently lit up the skies and which were set off for births, circumcisions, marriages or just general celebrations.¹³⁵ The sound of the fireworks let off in 1530 for the circumcision celebrations of Mehmed, Mustafa and Selim, the sons of Süleyman I, were heard everywhere.¹³⁶ Fireworks shot into the air from rafts in the sea off Topkapı on which firework castles had been made, and from many other nearby parts of the city for the circumcision of the sons of Mehmed III in 1597.¹³⁷ Ahmed III watched from Aynalı Kavak Kasrı the fireworks set off from rafts for his three sons, part of the fifteen days of celebrations organised for their circumcision, the fourteenth day of which included a

¹³¹ Cabi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 99.

¹³² Naima, *Tarih*, I, p. 78; Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, pp. 359–60; Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali ve Künhü'l-Ahbâr'ında II. Selim, III. Murat ve III. Mehmet Devirleri*, 3 vols., ed. Faris Çerçi (Kayseri, 2000), III, p. 626.

¹³³ Ahmet Refik, *Hicri On İkinci Asırda İstanbul Hayatı (1100–1200)* (Istanbul, 1930), p. 193, *hüküm* 233.

¹³⁴ Cabi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 844. ¹³⁵ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 702.

¹³⁶ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 84–5. ¹³⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 692.

magnificent firework display both from sea and land in Ok Meydanı.¹³⁸ Weddings were also marked with fireworks, those for the eldest daughter of Ahmed I in June 1615 lasting many days before and after the marriage, both day and night, in Topkapı and in the house of the groom. For three nights, firework castles were set alight on boats anchored in the sea off Topkapı and an infinity of rockets was fired into the air.¹³⁹ Both the night before the wedding of the princess to the governor of Rumeli in July 1575 and the night after were illuminated by fireworks.¹⁴⁰

Fireworks had to please. The official in charge of firework displays was sacked in 1784/85 because the people of the palace were not satisfied with those on the rafts off Beşiktaş palace to mark the birth of Mahmud II. The following week, rafts were brought to Tophane and a new display laid on. This one was very much liked and the person in charge was promoted.¹⁴¹

It was not just fireworks that enlivened the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants, for the city was a carnival of spectacle for their entertainment. They went to see the elephant which the Persian ambassador had given to Selim III – a great success also in Edirne, where the animal was sent next.¹⁴² They could also amuse themselves observing the experiment with a balloon made by the English convert Selim Ağa at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁴³ They looked on in amazement at the more than 360 *nahul* (a decoration, made in particular for imperial weddings and circumcisions, in the shape of a tree), decorated with flowers, candles and tulle, used in the circumcision ceremony of Murad III's son Mehmed, the 100 lions 100 lion cubs made out of sugar, the 100 tigers and tiger cubs, 100 large elephants and 100 baby elephants, 100 horses, 100 mules and 100 camels, all swimming in sugar. After them came 100 each of peregrine falcons, vultures, royal falcons, partridges, peacocks, cockerels, ducks and geese. People watched them as they passed, gazing at the colours, and it was as if beautiful flowers had opened.¹⁴⁴

The state put a great deal of time and money into choreographing spectacle and into providing the populace of the city with dramatic entertainment. That for the birth of İbrahim's son Ahmed involved three nights of continuous festivity, during which the shores of the

¹³⁸ Seyid Vehbi, *Sûrnâme (Üçüncü Ahmed'in Oğullarının Sünnet Düğünü)*, ed. Reşad Ekrem Koçu (Istanbul, 1939), pp. 21, 23–4, 36. See also Levni's miniatures on the event, Esin Atıl (ed.), *Levni ve Surname: Bir Osmanlı Şenliğinin Öyküsü* (Istanbul, 1999).

¹³⁹ Crescenzo Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter di Costantinopoli del 1615. A un amico', in Michele Giustiniani, *Lettere memorabilia dell'Abbate Michele Giustiniani, Patrio Genovese de' Sig.ri di Scio. Parte II* (Rome, 1699), no. XVII, p. 72.

¹⁴⁰ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 201. ¹⁴¹ Taylesanizade, *Tarihi*, p. 90.

¹⁴² Cabi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 52. ¹⁴³ Cabi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr Der Mecâlis-i Sûr*, ed. Ali Öztekin (Ankara, 1996), p. 105.

Bosphorus were illuminated and the boats at the jetties lit up with candles and lanterns. People packed into boats, stretching from Tersane to Üsküdar, watched pyrotechnic displays and looked on, dazzled by the illuminations.¹⁴⁵ Conjurers performed on rafts at sea during the four days of celebrations for the birth of Hatice Sultan, daughter of Mustafa III in 1768, each day's raft being the responsibility of one particular official – the head of the dockyards, the commander of the artillery, the commander of the armoury regiment and the head of the customs.¹⁴⁶

The twenty days of festivities for the circumcision of Mehmed, Mustafa and Selim, sons of Süleyman I, involved many entertainments in different parts of the city, ending on the last day with great entertainments in Kağıthane, horse races, archery competitions, acrobats, wrestlers and firework displays.¹⁴⁷ Those laid on for the celebrations for the circumcision of the three sons of Ahmed III included wrestling, gypsies dancing and wrestling with bears, acrobats, conjurers, tightrope walkers, competitions such as climbing up a pole at the top of which was a silver jug, puppeteers, dancers and, at night, shadow plays (*Karagöz* and *Hacıvad*), all watched by hundreds of thousands of people in Ok Meydanı. Musicians and dancers performed on rafts illuminated with lanterns, floating in front of the Tersane Kasrı. On the fourteenth day of the celebrations there was a major display staged on the water and watched by Ahmed III from Aynalı Kavak Kasrı. The boats of those who came to see it were so numerous that they covered the water and their oars could not move, according to the contemporary description of the event given by Seyid Vehbi, for whom the boats were so full that it was like judgement day. The foreign ambassadors were invited to these celebrations on different days – the French and Russian on one day, the Dutch and Austrian, the Venetian, and the ambassador from Dubrovnik on others. They brought gifts and were given feasts presented on silver and golden plates and set out in a European style.¹⁴⁸

The very costly¹⁴⁹ celebrations in 1582 for the circumcision of Mehmed, the eldest son of Murad III who was to become Mehmed III, went on for a staggering sixty days, during which time the city was lit up every night with hundreds of torches and thousands of lanterns.¹⁵⁰ Before his circumcision, Mehmed processed on horseback through the streets, accompanied by a retinue and musicians playing drums and

¹⁴⁵ Topçular Katibi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 1169.

¹⁴⁶ Çeşmizade, *Tarihi*, pp. 93–4. ¹⁴⁷ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 84–5.

¹⁴⁸ Seyid Vehbi, *Sûrnâme*, pp. 17, 19, 21, 23–4, 29, 32, 34–6.

¹⁴⁹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 133. ¹⁵⁰ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, p. 225.

horns and making a great deal of noise.¹⁵¹ He was dressed very magnificently. Over a garment of white silk he wore a red-coloured satin garment ornamented with rubies and diamonds. He was girded with a dagger and a sword.¹⁵² This display was designed to incorporate the populace:

With this music and noisy crowds, this shah of the world
Made an excursion in Istanbul like the sun
He showed his beautiful countenance to all the people of
Istanbul
He took their blessing and greeted them.¹⁵³

This enormous event was not without problems, and the crowds were so great that it was impossible to control them. A special unit of five hundred men, all dressed in kaftans of Moroccan leather and carrying oil-filled skin bags, whose job was to control the crowds and clear the routes, was used to drench them with linseed oil to keep order.¹⁵⁴ One of the attractions was two male elephants, one little and one big, and one giraffe, which were displayed at At Meydanı. At one point the large elephant suddenly broke loose. In a state of excitement, with his eyes ablaze, he expelled water from his trunk over those watching, who fled as if from a great, noisy shower of rain.¹⁵⁵ Fear of potential trouble led Ahmed III to restrict the celebrations for the birth of his first child, his daughter Fatma Sultan, in 1704, to the daytime only.¹⁵⁶ Those for the daughter of Mahmud II, Ayşe Sultan, in 1809, were also cut short, after the sultan, during a tour in disguise, observed women watching the fireworks from boats on the Bosphorus, from the shores and even from in front of Maçka Sarayı above Beşiktaş. Although the celebrations were planned to continue for several days more, Mahmud cancelled them, fearing that there might be trouble if so many women continued to go out and about at night.¹⁵⁷

The city was awash with pageantry. Parades and processions wound through the streets, impressing and overawing with their displays of wealth and power. The sultans not only appeared regularly, but did so in style. Selim II, on his way to the Friday mosque at the beginning of January 1574, wore a sword of solid gold, ornamented lavishly with jewels. His feet, encased in jewel-studded shoes, sat in gold, bejewelled stirrups

¹⁵¹ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 121–4. ¹⁵² Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 118–21.
¹⁵³ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, p. 124.
¹⁵⁴ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 194–6; Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, III, p. 395.
¹⁵⁵ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 211–12. ¹⁵⁶ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 289.
¹⁵⁷ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, pp. 515–16.

and his knee guards were gilded with gold. Wearing a garment embroidered with gold thread and a white turban, he rode a horse whose harnesses and trappings, too, were decorated with gold and precious stones. In front of him were the janissaries with their tall, plumed headgear, the janissary *ağa* on a very beautiful horse, and behind them officials of the palace. Directly behind the sultan came two boys on horseback, both with long plaited hair hanging down below their ears, carrying bows and decorated quivers full of arrows, and behind them were the chief secretary and the chief eunuch, and other officials on donkeys who distributed money to the people. One person walking in front of the procession carried a bag made of red velvet, inside which was the Qu'ran.¹⁵⁸

The procession to Friday prayer resembled that for the accession of a new sultan, except that for that occasion there were many more horsemen accompanying him and everything was more spectacular, according to Gerlach.¹⁵⁹ For the accession, sultans went to Eyüp, where they visited the tomb of Eyüb el Ensari, the companion of the Prophet who was martyred at the Arab siege of Constantinople in 674. Some sultans went there by boat up the Golden Horn (Haliç) and then returned on horseback, passing back into the city through the Edirne Kapı accompanied by a large retinue, as Süleyman II did in 1687.¹⁶⁰ Both Murad III¹⁶¹ and Mehmed III went by sea and came back by land, while their retinues went by land.¹⁶² Some, like Osman II, went by land and returned by sea, and others, like Mahmud I, went there and back by land.¹⁶³ Accompanied by great retinues, the sultans were watched by enormous crowds. When Murad III passed through the streets of the city on his way back from Eyüp, he was accompanied by two thousand people. A man of medium height, brown-bearded and with a nose that resembled the beak of a falcon, according to Gerlach, he wore a garment made of silk worked with gold thread. The Habsburg ambassador decorated the door of the embassy building with carpets and sat in front of it in a beautiful chair, his servants standing by him dressed in clothes of Damascus cloth. When the sultan passed the door they presented their respects to him.¹⁶⁴

While sultans had for centuries ridden to or from Eyüp, Mahmud I returning mounted on a horse 'as swift as the wind',¹⁶⁵ Sultan Mehmed V

¹⁵⁸ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 115. ¹⁵⁹ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 165.
¹⁶⁰ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 822; İszade, *Târîhi*, p. 207.
¹⁶¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 105–6. ¹⁶² Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 455.
¹⁶³ Abdi, *Târîhi*, p. 45; Peçevi, *Târîhi*, II, p. 452; Destari, *Târîhi*, p. 22.
¹⁶⁴ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 165.
¹⁶⁵ Abdi, *Târîhi*, p. 45. Interestingly, although Abdi refers to the sword, Destari Salih, who gives an account of the same event, refers to Mahmud I being girded with 'tir ve tirkeş', arrows and quiver; Destari, *Târîhi*, pp. 22–4.

(Reşad) (1909–18) did not adopt this custom, but, being old and fat, went there by ferry, the Söğütü ferry, and came back by carriage. The return by land was unfortunate, according to Simavi. A sea return, he argued, would have been better, for it would have avoided the narrow streets between ugly crumbling wooden houses through which the carriage passed.¹⁶⁶ This said, however, the use of carriages instead of horses for public ceremonies was in general a good thing, for 'it was indeed very ridiculous to see the odd behaviour of the grand vezirs and the *seyhilislams* who had never mounted a horse and who had never held reins in their hands' and to be treated to an unwanted glimpse of their white undergarments as they struggled unskilfully with their mounts.¹⁶⁷ The last girding of an Ottoman sultan was on 13 September 1918, when Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin) travelled to Eyüp in the imperial boat for the ceremony.¹⁶⁸

Sometimes the sultans appeared for more prosaic reasons, such as rabbit hunting. The prospect of catching a glimpse of the sultan even on these occasions greatly excited westerners, and the convert and high Ottoman official Adam Neuser's offer to take Heberer, an ex-Ottoman galley slave, and his companions to watch Murad III on a hunting expedition in 1588 was snapped up with great pleasure. He took them to Has Bahçe, an imperial garden by the sea, from where, shortly afterwards, they saw the sultan on a magnificent imperial boat, which was red and decorated with gold leaf. The oarsmen were wearing snow-white clothes and red conical hats. Passing through Has Bahçe, the sultan and his retinue rode off into the mountains, Heberer and his companions in hot pursuit. They were rewarded with a clear view of the royal personage. The sultan was preceded by the janissary *ağa*, dressed in garments embroidered with silver and gold thread and made up of flowery cloth, and wearing a beautiful, large white plume. He was mounted on a very magnificent horse, whose saddle was gilded with gold and decorated with precious stones. Behind him came about a hundred janissaries, who were in turn followed by three high officials, looking very magnificent in their turbans and garments with silver thread. Their horses had covers of beautiful cloths and their saddles and harnesses were gilded with gold and decorated with precious stones. Behind came the sultan, wearing a garment made of golden thread and riding an incredibly beautiful horse. The saddle and harness of the horse were so precious that their value was incalculable. The plume on his turban resembled the feathers of a black swallow and was surrounded with precious stones, among which was a

¹⁶⁶ Simavi, *Gördüklerimiz*, facsimile pp. 19–20.

¹⁶⁷ Simavi, *Gördüklerimiz*, facsimile p. 20, fn. 1.

¹⁶⁸ Simavi, *Gördüklerimiz*, facsimile pp. 153–4.

diamond that had been bought for sixty thousand ducats. At fifty paces from the sultan there were forty servants guarding him. These servants opened the way for him, shouting, 'Make way, make way', and prevented the people from approaching nearer than fifty or sixty paces to him. Behind the sultan there were about sixty archers, who acted as bodyguards. In one hand they held a bow and in the other an arrow, and on their backs they had quivers with very swift arrows. They were followed by other riders, some of whom carried cushions on the back of their saddles, on which sat animals which resembled tigers, or they had hawks, falcons or other wild birds. Dogs walked beside them, their colours very beautiful, but whose height, Heberer noted, was shorter than the hunting dogs in his own country. As the sultan passed Heberer and his companions, they took off their hats as a mark of respect. Realising they were foreigners, the sultan sent someone to ask who they were. Replying that they were German aristocrats, they sent a message to the sultan that they were happy to see him in good health. In response, the sultan greeted them graciously, and went on.¹⁶⁹

Of somewhat more significance in the political sphere was the sultan's part in military pageantry (although hunting expeditions, particularly those of Ahmed I, were presented almost as departures on campaign¹⁷⁰), when the might of the Ottoman realm and the awesome power of its military resources were displayed. Any departure on campaign or triumphant return from victorious battle was heralded with great pomp, or, as John Sanderson put it in a letter of 1597, 'triumphant pompe unspeakable'.¹⁷¹ For Bartolomeus Georgievitz, captured at the battle of Mohács in 1526, there was nothing to compare to the splendours of victory celebrations:

I verily believe, and do confess, for those dayes he celebrates for Victory, no Mortal Eye, (nay, not the Moon or Sun) did ere behold a spectacle more glorious and resplendent, for order, number, silence, richness, state, and magnificence in all kindes. It is impossible for onely man to be exalted to a loftier degree of sublimation, then this Pagan when triumphful.¹⁷²

The entry of Mustafa II into the city from Edirne in 1695 occasioned many festivities. He was met at Davut Paşa by a great retinue and escorted from there to Topkapı palace. On his way, young and old received him and the craftsmen and traders spread out cloth before him. The praying for God to bless him and the greetings of the people were of such

¹⁶⁹ Michael Heberer, *Osmanlıda Bir Köle. Brettenli Michael Heberer'in Amları 1585–1588*, trans. Türkis Noyan (Istanbul, 2003), pp. 283–5.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Safi, *Tevârih*. ¹⁷¹ Sanderson, *Travels*, p. 166.

¹⁷² Bartholomeus Georgievitz, *The Rarities of Turkey Gathered by One that was Sold Seven Times as Slave in the Turkish Empire...* (London, 1661), p. 46.



4. Victory procession, in Schweigger, *Ein neue Reysbeschreibung*, between pp. 176 and 177.

magnitude that the sultan was almost reduced to tears. The shops were crowded with people watching. When the procession reached the gate of Topkapı, animals were slaughtered and cannon were fired off simultaneously from the dockyards, arsenal, Saray Burnu and galleys. The noise was so great that the sky and the earth trembled.¹⁷³

The magnificence of the preparations for Murad IV's departure for Baghdad was so great that it was, in Peçevi's words, difficult to relate.¹⁷⁴ This departure involved the entire city's population, either as part of the enormous processions involved in sending off the army or as spectators, watching, cheering and praying for success. Teachers and pupils prayed, merchants rolled out their best cloths under the hooves of the sultan's horse, and crowds of women watched. The crush was such that many fell under the feet of the crowds and were trampled to death, their bodies reduced to dust by the mass of spectators.¹⁷⁵ Similar scenes greeted the army's return.

Sanderson's account, although perhaps displaying a certain English idiosyncrasy, shows the enormous pageantry of the departure of the Ottoman ruler on campaign at the end of the sixteenth century.

¹⁷³ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 117. ¹⁷⁴ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 494.

¹⁷⁵ Topçular Katibi, *Tarihi*, II, pp. 1071–2.

When the Great Turke went out of the citie towards the warrs it was with wounderfull great solemnitie and noteable order, to[o] longe to describe particu[l]lerlie. But I remember a great number of dogs ledd after him, well manned and in thier best apparrell; his haukes by horsmen carried in great number; tame lions and olifants, with other beasts of many sorts; but espesially the jarraff before spoken of, beinge prince of all the beasts, was ledd by three chaines of three sundry men stalkinge before him. For it is the custome that, the Great Turke in person goinge one warefare, most or all in generall the cheefe men and beasts attend him out of the cities. And at his retorne it is lawefull for all thier women, both smaule and great, to mete him without the waules; at other tim[e]s the women of any accompt or credit never come in multitudes emongest the men.¹⁷⁶

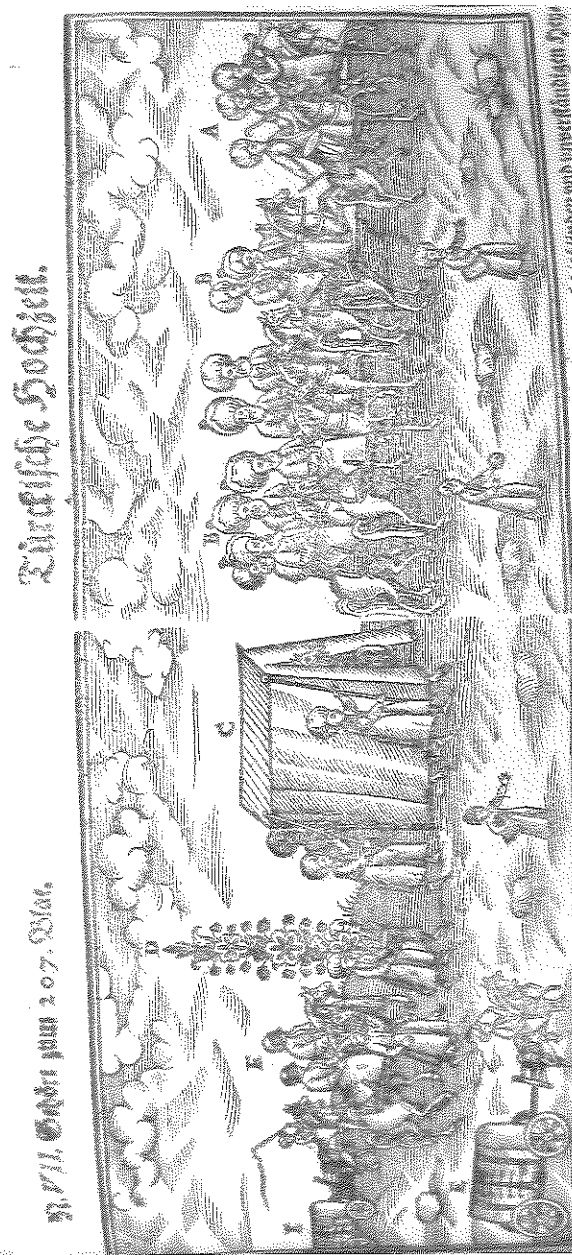
Any military departure, not merely that led by the sultan, required pomp and pageantry, both on land and at sea. Sultans appeared to send their armies and navies off to war, as Ahmed III did when he crossed to Üsküdar to watch the army leave for Iran. There the soldiers lined up in great order, and behind them the people who had come to see the sultan, lined up in their turn.¹⁷⁷ The armies were, of course, magnificent. The commander-in-chief İbrahim Paşa left for Hungary in 1599, with an army composed of soldiers magnificently dressed, equipped with shields ornamented with gold, golden-coloured spears and elegant quivers, and with the strongest of horses ornamented with plumes. The soldiers were hardy, valiant and as brave as lions, able to break through the enemy ranks and so strong as to be capable of wrestling lions to the ground. The imperial army was embellished and adorned in every way, its soldiers were the bravest and most valiant, and its grandeur and majesty was so great that it made the enemy jealous. All prayed so hard for this wondrous army that the prayers 'reached the court of heaven'.¹⁷⁸

People came not just to see, and pray for, the lion-hearted troops, but also to watch the departure of the fleet and the launching of new ships. Many people, including the Italian traveller Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, in Istanbul at the end of the seventeenth century, went to look at the fleet about to set out via the Black Sea to the Danube. Careri's curiosity aroused suspicions that he was a spy, but 'finding I was no Venetian, but went out of meer curiosity to see the galliots, and hulls of galleasses, with a great number of people', the authorities released him.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Sanderson, *Travels*, pp. 59–60. Peçevi referred to Mehmed III setting off from Istanbul on campaign in 1595 in the same way as his predecessors had; Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 373.

¹⁷⁷ Destari, *Tarihi*, pp. 5–6. ¹⁷⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 806–7.

¹⁷⁹ Giovanni Francesco Careri, 'A voyage round the world by Dr John Francis Gemelle Careri in six parts. Part I containing the most remarkable things he saw in Turkey', in John Churchill (ed.), *A Collection of Voyages and Travels Some now First Printed from Original Manuscripts Others now First Published in English in Six Volumes* (London, 1732), IV, p. 86.



5. Wedding procession, in Schweigger, *Ein neue Reysbeschreibung*, between pp. 206 and 207.

When, in 1596, the magnificent and beautifully decorated flagship built for the vezir Halil Paşa was launched, the *divan* did not take place; instead, all the high officials, as well as the high *ulema* and *seyhs* (leaders of religious orders), came to the imperial dockyard. Prayers were held for victory over the enemies of Islam, animals were sacrificed and alms were distributed to the poor. Cannon were fired 'joyfully' and all the people came out to watch.¹⁸⁰ So many people went, both by land and by sea, to watch the launching of the grand admiral Sinan Paşa's new and magnificent galley, that Heberer regarded the number as impossible to calculate. The French ambassador was forced to hire a boat in order to obtain a good view of the ceremony.¹⁸¹

The arrival as well as the departure of ships drew large crowds. When, in 1791, corsair ships from Algeria and Tunisia arrived, led by Seydi Ali in the galleon *Hifz-i Huda* (Protected by God), a vessel so large that it could not dock until the following day due to lack of wind, the people lined up on the jetty to watch and pray, recalling for the contemporary Ahmed Cavid the poem, 'Hey brave hero have you come with God's blessing?/ Hey bloody sword, have you come from a bloody holy war?'¹⁸² Captured vessels also drew crowds, that seized from the Christians by Kılıç Ali in 1573 also attracting the attention of Gerlach, who went to see it with his companions.¹⁸³

Military pageantry served not just to impress the populace of the city, but also to send a message to foreign envoys and ambassadors. That sultanic procession had a distinct message of power was not lost on Domenico, the doctor of Murad III who noted the sultan's use of it when preparing for war against the Persians, when he rode across the city accompanied by a huge retinue of cavalry.

He did it to terrify the Ambassador of the Persians, who was there at the time... The Grand Turk Murat had one of his pashas tell this ambassador that all this cavalry which he had seen were only the chickens in the coop and that he should consider how infinite a number remained outside in so many fields.¹⁸⁴

No doubt such processions and sultans, 'being accompanied by 3000 Janisaries, besides Bashawes, Chawses and Hagars' on the way to Ayasofya for Friday prayer, reinforced the impression of a very well-stocked coop indeed.¹⁸⁵

It was also a very, very rich coop. Much of what was on display in the city was magnificent, and wealth and luxury were evident in all the pageantry

¹⁸⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 585. ¹⁸¹ Heberer, *Köle*, pp. 316-17.

¹⁸² Ahmed Cavid, *Hadika*, p. 153. ¹⁸³ Gerlach, *Güntüğü*, I, p. 109.

¹⁸⁴ Domenico, *Istanbul*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁵ William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventuures, and Painefull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Travayles, from Scotland, to....* (London, 1623), p. 138.

and spectacle for which Istanbul was famous. The clothes of the sultan, the outfits of his retinue and his ministers, down to the trappings of his horse – all spelt money and power. Perhaps it was the weddings of the daughters of the sultans which displayed wealth most blatantly. Not only did the brides pass through the streets surrounded by enormous entourages on their way to the houses of their new husbands, but the presents given to the bride or to various members of her family, including the sultan, were also on display, carried along to Topkapı or to the bride's new home. In 1768, El Hac Mehmed Emin Paşa, who was to be married to Şah Sultan, daughter of Mustafa III, presented the sultan with 3 sugar gardens, 18 porcelain bowls of candied fruits on 6 trays, 20 English crystal shallow bowls filled with candied fruits, 24 crystal bowls of candied fruit, 2 crystal glass covers decorated with flower blossom and honeycombs on 24 trays, 120 baskets of fruit, 40 trays of blossom and 4 baskets of Frankish blossom, along with a decorated horse. He also presented gifts to Selim and Mehmed, the sultan's sons, to his daughters Mihrişah and Beyhan, and to the mother of Şah Sultan. Each of them received a sugar garden and 15 coffers of candied fruits, 15 coffers of dried fruits, 40 baskets each of juicy fruit and 10 trays each of blossom. To the bride he gave a large diamond ring in a golden coffer decorated with diamonds on a gold tray, a plume with diamonds, a diamond crown, a pair of large diamond and emerald earrings, a veil decorated with diamonds, emeralds and pearls, a pair of metal clasps with diamonds and with buttons of emerald and pearls, a pair of diamond bracelets, a diamond belt set with jewels, a mirror decorated with diamonds, a pair of lightweight slippers ornamented with diamonds, emeralds, delicate pearls and the most brilliant rubies, a pair of shoes decorated with diamonds, emeralds, pearls and rubies, a pair of clogs decorated with diamonds and other jewels, three rolls of Istanbul brocade, five silver trays for carrying the aforementioned jewels, a silver *nahl*, thirty-eight small and large *nahl*, two silver coffers of candies, two sugar gardens, thirty coffers of candied fruits, thirty gold-leaf coffers of dried fruits, forty baskets of succulent fruit and a *nahl* of blossom.¹⁸⁶ Those who escorted this impressive array of presents from the house of the grand vezir to Topkapı were no less spectacular than the gifts.¹⁸⁷

The wedding in June 1615 of the eldest daughter of Ahmed I, a girl of sixteen, to the considerably older grand admiral, a man of around fifty (as Crescenzi commented in a letter in which he described the event), involved equally spectacular pageantry. First, the presents, all of a quantity and quality worthy of the daughter of a major

¹⁸⁶ Çeşmizade, *Tarihi*, pp. 71–3.

¹⁸⁷ Çeşmizade, *Tarihi*, pp. 71–3.

world prince, wound their way from the Eski Saray to the house of the groom, accompanied by around six hundred high state officials, foreign dignitaries and other important personages, behind whom followed around a thousand janissaries, the *kadis*, *paşas*, *vezirs* and the *seyhülislam* on horseback, and around forty men on horseback playing various trumpets, pipes and drums and other 'barbarous' instruments.¹⁸⁸ Next came the presents, all revealed and on display: a great mass of jewels, a closed casket of rock crystal of such translucence that the extremely large pearl earrings, other pendants, rings and very rich jewels could all be clearly seen within it; more bowls loaded with jewels followed. After the jewels came the clothes: great quantities of handkerchiefs, shirts worked with gold and richly ornamented, and jackets with the richest of gems, all so precious, dei Crescenzi gushed, that nothing richer could ever have been seen. Then came bed furnishings, richly decorated with jewels and tapestries of crimson velvet. Fourteen closed carriages, each with four horses and accompanied by two black eunuchs on horseback, followed, together with the female slaves and the old women. Behind these were other female slaves with their hands and faces covered, all dressed in gold brocade, accompanied by male slaves of the palace, with thirty eunuchs following behind. Next followed more room furnishings, sofas and chests, eighteen mules loaded with carpets and twelve with copper utensils for the kitchen.¹⁸⁹

The next day, the sultan's daughter herself went in procession to the house of the groom. Much larger than that of the preceding day, dei Crescenzi felt unable to describe in detail all the officials who took part, for that alone, he wrote, would take a whole day. Apart from the janissaries, who now numbered one thousand five hundred, the *kadis*, *paşas* and the *seyhülislam*, and men on horseback playing trumpets, pipes and drums, there were also ten gypsies jumping and dancing in a buffooning manner and around thirty other gypsies, playing harps and lutes and singing in a gypsy manner so barbarous 'as to shame an innkeeper'.¹⁹⁰ There was also a madman, described in some detail by dei Crescenzi, who explained that madmen were held to be saints by the Turks. This sight was, he noted, 'the most bizarre thing I have ever seen'.¹⁹¹ Behind, on foot, two by two, came the men of the arsenal and next twenty other men, with hammers, axes and other things for breaking, cutting and sawing. A great multitude of slaves and people from the arsenal carried two very large *nahls*, with fruits, birds and other animals of wax of many colours. These were followed by another bejewelled and gold *nahl*. Fifty mounted black eunuchs preceded the

¹⁸⁸ Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter', p. 66.

¹⁸⁹ Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter', p. 68.

¹⁹⁰ Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter', p. 69.

¹⁹¹ Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter', p. 70.

bride, who was on horseback but under an awning of crimson velvet. This reached to the ground and covered her completely. Her horse was led by black eunuchs. There followed a most beautiful horse with rich jewelled trappings, led by a black eunuch; then a carriage of red velvet, with its wood decorated in gold, accompanied by two black eunuchs on horseback and one on foot who carried a little ladder of silver on his shoulders for ease of entering the carriage. He, in turn, was followed by two eunuchs preceding twenty-five female slaves on horseback with their hands and faces covered and dressed in gold brocade, who brought up the end of the procession. The impact of this display was dramatic, for Greeks and Armenians, dei Crescenzi recorded, were so moved by the sumptuous gifts that they converted to Islam.¹⁹²

Two large *nahls* for the wedding were made by the wife and mother-in-law of Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir Efendi, who wrote an extensive account of the period. They were made in Aksaray and Odun Kapısı and taken from there to Eski Saray. One hundred people carried each *nahl*, preceded through the streets by carpenters, who destroyed shops or any obstructions along the route to make way for them. Such *nahls* could take two years to make.¹⁹³

The gifts for the wedding of the daughter of Mehmed III in 1598 to Mehmed Paşa contained other, perhaps even more exotic, presents. Jewels and *nahls* as tall as minarets were taken from the house of Mehmed Paşa in At Pazarı near Aksaray, through Divan Yolu (the road leading from the Edirne Kapı to Topkapı), to the Eski Saray. Elephants, giraffes, horses, camels, lions and tigers made of sugar and twelve castles and twelve horses made of fireworks were sent as presents to the sultan.¹⁹⁴

Wealth and opulence also played a part in another important pageant in the city, this time clearly establishing spiritual credentials for the sultan and linking Istanbul firmly with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This was the departure of the *sürre*, the cover for the Qaba together with lavish presents and gifts of money that were sent annually from Istanbul. This involved much celebration, which, in 1786, lasted night and day for a week.¹⁹⁵ The *sürre* was sent from the palace across the water to Üsküdar, from where it began its journey southwards. In 1766, the *sürre*, ornamented with freshly minted gold, was carried from the palace by the *bostancıbaşı* (commander of the imperial guards) and other high officials, all dressed in great finery, to the Bahçe Kapı, where it was loaded onto a boat and transported to Üsküdar.¹⁹⁶ The return of the old Qaba cover

¹⁹² Dei Crescenzi, 'Letter', pp. 65–72. ¹⁹³ Topçular Katibi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 596–8.

¹⁹⁴ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 777–9. ¹⁹⁵ Taylesanzade, *Tarihi*, pp. 148–9.

¹⁹⁶ Çeşmizade, *Tarihi*, p. 10; same thing two years later, p. 69.



6. Departure of the *sürre* for Mecca, in Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 421.

could also be an occasion for display. In Ramazan of 1597 it was sent by the Sharif of Mecca and Medina to Istanbul to celebrate the accession of the sultan Mehmed III. It arrived in Üsküdar, where it was received by the *bostancıbaşı* and his men and put on a galley. It was taken first to the tomb of Eyüb El-Ensari, where it was placed on his coffin. After the night in Eyüp, it was loaded onto a special camel and in a crowded procession, accompanied by the *ulema* (religious establishment) and high officials, entered the city through Edirne Kapı. From there it processed to the *Bab-ı Hümayun*, surrounded by emotional crowds who prayed and wept.¹⁹⁷ The power of this procession so moved the people that many Jews and Christians became Muslim as a result, perhaps driven by motives somewhat more spiritual than those of the Greeks and the Armenians, who converted as a result of the sumptuous wedding of Ahmed I's daughter in 1615.¹⁹⁸

Pageantry was not merely a matter of the raw display of power, wealth and legitimation of the ruler. It was also pure celebration and an important release valve on the pressure cooker of the city, a way of allowing the

¹⁹⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 682–3. ¹⁹⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 682–3.

masses to let off steam harmlessly and be happily entertained. In addition, it was a way of providing welfare. Celebrations for circumcisions, weddings, accessions and military victories involved feeding, alms and distribution of money. The poor were filled with both abundant food and joy at the circumcision festivities for the sons of Bayezid II in 1490.¹⁹⁹ The *ulema* were fed and the janissaries and other guilds provided with a rich variety of food at the wedding of İbrahim Paşa in 1522.²⁰⁰ The poor received quantities of food daily during the sixty-day celebrations for the circumcision of Murad III's eldest son Mehmed in 1582, when a great kitchen was set up in At Meydanı and five hundred cooks prepared food each day for the poor, the hungry and destitute. Great bowls of food were spread out from the walls of Ahmed Paşa Sarayı to Dikilitaş, upon which the crowds fell like pillaging hordes.²⁰¹ On the thirteenth day of the celebrations for the circumcision of the three sons of Ahmed III at Ok Meydanı, an enormous banquet was laid out which went on from morning to night. Food was given to everyone who came, men, children, and women, who sat separately, protected by the soldiers of the grand vezir. For the banquet alone, ten thousand trays of rice coloured with saffron were prepared.²⁰²

Food was distributed on the departure of the *sürre* for Mecca four hundred to five hundred copper dishes of food being prepared for the poor in November 1702, for example,²⁰³ and at Eyüp, on the occasion of accession ceremonies. Eyüp in general was always extremely crowded, because people went there to make sacrifices for religious reasons. According to Latîfi, writing in the sixteenth century, one thousand rams per day were sacrificed, drawing people who came there to receive the meat as alms.²⁰⁴ Unflatteringly described in the anonymous eighteenth-century *Risale-i Garibe* (The Treatise of Strange Things) as 'the ravens of Eyüp who tore each other to pieces in the plundering of sacrificial meat',²⁰⁵ they were not all perhaps the deserving poor. Even the opening of a new pavilion could occasion a sacrifice and distribution of food to the poor and destitute,

¹⁹⁹ İbn Kemal, *İbn Kemâl Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân, VIII. Defter*, ed. Ahmet Uğur (Ankara, 1997), p. 119.

²⁰⁰ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 50.

²⁰¹ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 215–17; Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 133; Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, pp. 311–13; Hasan Beyzade Ahmed Paşa, *Hasan Bey-zâde Tarihi*, 3 vols., ed. Şevki Nezihi Aykut (Ankara, 2004), II, p. 292.

²⁰² Seyid Vehbi, *Sûrnâme*, pp. 10, 36. ²⁰³ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 186.

²⁰⁴ Latîfi, *İstanbul*, p. 63.

²⁰⁵ Hayati Develi (ed.), *XVIII. Yüzyıl İstanbul Hayatına Dair Risale-i Garibe* (Istanbul, 1998), p. 22.

as happened for the inauguration of the new pavilion which replaced the Sultan Bayezid Han Kasrı in 1593.²⁰⁶

Other acts of charity were performed and alms were distributed to mark numerous celebrations, such as the victory at Egri in 1596, after which the *valide sultan* (the title given to the mother of the sultan) ordered bountiful alms to be given to the poor and destitute, and to widows and orphans.²⁰⁷ Sultans such as Mehmed III,²⁰⁸ Mahmud I²⁰⁹ and Ahmed III²¹⁰ made distributions to the poor on their accession ceremonies at Eyüp. Sultans ordered and paid for the circumcision of poor boys at the time of the circumcisions of their own sons, five thousand being carried out on the poor at the time of the circumcision celebrations for the three sons of Ahmed III.²¹¹ At the 1870 celebrations for the circumcisions of the sons of Abdülaziz (1861–76), more than two thousand seven hundred boys of the people of the city were circumcised. The barracks in Gümüşsuyu were prepared for these circumcisions, with one thousand circumcision beds and the dormitories highly decorated.²¹²

On special occasions coins were scattered to the crowds. Süleyman I and his three sons, Mustafa, Mehmed and Selim, showered the crowds with silver and gold coins;²¹³ Mustafa I threw them about all over the place for no apparent reason;²¹⁴ Selim III had them scattered during his procession to Eyüp;²¹⁵ and the crowds caught them during the wedding of Halil Paşa in 1593.²¹⁶ During the wedding of İbrahim Paşa to the daughter of the sultan in 1586, shiny new *akçes* (silver coins) cascaded through the air and into the hands of the waiting populace, not all of them the needy poor, but 'plunderers', who scooped them up into the skirts of their robes and took them away in hoards.²¹⁷ Every two or three days during the circumcision celebration for Mehmed, son of Murad III, trays of silver and gold coins were thrown into the crowds of people, who, waiting with their hands out below the place from which the sultan distributed them, fought and trampled each other in their efforts to seize them. Somewhat disgusted by their unprepossessing display of greed, the contemporary Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali commented that 'for coins many penniless people lost their lives'.²¹⁸

²⁰⁶ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 320. ²⁰⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 638.

²⁰⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 455, 607. ²⁰⁹ Abdi, *Tarihi*, p. 45.

²¹⁰ Defterdar San Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 822. ²¹¹ Seyid Vehbi, *Sûrnâme*, pp. 7–8.

²¹² Ahmed Lütfi Efendi, *Vak'a-nüvis Ahmed Lütfi Efendi Tarihi, C. XII*, ed. M. Münir Aktepe (Ankara, 1989), p. 96.

²¹³ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, p. 280. ²¹⁴ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, II, pp. 452–3.

²¹⁵ Taylesanizade, *Tarihi*, p. 367. ²¹⁶ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 343.

²¹⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, p. 170.

²¹⁸ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Sûr*, pp. 254–6, quotation p. 256.

Involvement of the populace

Pageantry drew the Istanbul population into participation in the successes and triumphs of the empire and the celebrations and festivities of its ruling family. Popular participation became a factor in the empire's achievements, which were, in turn, the successes of the people of the empire's capital. The people wept and prayed incessantly for God's assistance, sometimes spontaneously, at other times encouraged or ordered to do so by the sultans. They prayed on the birth of Mehmed, son of Mustafa III, for his health and success,²¹⁹ and their prayers for God's protection of Mehmed IV on his accession rose to the heavens in 1648.²²⁰ They prayed for rain in Ok Meydanı in 1596, and then, rain having failed to fall, they prayed again in great crowds in the Fatih mosque.²²¹ In April 1575 a great procession was organised, attended by the most important *paşas*, which visited many mosques, praying for rain to end the long drought.²²² In May they were praying together for rain again,²²³ and again a year later, in April 1576, when the sultan set off for Eyüp to conduct prayers there for this purpose. Shops were to remain closed until the prayer was over, and the entire city prayed – Muslims in the mosques, Jews in the synagogues.²²⁴ In 1595 prayers were ordered for rain and snow, and the *seyhülislam* and the *ulema* appeared in Ok Meydanı to pray with the great crowds assembled there.²²⁵ When there was a drought at the beginning of Ahmed I's reign, the grand vezir, Mehmed Paşa, requested, and was granted, the sultan's permission to hold prayers in Ok Meydanı and to cancel the *divan* for the occasion. On the day of the prayer, the grand vezir again requested that the prayers should continue for a further two days, as had been the case in the past, that the criers should be sent to announce this in Istanbul, Galata, Üsküdar and Eyüp, and that the *divan* should be cancelled. This request, too, was acceded to.²²⁶

They also prayed for salvation against plague, which struck frequently and with devastating results. When plague ravaged the city in 1592, Murad III ordered communal prayers at dawn in Ok Meydanı, as well as prayer in Alemdağı, regarded as a holy site, on the Anatolian side of the city, to be attended by all, the poor and the *ulema*. Boats were laid on to transport the *ulema* and the *seyhs*, and a crowd assembled, so enormous

²¹⁹ Çeşmizade, *Tarih*, pp. 11–12. ²²⁰ Naima, *Tarih*, III, p. 1171.

²²¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 595–6, 600. ²²² Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 186.

²²³ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 189. ²²⁴ Gerlach, *Günlüğü*, I, p. 309.

²²⁵ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 626.

²²⁶ Cengiz Orhonlu (ed.), *Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Belgeler. Telhisler (1597–1607)* (Istanbul, 1970), p. 108, *hüküm* 129, p. 111, *hüküm* 137.

that it was 'without limit and without comparison'. Shops remained closed while the people waited overnight at Alemdağı before praying together at dawn for God's intervention. These prayers were apparently successful, at least according to Selaniki, who reported that the next day the daily death toll dropped from 325 to 100 and the ill rose from their beds cured.²²⁷ Six years later, in 1598, the people were once more at Ok Meydanı praying against plague, ordered to do so by the sultan, who had himself been urged to take this action by the *ulema*.²²⁸ Not all such prayers were so orchestrated. In 1812, during Friday prayer in the Beylerbeyi mosque, Mahmud II sent a note down to the imam (prayer leader) sitting in front of the mimbar, instructing him to pray for the plague to be lifted from the people of Islam.²²⁹

The military successes of the state were very much the successes of the population, and military pageantry and display, so common in the city, involved more than the mere exhibition of force and triumphant victory over enemy armies. The Ottoman soldiers were a source of pride for the inhabitants, who identified with them and were given a sense of security and superiority by this identification, as well as a sense of divine blessing. All those who, in December 1596, saw the fully armed regiments of the sailors and leaders of the *gazis*, the soldiers of the *mucahidin* regiment, the four thousand marines, the corsairs and the brave musketeers of Algiers, cried out, 'God is great'. The regiment of Algiers fired off their guns and the great noise rose to the heavens, terrifying all who heard it.²³⁰

This popular involvement in military performance was also reflected in communal prayer for military victories, either asking divine support for them or giving thanks to God for assistance in achieving them. Here, too, prayer served to weld all the inhabitants of the city together into a unit, identified with, an integral part of and made vicariously successful by the might of the Ottoman empire. Crowds at the departure on campaign of Süleyman I prayed for the success of the Muslim army.²³¹ They prayed for the victory of the army departing for Hungary under the commander-in-chief İbrahim Paşa in 1599 with such gusto that their prayers rose up to the court of heaven.²³² The entire population of the city prayed, on Murad III's instructions, for the victory of the grand vezir Ferhad Paşa away on campaign,²³³ while 'the angels in the Heavens added their amen, amen to the prayers that were said' for the Ottoman navy as it set sail from Istanbul

²²⁷ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 285–7, quotation p. 287. ²²⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 759.

²²⁹ Cabi, *Tarih*, II, p. 908. ²³⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 652–4.

²³¹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 14–15. ²³² Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 806–7.

²³³ Hikmet Ülker (ed.), *Sultanın Emir Defteri (51 Nolu Mühimme)* (Istanbul, 2003), pp. 60–1, *hüküm* 115, and facsimile p. 36.

with its cannon blazing in 1594.²³⁴ They also offered prayers of thanks for victory, Mehmed III ordering the news of the glorious conquest and just holy war to be announced throughout the city to the assembled crowds, who were to pray and thank God for this victory.²³⁵

Such communal prayers, for which even the *divan* could be cancelled,²³⁶ were very large affairs, as Sanderson reported in a letter from Pera in August 1596 to Sir Robert Cecil.

Eighteen dayes past came newes to the Great Sultana and Vizier that the Grand Signor with his hoast was passed the Danubium and enteringe the enemies land; whearfore presentlie proclamation was made that prayer should be in the fields; which was performed the 12th present, two mile without the waules of Constantinople. By credible report ther was to the number of 6 or 700 thowsand Turks at the least. (Also the Sultana freed all the prisoners of Constantinople and Galata which weare for debt, satisfienge their creditors; and many others, except for notoriouse crimes, also sett at libertie.) This was begine at the breake of day, and continued some three or four howers. For the space also of six dayes after they used continually great devotion in all their churches of Constantinople.²³⁷

People were often required to do more than pray and a less spiritual response to military victory was also necessary. The city had physically to reflect the splendour of such triumph. Tradesmen and craftsmen were ordered by Mehmed III to decorate their shops, and the cloth merchants to display their sumptuous cloth in celebration of the victory at Egri in Hungary.²³⁸ They celebrated vigorously and actively for his return from campaign in December 1596, when 'the whole world, mankind, rich and poor, young and old, all creation, with heart and soul longed to see the face of sultan, the great monarch, the *gazi* sultan and there was such a crowd of people that no description can do justice to it'.²³⁹ All the merchants of the cloth market displayed their best brocades, satins, velvets and silks, spread out for many yards before the sultan, and held up for him to see; the Jews, Christians and Armenians unfurled their highly valuable cloth even further, exceeding even the yards covered by their fellow Muslim merchants. The display of more than two thousand weavers was so good that Selaniki regarded it as having been among the best. There was much sacrificing. Each of the *mütevellîs* (officials in charge of *vakıfs*, charitable foundations) of the imperial *vakıfs* sacrificed three cattle and ten sheep; each from the mosque complexes established by vezirs

²³⁴ Selaniki, *Tarih*, I, pp. 376–7, quotation p. 377.

²³⁵ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 648.

²³⁶ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 509–10. ²³⁷ Sanderson, *Travels*, pp. 156–7.

²³⁸ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 655. Similar scenes for his departure on this campaign; Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 609–14.

²³⁹ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, p. 652.

sacrificed one cattle and five sheep; and the butchers of the city and the other shop owners sacrificed many hundreds of sheep. The crowds were greatly moved by the occasion and all 'wiped the ground with their faces as they humbled themselves before him [the sultan] and gave thanks to him'. The *mütevellîs* of the imperial *vakıfs*, religious figures, students and teachers stood on either side of the road, each *mütevelli* with a censer in his hand, full of amber and musk-smelling incense.

When they and all the assembled crowds opened their hands and prayed and thanked God for this illustrious and glorious conquest, all the children on all sides cried and wept, calling out amen, amen, and their sound reached the court of heaven. There was nobody who did not cry or remained unaffected by this. The eyes of the illustrious sultan, the protector of religion... too filled with tears and the soldiers were very touched by this.²⁴⁰

Shops were decorated for other occasions too, and tradesmen and craftsmen laid on displays of their arts for processions which wound their way through the streets of the city. Such a procession was staged for the birth of Ahmed III's daughter Fatma in 1704.²⁴¹ Illuminations were also used, such as the *mahya* (display in lights) erected by the population to celebrate Abdülaziz's return from Europe in 1867, which read 'long live the sultan' and was positioned where it could be seen from the sultan's residence.²⁴² Rich and poor hung lanterns and candles on the doors of their houses to celebrate the return of the sultan from the Yerevan campaign in 1635.²⁴³

Active and enthusiastic participation could bring satisfactory results. On his way back to Istanbul from Egypt, where he had been very well received, with much public display and noise, Abdülaziz visited İzmir. Here, all the different nations received him with great applause, and even 'madams and mademoiselles fell to their knees in the street and cried out "vive le sultan"'. Delighted at such a reception, the sultan remarked that he had not seen from the people of Istanbul such signs of affection as he had seen in Egypt and İzmir, thus precipitating a quick shift in the capital away from what the statesman and historian Ahmed Cevdet Paşa referred to as the old tradition of remaining silent before the sultan as a mark of reverence and respect, to this new style of rapturous and noisy reception, which, from now on, seeped into Istanbul. There was, however, one crucial difference – at least for Ahmed Cevdet – for although the people of Istanbul began to clap, they did so in a very well-mannered and

²⁴⁰ Selaniki, *Tarih*, II, pp. 652–3. ²⁴¹ Özcan, *Anonim*, p. 289.

²⁴² A. Süheyl Ünver, *Risale 3. Mahya ve Mahyacılık* (Istanbul, 1932), reprinted in A. Süheyl Ünver, *Istanbul Risaleleri 1*, ed. İsmail Kara (Istanbul, 1995), p. 50.

²⁴³ Topçular Katibi, *Tarihi*, II, p. 1040.

courteous way. The Istanbul people were, for him, thus many times better in city celebrations than those of Egypt and İzmir.

The three days of festivities put on for Abdülaziz's return were certainly magnificent. Craftsmen positively vied with each other to lay on the most striking display. Little gardens of flowers and lemon trees were made up in pots, branches of daphne ornamented the shop fronts and were draped at the entrances to the *hans* (complexes used by merchants and traders as inns to stay in, places to store goods and as markets for sales), shops were festooned with lanterns, everywhere so illuminated in this feverish desire to display that lamps simply sold out and it became impossible to procure one anywhere in the city. The streets were turned into magnificent *yah* gardens, shops into bridal chambers. The Grand Bazaar, usually closed at night but given special permission to remain open for this occasion by the grand vezir Fuad Paşa, glowed with splendour, so crowded that it was almost impossible to walk round it. The city resounded to the sound of music, as musicians played and military bands moved through the city. Despite all the crowding – so great that it was impossible to get from the Grand Bazaar to Asmaaltı – women were apparently unmolested and there was no impropriety, as everyone wandered happily, enjoying themselves in the no doubt slightly rosy estimation of Ahmed Cevdet, who remarked that 'in brief all the people of Istanbul, looking at each other, organised such a city celebration that its like had never been seen before', and found its wonders impossible to describe in words. The sultan, perhaps unsurprisingly, was delighted.

These celebrations, according to Ahmed Cevdet, were the brainchild of Fuad Paşa. A very inventive man who 'worshipped the sultan', Fuad Paşa orchestrated these unequalled celebrations, which had the useful effect of making the sultan loved by the people. Such love was rewarding. Ministers, who had decided to annul certain tax concessions and the exemption of the Istanbul population from military conscription, now changed their minds. After this display of love and emotion expressed by the capital's populace for its ruler, the implementation was postponed.²⁴⁴

Pageantry served many purposes: it could, as in the case of Abdülaziz's return, bring immediate benefit to the population. In more general terms, it also brought them both entertainment and relief from everyday pressures. It provided welfare – material in the form of food and financial handouts, and spiritual in the form of communal prayer. The population was made a collective unit by it and was incorporated through it into the successful enterprise of the empire. A city of pageantry, Istanbul was also

²⁴⁴ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât*, pp. 58–60.

the capital, the focus of power and the seat of the sultan. The sultan, far from a remote figure or a ruler possessed of absolute authority, negotiated his power, surviving the dangerous intricacies of the Ottoman political world, in which he often had very little trust in many of his ministers, who came into and out of office at a rapid rate, and was acutely aware of the populace of the city, who needed to be accommodated, incorporated into the affairs of the state and its ruling family with which they were to identify, and whose welfare the sultan needed to ensure. Above all, the sultan was visible and accessible to the population, the source of justice and, perhaps more by implication than open expression, a spiritual figure.

While gardens, open spaces and the city parks of the nineteenth century offered the populace a pleasure zone in which to disport themselves, such recreation was not restricted to the outdoors, for there was another location frequented by one and all which was central to the life of every citizen throughout Istanbul's existence as Ottoman capital, and that was the public baths.

7 The *hamam*

If the Western world boasts of her grand and magnificent buildings such as those in Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, Turkey also boasts of her baths, which are well known throughout the world. Baths are some of the greatest institutions in the Turkish Empire.¹

Perhaps one of the most important axes of social life in Istanbul was the *hamam*. Far more than merely a place of washing, the *hamam* provided men and, in particular, women with a social space where many of the important rituals of life took place. It enabled them to be clean in the way they wished, providing services that made it the equivalent of a modern beauty salon and health spa all rolled into one. It was where neighbours and friends could meet and socialise, enabling women, whose social relations were more limited than those of men, to mix with women not from their immediate family circle. There, after careful scrutiny, they could choose the brides for their sons and brothers; brides were washed before their weddings; and babies were taken for ablutions in their first outing, forty days after their birth. A place of chitchat, gossip and political grumbling, it was also a multi-ethnic and multi-religious space, a quintessential element in the lives of the people of the city, without which their everyday existence would have been inconceivable.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the *hamam*, along with a mosque and a market, was one of the first buildings erected by the Ottoman sultans after the conquest of any urban space. Mehmed II ordered the construction of splendid and costly baths shortly after his conquest of Constantinople, as part of his plan for the building up and beautifying of the city, 'for the benefit and needs and comfort of the inhabitants'.² If any town lacked a *hamam*, this absence was something exceptional and needed explanation. Evliya Çelebi attributed the absence of a *hamam* either to the backwardness of the town³ or to the presence of a Christian

¹ Basmajean, *Life*, pp. 148–9. ² Kritoboulos, *History*, 55, p. 105.

³ Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality. The World of Evliya Çelebi*, with an afterword by Gottfried Hagen (Leiden and Boston, 2004), p. 50.

majority. The town of Pınarhisar in Bulgaria thus had only one small *hamam*, because the majority of the population was Christian and therefore did not wash, while the Muslim population of the town had baths in their houses and did not need a public bath.⁴

Istanbul had many *hamams*, indeed an infinite number according to Bassano.⁵ Schweigger talks about the existence of more than 150 *hamams* in the city in the late 1570s,⁶ du Fresne-Canaye more than 100 in 1573,⁷ while Domenico mentions more than 220.⁸ In the following century, Sandys noted that every main mosque in Istanbul had a bath attached to it,⁹ a view reiterated by Bon in the same period.¹⁰ Evliya Çelebi, whose figures are notoriously unreliable, listed by name 124 *hamams* in the city¹¹ and gives a figure of 151 for those belonging to *vakıfs*, of which most were double *hamams*, making a total of 302, according to his calculations. This, he notes, is a small number for such a large city, but adds there were 14,536 private *hamams* belonging to the vezirs and the richer elements of society. He further notes that while he was away from the city, a further 17 *hamams* were built.¹² De la Croix, writing in 1671, refers to more than 60 *hamams* in the city.¹³ The Ottoman Armenian İnciciyan referred to 48 *hamams* in Topkapı palace alone at the end of the eighteenth century,¹⁴ and Lacroix gave a figure of 300 for Istanbul around the 1830s.¹⁵

Many *hamams* were *vakıf* property, for they had the twofold advantage of religious purpose and economic viability. A *hamam* performed an important religious function by providing the population with a place in which to wash. Cleanliness was an essential element in Ottoman society. It had religious significance and ablution formed, and forms, an integral part of the ritual of prayer. As the popular Turkish saying puts it, 'cleanliness comes from belief. It was also a guaranteed money-spinner, for its centrality in the life of the city ensured its constant use. An important part of many *vakıf* holdings, it was integral to the economic life of the city, giving employment and stimulating trade in related services and in the production of needed commodities and materials. Both men and women worked in the *hamams* in various capacities: as *tellaks* (bath attendants), *natur*s (attendants in a women's bath), porters, casual labourers and stokers in the boiler rooms. These men and women worked under the

⁴ Dankoff, *Mentalitey*, p. 69.

⁵ Bassano, *Costumi*, f. 2v.

⁶ Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung*, p. 116.

⁷ Fresne-Canaye, *Voyage*, p. 93.

⁸ Domenico, *Istanbul*, p. 2.

⁹ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Bon, *Description*, p. 182.

¹¹ Yüksel Yoldaş-Demircanlı, *Istanbul Mimârisi İçin Kaynak Olarak Evliya Çelebi Seyâhatnâmesi* (Istanbul, n.d.), pp. 376–428.

¹² Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, I Kitap*, pp. 138, 136–7.

¹³ De la Croix, *Mémoires*, I, 3rd letter, p. 132.

¹⁴ İnciciyan, *Istanbul*, p. 23.

¹⁵ Lacroix, *Guide*, p. 22.

authority of the bath-keepers, female in the case of the women's *hamams* and male for the men's. The bath-keepers ran the baths and were figures of great authority, held in high esteem by those working there and to whom they referred 'as if to a judge'.¹⁶ Many people found employment in the *hamams*, the Bey *hamam* in Beyoğlu in Istanbul, for example, employing fourteen people, five *tellaks*, three *natur*s, one casual labourer, one stoker and four porters, according to a mid-seventeenth-century court register.¹⁷ Evliya Çelebi referred to two thousand *tellaks* and one thousand *natur*s working in the *vakıf hamams*.¹⁸

Apart from employment within the *hamam* itself, the *hamam* sector created demand for commodities such as towels, *hamam* bowls, *peştemal* (cloth used for covering the body), special clogs used in the *hamam* which were often beautifully ornamented, and clay which was sold in the *hamam* to be used by both women and men for softening skin, removing dead skin and dandruff, cleaning grease from the skin and opening the pores.¹⁹ Ash from the stokeholes was used to produce ink and was in great demand. In consequence ownership of the ash could become a matter of dispute. According to early eighteenth-century legal rulings, in two cases of dispute between a bath-keeper, who rented the *hamam*, and the administrator of a *vakıf* which owned the *hamam* in question, ownership of the ash was granted to the bath-keeper.²⁰ The *hamams* also stimulated other, related trades. Evliya Çelebi, for example, refers to five hundred launderers working in three hundred laundries, and twenty people working in ten shops specialising in the removal of spots.²¹

The social importance of the *hamam* meant that its regulation was a matter of significance for the state, which interested itself in regulating the affairs of the *hamam* and in ensuring its efficient and hygienic running. A quintessential place of ablution, it was important that the *hamam* itself be kept clean. In the early sixteenth century, Selim I issued orders that officers were to check that the bath-keepers kept their baths clean and hot, and the water warm. The *tellaks* were to work quickly and to be expert in shaving heads, and the razors they used were to be sharp. The *natur*s were to keep the *peştemals* clean. Those who did not abide by these orders were

¹⁶ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Mevâidîn*, pp. 355–6.

¹⁷ Reşad Ekrem Koçu, 'Bey Hamamı', in Reşad Ekrem Koçu (ed.), *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1961), V, pp. 2637–8.

¹⁸ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, I Kitap*, pp. 290–1.

¹⁹ Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı*, p. 300. This is presumably the same substance referred to by Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54.

²⁰ Abdürrahim Efendi Menteşzade, *Fetâvâ-yı Abdürrahim Efendi, I-II* (Istanbul, 1827), II, pp. 551, 553–4, quoted in Tahsin Özcan, *Fetvalar Işığında Osmanlı Esnafı* (Istanbul, 2003), p. 222.

²¹ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, I Kitap*, p. 290–1.

to be heavily punished.²² The *tellaks* and *natırs* offering services in the *hamam* – the washing and scrubbing, shaving and plaiting of hair, a service charged according to the length of the hair – had, according to the *narh* register for 1640, to dress in clean *peştemals* of silk thread. They were not to ask for tips, especially from the poor and from those from outside the city. Nor were they to hassle the customers. The *natırs* were to plait hair correctly, and not crookedly, while *tellaks* when shaving were to place *peştemals* round the necks and across the chests of their customers, to ensure that nothing ran down over them. The *tellaks* were to show respect to the customers and to give them clean, dry *peştemals*.²³ Despite such regulations, not everyone was happy with the service they received. The author of the *Risale-i Garibe* cursed the bath-keepers who kept their baths cold and the towels and *peştemals* dirty.²⁴ He was (as he so often was) displeased about other aspects of the service in the *hamam*: the *tellaks* provided over-hard scrubbing and the *natırs* gave wet *peştemals*.²⁵ Those who failed to run a clean establishment could be ordered to do so. A case taken to court by customers complaining about the dirty conditions of a *hamam* at the beginning of the eighteenth century resulted in a ruling that the bath-keeper should be instructed to keep his *hamam* in a proper state.²⁶

Bath-keepers could also be condemned for failure to deal respectfully with their customers. In 1874, Ali Efendi complained in his column in the newspaper *Basiret* of the lack of respect shown in the Istanbul *hamams* towards Ottoman soldiers, who risked their lives to protect the state. On seeing soldiers coming into the baths, the bath-keepers treat them rudely, 'saying "there is no water" or "the water is cold" and then giving them wet *peştemals* and towels'.²⁷ The reason for such hostility, according to Ali Efendi, was the reduced entrance fee of only twenty *para* which the soldiers paid. This behaviour was unacceptable and Ali Efendi called on the authorities in Istanbul to do something about it.

Ali Efendi based his complaints not just on the inherent disrespect shown towards the proud defenders of the nation, but also on the health implications involved. Apart from any insult, 'wet *peştemals* and towels make people ill'.²⁸ There was also the danger of contagious disease. This aspect of the need to control the hygiene of the *hamam* developed towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the increasing awareness of the importance of the prevention of the spread of disease. Public health

²² Yücel and Pulaha, *I. Selim Kanunnameleri*, pp. 67, 119, 200–1, facsimile 43b–44a.

²³ Kütükoğlu, *Narh*, pp. 260–1. ²⁴ Develi, *Risale-i Garibe*, p. 40.

²⁵ Develi, *Risale-i Garibe*, p. 40.

²⁶ Yenişehirli Abdullah Efendi, *Behcetü'l fetâvâ maa'n nukûl* (Istanbul, 1266), p. 559, quoted in Özcan, *Fetvalar*, p. 217.

²⁷ Basiretçi Ali Efendi, *Mektupları*, p. 378. ²⁸ Basiretçi Ali Efendi, *Mektupları*, p. 378.

became a matter of government concern in a way it had not been in previous centuries, reflecting the growing part government was coming to play in the daily lives of the empire's citizens and in the shifting perceptions of what its role was. In consequence, the *hamam* became subject to health checks for the purpose of the prevention of contagious diseases such as syphilis, which was widespread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Described by the population as the affliction which 'wanders from house to house',²⁹ syphilis decimated many areas of Anatolia, and certain regions even had hospitals dedicated solely to the treatment of syphilis patients. In 1898, the *Şura-i Devlet*, the Council of State, drew up regulations for syphilis health checks to be applied to social places where men gathered, such as barbers, coffee houses and *hamams*, which were believed to be environments conducive to the spread of the disease. Employees were subject to monthly health checks and owners were to keep the utensils they used clean and hygienic.³⁰ A later regulation of 1915 applied to the province of Kastamonu, which had a particularly high incidence of syphilis. Those working in the *hamams* were subject to regular syphilis checks, and any who were found to have the disease were to be 'removed from their jobs and sent for compulsory treatment'.³¹ Bath-keepers were instructed to 'wash the *hamam* equipment frequently with soap and boiling water. The equipment used by one client was not under any circumstances to be given to another without first being cleaned'.³²

Some bath-keepers offered a somewhat less official service, allowing the poor to spend the winter in the boiler rooms of the *hamams*. In the nineteenth century, children who had ended up on the streets for various reasons, orphaned, turned out of their homes, or as a result of general delinquency, were permitted by 'good-natured and compassionate' bath-keepers to pass the winter in the stokeholds, which effectively became homeless shelters, and thus performed a further welfare function, largely conducted by the *vakıf* institution rather than the state. Very small children there were given clothes for religious festivals by various charitable people, while others donated their children's old shoes and clothes. They were given leftover bread and food as charity in Ramazan by the mansions surrounding the *hamams*. The most crowded and most famous among the *hamams* for this was Gedik Ahmed Paşa *hamam*. There was a definite hierarchical order in the stokeholds; those children who had been there

²⁹ Ahmed Şerif, *Anadolu'da Tanın*, ed. Mehmed Çetin Börekçi (Ankara, 1999), I, p. 416.

³⁰ 11 Mayıs 1314: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul, Y. A. RES. 99–32.

³¹ Clause 32 in 'Kastamonu Vilayetinde Teşkil Olunacak Memleket Hastahaneleri ve Seyyar Heyet-i Tıbbiye Hakkında Nizamname' in *Düsnur*, 2nd edn (İrsaadet, 1330), II, pp. 337–8.

³² Clause 35 in 'Kastamonu', p. 338.

longest and so had the most senior rank slept on sheepskin rugs nearest the furnace, with the others ranged according to rank at increasing distance from it, down to the newest arrivals by the door. If there were any sick children among them, they were put to sleep by the furnace. These children, who were called *külhanbeyleri*, *beys* of the stokehold, helped the stokers, carrying logs, throwing out the ash and keeping the area clean. They developed their own coded language, with special words and accent.³³

The provisioning of winter shelter was an act of charity which many approved of, and indeed the author of *Risale-i Garibe* condemned those who did not allow the poor and destitute to winter in such places.³⁴ This was not, however, the attitude taken by Selim III, who ordered that young urchins were not to be allowed into the stokeholds, while older urchins were to be dispatched to work in the dockyards.³⁵ It would also appear that the use of *hamams* as living quarters by those coming into the city from outside without work, who were regarded as disruptive trouble-makers, was a problem for Mahmud I, whose janissary *ağa* rounded them up, loaded them onto boats and sent them to Üsküdar.³⁶

Not only was the state concerned about the conditions within the *hamams*, but also about security on the way to and from them. As always, the state was preoccupied with matters of order and security, and the excessive presence of women on the streets was always regarded as a potential cause of disorder, prompting Mahmud II to cancel the festivities for his daughter's birth in 1809, for example.³⁷ For this reason, the state took strict precautions about what was acceptable in the vicinity of the *hamams*, and along the routes which women took to get there. The concern for order was not just the result of the presence of women, for the problems which might arise in relation to women applied equally to young boys, who could also be targets of unwanted attentions on the streets of the capital. Selim I issued instructions that men were not to gather and sit outside the *hamam* or on the roads leading to the *hamam*.³⁸ Men were not to go 'a child in one hand, a bundle in the other' up to the *hamam* door, as if assisting their wives, a socially unacceptable action and one which was construed as invasion of female space, whatever the implied justification.³⁹ Nor was there to be loitering, and thus ogling, concealed or otherwise, on the street nearby. That such unseemly behaviour was a problem is graphically demonstrated by the judgement issued in 1594 in response to the

³³ Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı*, pp. 324–5. ³⁴ Develi, *Risale-i Garibe*, p. 40.

³⁵ Karal, *Hümayunları*, p. 96. ³⁶ Akrepe, 'İstanbul'un Nüfus Mes'elesi', pp. 10–12, 18.

³⁷ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, pp. 515–16.

³⁸ Yücel and Pulaha, *I. Selim Kanunnameleri*, pp. 37, 92, 157, facsimile 7b.

³⁹ Develi, *Risale-i Garibe*, p. 24.

rather enterprising commercial profiteering from this male desire for the sighting of women. Various private houses had been converted into *boza* houses in the *mahalle* of Koca Nişancı Bey. Here they began to make *boza* and to attract male customers, who gathered at these houses. Ripping out the wooden boards of the houses nearby, men even began to cook kebabs. The local police official was bribed weekly to turn a blind eye to these illegal goings-on. Happily settled with their *boza* and kebabs, men watched the women passing by innocently on their way to the *hamam*. The result was disruptive. Groups of men gathered in the street to leer at the good Muslim women, who, not surprisingly, were deterred from going to the *hamam*. The sultan promptly banned the making of *boza* in the *mahalle*, and anyone caught doing so was to be imprisoned or sent to the galleys.⁴⁰

In 1576, the people of various *mahalles* were so incensed by such problems that they went to the Istanbul *kadı* to complain. Non-Muslims in these *mahalles* had started to open wine shops in their houses, and drunkards from these places were molesting women going to the *hamam* and men going to the mosque for the evening and the night prayer. The situation was such that men, deterred by this aggression, were not going there to pray. In response to this petition, the sultan ordered that all wine houses on main roads, roads leading to *hamams*, round *mescits* and in areas with a Muslim majority should be demolished.⁴¹

It was not just men whose behaviour in the vicinity of the *hamam* was under scrutiny; inappropriate female comportment would also cause censure. Indeed, any going-out by women, whether to the *hamam* or elsewhere, was to be conducted decently. The famous sixteenth-century *seyhülislam* Ebussuud ruled on the matter, stating that a woman who went out to the *hamam* or to a public area was a 'virtuous' woman, if she behaved in an honourable and dignified manner and was accompanied by a servant.⁴² The danger of unseemly female behaviour was clearly felt keenly by their husbands, whose honour would be stained by any unsuitable actions of their wives. One husband, before going on pilgrimage, notified his wife that were she to go to the *hamam* or a wedding, or be seen by any non-related male, this would cause her to be divorced on the spot. To underline this, he wrote these stipulations down on a piece of paper and fixed the paper to the wall of his house. The ruling of the *seyhülislam* Ebussuud on the matter was that were his wife to violate these conditions in her husband's absence, then she would indeed be divorced in the absence of her husband.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ahmet Refik, *Hicri On Birinci Asırda*, p. 18, hüküm 35.

⁴¹ Ahmet Refik, *Onuncu Asır Hicri*, pp. 141–2, hüküm 9.

⁴² Düzdağ, *Ebussuud Efendi*, p. 55, hüküm 154.

⁴³ Düzdağ, *Ebussuud Efendi*, p. 54, hüküm 147.

Many upright citizens were equally concerned about the honour of their women when it came to visiting the *hamam*. In a court case from the early eighteenth century, a group of men complained that female members of their families could be seen entering the *hamam* from the windows of a nearby house. The men wished to have the offending windows boarded up, but the judge ruled against them.⁴⁴ It was not even permissible for women in a village to be seen through the windows of the dressing room of a *hamam*.⁴⁵ One case involved a plaintiff protesting that the stock of wood piled up beside the *hamam* could be used by a man to climb up and see over into the plaintiff's property, where his women lived. The plaintiff petitioned the court to order the removal of the wood, unsuccessfully.⁴⁶

Regardless of any moral rectitude on their way to the *hamam*, women could be the victims of sexual violence once inside. Those people who had complained to Murad III in 1576 further protested about the drunks from the wine houses entering the women's *hamam* and of one man who had even cornered a woman in one of the small rooms in the *hamam*. The other women had come to her aid but were unable to remove him and had to call in outside help to expel him from the *hamam*.⁴⁷ In 1809, in a period of total political chaos, during which people did not venture out onto the streets for fear of being attacked, a woman was seized by force from the Alaca *hamam* by armed porters and then raped in a room above a butcher's shop just opposite the *hamam*. This incident created a huge scandal and horror among the populace.⁴⁸ The enormity of the violence was magnified by the fact that the woman had been taken from a *hamam*, where of all places she should have expected to be safe, and around which the state took so much care to enforce order. The fact that this violation happened there indicates the level to which the government had lost control in this period, unable to protect the female population, and the degree to which there was lawlessness and uncontrolled violence on the streets of the capital.

While cleanliness was central to the *hamam*, the *hamam* itself was far more than merely a communal bath. It was a social hub, a central pillar of Ottoman social make-up. It was where many of the major ceremonies of life were celebrated. Babies and mothers were washed there on the fortieth day after the birth of the baby. This was traditionally the baby's first outing. Their washing was accompanied by special prayers, and the

⁴⁴ Menteşzade, *Fetâvâ-yı Abdürrahim Efendi*, II, p. 576, quoted in Özcan, *Fetvalar*, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Çatalcalı Ali Efendi, *Fetâvâ-yı Ali Efendi*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1312), II, p. 256, quoted in Özcan, *Fetvalar*, p. 214.

⁴⁶ Menteşzade, *Fetâvâ-yı Abdürrahim Efendi*, II, pp. 575–6, quoted in Özcan, *Fetvalar*, p. 214.

⁴⁷ Ahmet Refik, *Onuncu Asr-ı Hicrî*, pp. 141–2, hüküm 9. ⁴⁸ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 490.

washing itself followed a certain ritual order. Relatives and neighbours were invited, festivities were laid on and dancing girls and musicians hired for the event.⁴⁹ The *hamam* was used in order to find suitable brides, the women scrutinising possible candidates for their sons or brothers, not merely judging them physically, but also checking out their manners and behaviour. This was one of the few social spaces in which women, who were neither related nor close neighbours, could come together and could thus view a wider field of potential wives. Matchmakers would sit on the *divan* of the bath-keeper under their veils and *feraces* and carefully watch the girls entering and exiting the tepidarium. Those washing in the *hamam* were aware of who they were. The matchmakers would learn from the bath-keeper whether the girls they liked were married or single, and would then get the addresses of the unmarried girls from her in order to pay them a visit later.⁵⁰

The *hamam* also played a part in wedding ceremonies, and an essential part of a girl's dowry was the *hamam* set, including good-quality embroidered bath towels, a special kind of wooden clogs, which were ornamented with silver threads, and a *hamam* bowl. The *gelin hamamı*, the bath of the bride, was held a few days before the wedding and involved the female members of both families, together with their relatives and neighbours. They washed the bride and sang religious hymns and sad traditional folksongs. They would also dance.⁵¹ Women often spent an entire day in the *hamam*, in an endless round of washing, eating and chatting. The food was an essential part of the pleasures of the *hamam*. Food typically included stuffed vine leaves, meatballs, cheese *börek*, pickles, nuts, even salami and *pestil* (thin strips of dried fruit pulp), as well as various cakes and desserts.⁵²

The *hamams* could be crowded. In this case, women sometimes reserved places. The grandmother of Haris Spataris, an Istanbul Greek who moved to Athens during the Turkish War of Independence, did so by sending the grocer's boy ahead to announce that she would be coming and to reserve a place for her family members to change in.⁵³ The grandmother of Spataris's contemporary, İrfan Orga, sent a maid to arrange

⁴⁹ Balikhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey, *Hayatı*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Münevver Alp, 'Eski İstanbul Hamamları ve Gezmeleri', *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, no. 179 (June 1964), pp. 3423–5, reprinted in İ. Gündoğdu Kayaoğlu and Ersu Pekin (eds.), *Eski İstanbul'da Gündelik Hayat* (Istanbul, 1992), pp. 57–8.

⁵¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu described such a *gelin hamamı*, which she likened to 'the spithalamium of Helen by Theocritus', *Letters*, pp. 134–5.

⁵² Haris Spataris, *Biz İstanbullular Böyleyiz! Fener'den Anılar 1906–1922*, trans. İro Kaplangı (Istanbul, 2004), p. 219; İrfan Orga, *Portrait of a Turkish Family* (London, 1950), p. 18.

⁵³ Spataris, *İstanbullular*, p. 217.

with the bath-keeper both for a place to change and for a space within the *hamam* at which to wash.⁵⁴ Not everyone could reserve spaces beforehand. Often the old women of the family, accompanied by children, were sent to the *hamam* early in the morning, in order to be there at the time the *hamam* opened, for they were the ones who had no duties at home and so were free to go. It was then their job to find a suitable place in the *hamam* and reserve it for the family members who would come later. They reserved these spaces by sitting firmly in one section and placing their *hamam* bowls in another. The pressure to secure space could be intense and fights could break out. This could even lead to blows, some women wrapping their *hamam* bowls in their *peştemals* and beating their opponents with them. It was sometimes not just a matter of securing a space in a crowded *hamam*, but of securing the best place, such as the basin with the hottest water in the *hamam*, or that with the fastest-running water, or that furthest from the door, and thus less cold, or, for some, one of the little rooms off to the side.

In many ways, the *hamam* was a microcosm of the world outside, reflecting the social divisions and political upheavals of the society beyond its walls. It was a setting for political discussion and complaints about the conduct of state affairs, a setting so well known that spies were active there, listening out for seditious mutterings, which were then reported to the authorities. Such reports could lead to arrests, as was the case in 1809, when women who had been discussing the government were seized.⁵⁵ Even the divisions among the janissaries, which resulted in open and often extremely violent fighting between members of different regiments, could be played out in the *hamams*, this time among the wives, who, hurling abuse at each other, fought among themselves, fighting the wives of janissaries from other regiments. In true janissary spirit, such fights could be very aggressive, with the free use of *hamam* bowls and clogs.⁵⁶

Just as the *hamam* thus reflected political differences, it also reflected social divisions. Selim I ordered that the *peştemals* which were given to non-Muslims were not to be used for Muslims; those *peştemals* used by non-Muslims were to be marked with a sign.⁵⁷ These regulations were repeated in those issued in 1640, which stipulated that non-Muslims, both male and female, were to be distinguished from Muslims by wearing a special marker, a ring, on their *peştemals*. They were to change in a different place, were not to be given clogs, and had to wash at separate spots.⁵⁸ Thus, although all religions went to the same *hamams*, the distinction

⁵⁴ Orga, *Portrait*, p. 17. ⁵⁵ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 392. ⁵⁶ Cabi, *Târîhi*, I, p. 507.

⁵⁷ Yücel and Pulaha, *I. Selim Kanunnameleri*, pp. 67, 119, 200–1, facsimile 43b–44a.

⁵⁸ Kütükoğlu, *Narh*, p. 261.

between them was maintained, at least in theory. The state was always concerned to maintain order through clear status division, with each group knowing its place, a concept that was applied to all divisions of society, whether religion-, guild- or function-related. However, the issuing of orders did not mean that they were always obeyed or that they were a faithful reflection of reality on the ground. Just as the frequent issuing of dress codes indicates that they were not in fact implemented, so, too, perhaps, did the strictures of division in the *hamam* not necessarily mean that such division was strictly observed in the noisy commotion of the *hamam*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, although they changed their clothes in separate places, Muslims and non-Muslims shared the same space for washing.⁵⁹ This social mixing comes out clearly in Basmajean's description: 'in the exterior [bath] everything is calm. Here is a Christian smoking in his bed; there in the corner is a Mohammedan praying on his carpet, a little beyond another, with a beard reaching to his middle, reading the Koran, while near by is a Jew performing his toilet'.⁶⁰

There was, however, strict separation between the sexes. Male children went to the *hamam* with their mothers up to a certain age, which was defined not according to age, but rather according to the appearance of the boy. At a certain point, remarks such as, 'why didn't you bring your father too?' were made by the bath-keeper, and the boy's time in the women's *hamam* was brought to an abrupt end. In his memoirs, İrfan Orga, who was born in 1908, recalled that boys of five years old could be considered too old to go to the women's *hamam*. He himself, however, was protected by his grandmother, whose strong character prevented any adverse comment from either the bath-keeper or the other customers.⁶¹ A contemporary of Orga's, Spataris, reported that boys went to the women's *hamam* until they were seven, when, 'according to the Muslim understanding they became adolescent, that is they started to be interested in women',⁶² and women began to regard such boys as an alien male presence in the baths. When Spataris himself reached the age of seven, he was expelled from the *hamam* to which he went regularly with his mother.⁶³ This was a disappointment for him, for when he began to go with his father to the men's *hamam* he found nothing interesting there.⁶⁴

Many middle- and upper-class men had baths in their own houses, but most of them preferred to go to the public baths.⁶⁵ They did not, however,

⁵⁹ Spataris, *Istanbullular*, p. 217; Orga, *Portrait*, p. 19. ⁶⁰ Basmajean, *Life*, p. 150.

⁶¹ Orga, *Portrait*, p. 17. ⁶² Spataris, *Istanbullular*, p. 216.

⁶³ Spataris, *Istanbullular*, p. 216. ⁶⁴ Spataris, *Istanbullular*, p. 216.

⁶⁵ Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and the Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 2 vols. (London, 1836), II, p. 36.

go just anywhere. The *hamam* had to have certain qualities in order to appeal to them. First of all, it had to have good-quality water, it had to be wide enough for one not to hit one's head, it had to be near where one lived but, importantly, not in an area where single men were living. There should be no workers or day labourers among its customers. The *hamam* and its towels had to be clean. If the *hamam* had all this, then they would go to it.⁶⁶

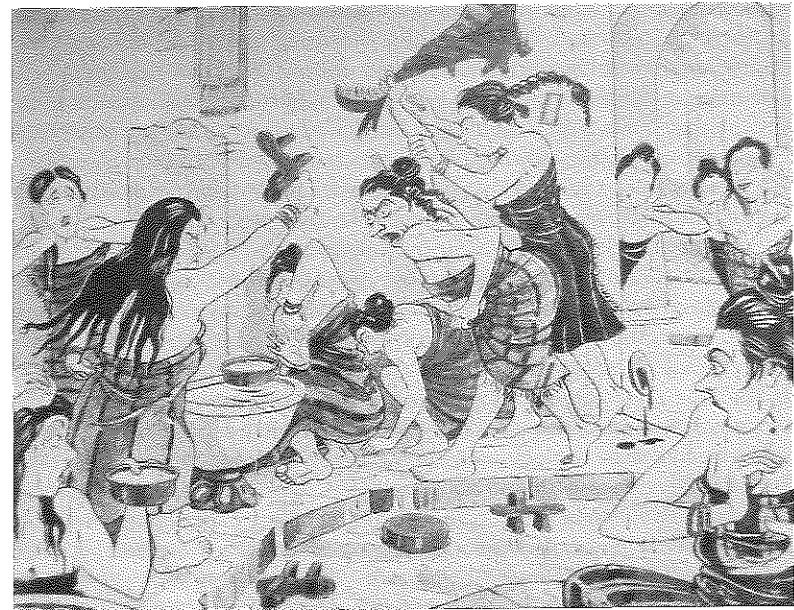
The centrality of the *hamam* in everyday life is highlighted by its appearance in the *Karagöz*, the traditional and extremely popular shadow play, one of the main entertainments in Ottoman society which was performed particularly during the month of Ramazan. One such *Karagöz* was set in the *hamam*.⁶⁷ Writing in the mid seventeenth century, Evliya Çelebi refers to a *Karagöz* performance in which the main character of the shadow play, Karagöz, was removed naked from a *hamam*, tied up with the roll of skin which had been peeled off him during his scrubbing.⁶⁸ An early Republican version of a play called 'The play in the Double *Hamam* or Karagöz gets beaten' has survived and may well be that which Evliya Çelebi saw.⁶⁹ As it was a popular entertainment, it clearly needed to reflect people's everyday experiences in order to be both believable and funny, and thus gives a good idea of the *hamam*, at least at this period. The first part of the play consists of an account given by Hacivad to Karagöz about his wife's trip to the *hamam* and the behaviour of Karagöz's wife there, and highlights the social divisions in Ottoman society. Hacivad represented the better-off, better-class man, while Karagöz was much more of a common character. This social division comes out in the depiction of the contrast between the reception in the *hamam* by the *natır* and the bath-keeper of Hacivad's wife and daughter, who are shown much respect and given clean seats, and that of the 'filthy dirty, cheap and common' wife of Karagöz. While Hacivad's wife and daughter changed into their silk *peştemals*, which they took out of their *hamam bohças* (bundles containing the things necessary for the *hamam*), Karagöz's wife wore only her dirty, old *peştemal*. Hacivad's wife and daughter were led to their washing area, where, without any display of manners, Karagöz's wife plonked herself down too and began to wash. Hacivad's wife and daughter were 'mortified with embarrassment'.

⁶⁶ Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı*, p. 299.

⁶⁷ The same theme appears in *orta oyunu*, the traditional theatre; Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı*, p. 403.

⁶⁸ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, I Kitap*, p. 310.

⁶⁹ Muhittin Sevilen, 'Çifte Hamamlar Oyunu Yahut Karagöz'ün Dayak Yemesi', in Muhittin Sevilen, *Karagöz* (Istanbul, 1969), pp. 92–112. Muhittin Sevilen, known as Hayali Küçük Ali, was one of the last great masters of traditional Turkish shadow theatre.



33. Women fighting in a *hamam*, in Erimez, *Tarihten Çizgiler*, [p. 24].

Karagöz's wife's behaviour continued to cause embarrassment, for, when a bowl of delicious pickles arrived, sent by Hacivad for his wife and daughter, she seized the bowl and, sitting comfortably on the hot central massage slab with the pickles beside her, began to eat with gusto, smacking her lips and shovelling them down with relish. A pregnant woman approached. 'I really fancy a bit of pickle', she said, 'would you give me some?', but Karagöz's wife did not even give a morsel to the poor woman and instead smacked her lips even harder. Hacivad was very angry about Karagöz's wife's behaviour, for he considered himself a cut above the common Karagöz family and felt that his family had been insulted by her vulgarity. Karagöz, however, laughed merrily throughout his account, interjecting comments about his wife's cleverness.

The second part of the play revolves around the economic aspect of the *hamam* and introduces Çelebi, the well-off owner of the double *hamam* (a *hamam* with one side for women and the other side for men), who was in discussion with Hacivad. Hacivad was to open and take over the running of the *hamam*, and now began to take on staff. The newly hired stoker arrived, promising to produce a great deal of heat for the *hamam*, which would make the customers very pleased. Hacivad next went to

speak to Kilci Baba, the old man who sold the clay. Kilci Baba was singing a folksong. 'Oh bath-keeper, which beauties come to this *hamam*?/ My beloved with her fingers hennaed comes/ Without her the world becomes small/ Buy clay, girls, buy clay!' He brought clay of such good quality that it was 'like henna', and filled the *hamam* storage space. Next, Hacivad took on a female bath-keeper and two *naturs*, but then learnt that the *naturs* were not on speaking terms. He resolved to make peace between them. The two arrived singing a song: 'The door of the *hamam* was struck/ Inside there was a gathering/ The bath-keeper fell in love with the stoker'. Hacivad asked the girls, 'What has happened [between you]? Did you kill each other's mother and father?' Although the two had rowed bitterly and fought hard, they now decided to make up. Kissing, they went happily together into the *hamam*.

Karagöz's role in the play revolved around trying to get into the women's section of the *hamam*. He was evicted each time, once after being beaten with wet *peştemals* by the *naturs*, and was thrown out naked onto the street. The play ends with the discovery of an illicit mixed party in the women's *hamam*, the door between the male and the female sections having been opened and the men having entered, undetected by those outside. Karagöz set fire to the *hamam*, the scene of such disgraceful behaviour. When Hacivad appeared and asked who had burnt down the *hamam*, Karagöz answered that he had done it because 'it is not a *hamam*, it is a den of iniquity'. 'In that case', replied Hacivad, 'let it be so'.⁷⁰

The *hamam* through European eyes

Of all the aspects of Ottoman life which fascinated and intrigued an often remarkably ignorant European audience, the *hamam* was the most important. European observers were intrigued by what they perceived as the Turks' total addiction to cleanliness, and were driven to flights of fancy about activities within the *hamams*, or to howls of horror at the scrubbing and limb-twisting that professional washing involved. For the majority of western travellers, and for almost all of those who never set foot in Istanbul, the *hamam* represented the 'orient', the 'exotic' par excellence, for 'there is, perhaps, no luxury throughout the luxurious East more perfect, or more complete, than the Baths', nothing which so embodied a scene from the *Thousand and One Nights*.⁷¹ It was the bath that most fascinated and intrigued them and which fed their fantasies about the East. As in so many aspects of European understanding of Ottoman

⁷⁰ Sevilen, 'Çifte Hamamlar', p. 112. ⁷¹ Pardoc, *Beauties of the Bosphorus*, p. 13.

society, much of what the Europeans reported about the *hamam* was inaccurate or incorrect, a reflection of their own perceptions and the desire to fulfil the fantasies of their readership. Regardless of reality, they are amusing as accounts and for the picture they give of the European traveller's encounter with the Turkish culture of cleanliness.

'The Turks are devoted to washing their hands, their feet, their necks and all the body, including parts which I am ashamed to mention'.⁷² So wrote Theodore Spandounes in the early sixteenth century, reflecting a common European amazement at the extraordinary Turkish devotion to washing. Indeed, according to the Habsburg ambassador Busbecq, the Turks 'hate uncleanliness of the body as though it were a crime, and regard it as worse than impurity of the soul; hence their frequent ablutions'.⁷³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Frenchman Grelot regarded the Ottomans as a nation that affected cleanliness like no other,⁷⁴ or that his fellow Frenchman Tournefort was convinced that they spent a great part of their lives washing.⁷⁵ This, Tournefort explained, was related to religion, having been commanded by the Prophet. He himself found such linking of cleanliness to religion 'ridiculous'.⁷⁶

European travellers such as Thévenot were struck not only by the numbers of baths, but also by their magnificence and beauty.⁷⁷ The large baths were well and richly made, while the luxurious baths were 'constructed of the finest marble of inestimable value, with fountains and various channels of fresh water in front of the bath, and many of them are hot'.⁷⁸ They were seen as the chief ornament of the town which served all, regardless of rank or religion.⁷⁹ Sandys regarded the public baths as being second to the mosques for the excellence of the buildings.⁸⁰ Even Grelot, so hard to please in most ways, was impressed. There were, he said, a great number of baths, all over the empire, 'and some not inferior to the ancient *Thermae* of the Roman Emperours',⁸¹ a viewpoint echoed by Sanderson:

The citie is also full of a number of very fa[i]re banies, as well publique as private, which, in imitation of the auncient Greeks and Romaines, ar built and contrived with great industry, sumptuousness, and expence almost incredible. Besides those of the Great Turks seraglio, his women, and bassaies, the most of the common sorts ar bewtified with pillors, banks, and pavements of divers and rare colored marble. Faire they ar, and very great, with plenty of water.⁸²

⁷² Spandounes, *Origin*, p. 134. ⁷³ Busbecq, *Letters*, pp. 119–20.

⁷⁴ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 187.

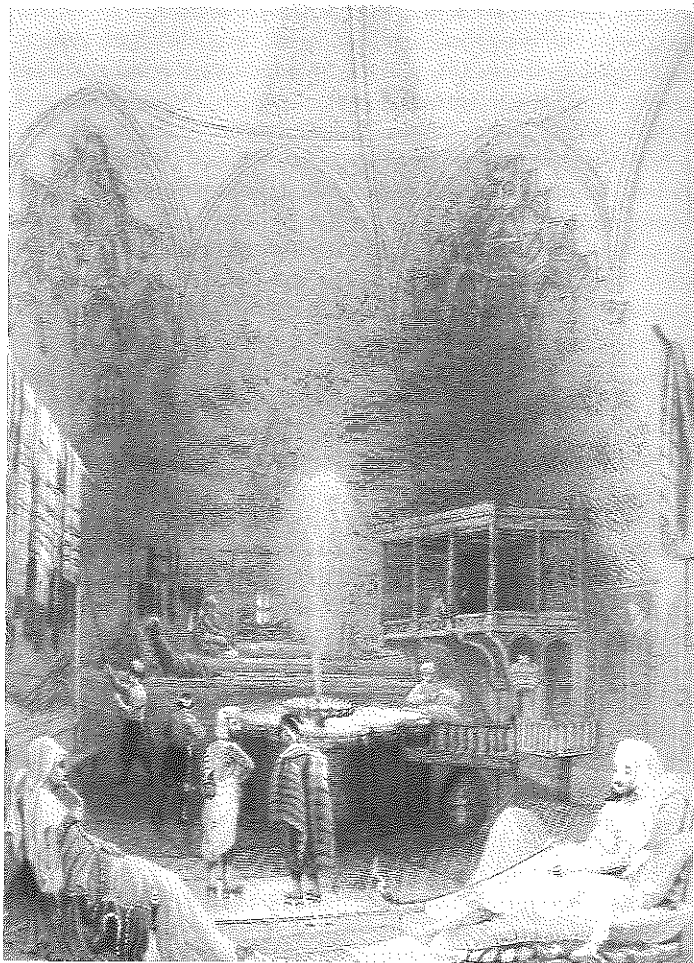
⁷⁵ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 65; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 85.

⁷⁷ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 94. ⁷⁸ Bassano, *Costumi*, f. 2v.

⁷⁹ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, pp. 85–6.

⁸⁰ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54. ⁸¹ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 187. ⁸² Sanderson, *Travels*, p. 78.



34. Cooling room in a *hamam*, in Pardoe, *Beauties of the Bosphorus*, between pp. 14 and 15.

Baths were for everyone, of whatever type and whatever religion,⁸³ rich or poor,⁸⁴ and people went to them regularly, at least once a week according to Thévenot,⁸⁵ often twice a week, according to

⁸³ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 65; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, pp. 85–6.

⁸⁴ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 99. ⁸⁵ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 99.

Sandys.⁸⁶ Women went often, twice, and even three or four times, and certainly never less than once a week,⁸⁷ for, according to Thévenot, Turkish women were very clean, having neither filth nor hair on their bodies.⁸⁸ This was not the case, apparently, in Cairo later, for Lane wrote that while many men went to the bath twice a week, women went less frequently.⁸⁹ There were baths for men, baths for women, or the same bath for both, in which case they had separate hours, men in the mornings and women (plus young children) in the afternoons, or were on alternate days.⁹⁰ They were not expensive, the entrance charge being minimal.⁹¹ In the seventeenth century, the charge was apparently only three or four *akçes*.⁹²

What happened in the baths was a source of great curiosity for European visitors, many of whom wrote eagerly of the pulling and stretching, the turning backwards and forwards of the bathers' limbs,⁹³ the cracking of the bones⁹⁴ (the *coup de grâce* of the massage)⁹⁵ and the other intricacies of treatment in the baths. They were often impressed, if alarmed, for they acknowledged that 'as to the washing and scrubbing of men, the *Turks* have a particular dexterity'.⁹⁶ Apart from rubbing, stretching and cleansing the skin with a piece of rough program, the bath attendants also shaved the heads and bodies of the men, or removed body hair using *rusma* (a depilatory powder) and unslaked lime. Women used an ointment made from earth from Chios, which left their skin soft, white and shining, and freed their faces from wrinkles – at least according to Sandys.⁹⁷ According to Thévenot, *rusma* was much used by the men to remove hair, and was a source of considerable revenue for the sultan.⁹⁸

Not all Europeans enjoyed the bathing experience, and some were not prepared to try it at all as it required undressing, certainly something that put off Bertrand de la Broquière when invited to the baths at Adana in the 1430s.⁹⁹ Lacroix referred to the 'far from agreeable sensations' caused by the massage and warned that the strangeness of the operation could

⁸⁶ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54.

⁸⁷ Bassano, *Costumi*, f.5v; Bauden, *Galland*, p. 194; Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 174.

⁸⁸ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 174. ⁸⁹ Lane, *Customs*, II, p. 36.

⁹⁰ Lane, *Customs*, II, p. 36; Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 86; Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 99; Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 189.

⁹¹ Lane, *Customs*, II, p. 36.

⁹² Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 86; Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54; de la Croix, *Mémoires*, I, 3rd letter, p. 132.

⁹³ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 191; Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54.

⁹⁴ Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 87; Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Lacroix, *Guide*, p. ii. ⁹⁶ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 190.

⁹⁷ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54; Spon and Wheeler, *Voyage*, I, pp. 198–9.

⁹⁸ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 98.

⁹⁹ Bertrand de la Broquière, *The Travels of Berrandon de la Brocquière*, trans. Thomas Johnes (London, 1807), p. 171.

cause somewhat disagreeable surprises.¹⁰⁰ Tournefort felt, when he first 'fell into the hands' of the bath attendants, that all his joints would be dislocated.¹⁰¹ Such cracking of the bones produced, according to Thévenot, a sensation rather alarming to an inexperienced person.¹⁰² Albert Smith was far more forthright, for he underwent 'a dreadful series of tortures, such as I had only read about as pertaining to the dark ages', and was convinced that his last minute had come and that death by suffocation would finish him off.

I do not know that I ever passed such a frightful five minutes, connected with bathing, nervous as are some of the feelings which that pastime gives rise to. It is very terrible to take the first summer plunge into a deep dark river, and when you are at the bottom, and the water is roaring in your ears, to think of dead bodies and crocodiles; it is almost worse to make that frightful journey down a steep beach, in a bathing machine, with a vague incertitude as to where you will find yourself when the doors open again: but nothing can come up to what I suffered in my last extremity, in this Constantinople bath. Thoughts of Turkish cruelty and the sacks of the Bosphorus; of home, and friends, and my childhood's bowers – of the sadness of being murdered in a foreign bath – and the probability of my Giaour body being eaten by the wild dogs, crowded rapidly on me.¹⁰³

Perhaps Wraxall had had a similar experience, for he wrote, 'suppose now, my dear reader, that you accompany me to a Turkish bath; – but no, I should not like to practice such cruelty upon you; you had better stay at home'.¹⁰⁴

Other Europeans were more positive and were more able to understand why the Turks went to the baths for sheer delight,¹⁰⁵ apart from other considerations of health, cleanliness or religion,¹⁰⁶ or sex, for Harff reported that 'when a man wishes to sleep with his wife she goes before midday to the bath, and the husband after midday, and he gives the wife three aspers as bath-money'.¹⁰⁷ The baths were even, for some Europeans, a relaxing experience and, at least for Sandys, 'restoreth to the wearied body a wonderful alacrity'.¹⁰⁸ Théophile Gautier found that after a *kese* (a vigorous rubbing of the skin with a rough cloth) in the *hamam* he visited in Istanbul, 'long gray [*sic.*] rolls... peel[ed] from the skin, in a manner astounding to a European convinced of the cleanliness of his own person'.¹⁰⁹ By the nineteenth century, the European was

¹⁰⁰ Lacroix, *Guide*, p. ii. ¹⁰¹ Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 87; Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66.

¹⁰² Thévenot, *Voyages*, II, p. 41. ¹⁰³ Smith, *Constantinople*, pp. 101–2.

¹⁰⁴ Lascelles Wraxall, 'A week in Constantinople', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 39 (1856), p. 306.

¹⁰⁵ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54. ¹⁰⁶ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ Harff, *Pilgrimage*, p. 244. ¹⁰⁸ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁹ Théophile Gautier, *Constantinople*, trans. Robert Howe Gould (New York, 1875), pp. 236, 233–5.

perhaps becoming less convinced of the cleanliness of his own person. The importance of hygiene, in particular in relation to the spread of disease, was becoming more recognised and, in consequence, the bath came to be viewed in a very positive light. Cleanliness came to be seen, in the words of the popular saying, as next to godliness, and the establishment of bath-houses regarded as 'a great step towards the purification of the mind and the achievement of moral superiority'.¹¹⁰ In 1857, at a meeting of the British Association in Dublin, Dr Edward Haughton promoted the Turkish bath as 'a pleasure free from vice and a luxury which was not injurious'.¹¹¹ Some of the baths established in Ireland even served coffee and *çubuks* (long tobacco pipes) to complete the Eastern experience.¹¹²

This link between hygiene and health was made by some well before the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Thévenot felt that the great use the Turks made of the baths effectively protected them from diseases.¹¹³ Grelot, too, thought there was a connection between the healthy Ottoman and the bath, for he argued that the baths were the reason why the Ottomans were not so subject to diseases as the Europeans. Nothing was more wholesome than the baths, if used in moderation; moderation, however, being the key, for, as with 'all sorts of Physick', medicine should only be used in case of necessity, otherwise it became more prejudicial than advantageous to health. Baths should thus, he said, be frequented no more than once a month. The Turks, however, persisted in using them almost every day with dire consequences, for 'their brains are thereby so over moisten'd, that they are generally troubled with a continual Rheume in their eyes'.¹¹⁴

Apart from the virtues of cleanliness, there were other virtues displayed in the baths, one of which was modesty. According to Sandys, men went to the baths in the mornings, and women in the afternoon, unlike the Romans, who 'did ordinarily frequent them together: a custome, as they say, continued in Switzer-land at this day, and that among the most modest'.¹¹⁵ Bassano warned that in undressing it was very important 'not to show any dishonest part because those who are without respect are beaten and thrown out of the bath'.¹¹⁶ Writing two hundred years later, Tournefort also noted the need for care, since thoughtless undressing resulted in punishment. If such carelessness was by design, a severe

¹¹⁰ Teresa Breathnach, 'For health and pleasure: the Turkish bath in Victorian Ireland', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32/1 (2004), p. 163.

¹¹¹ Breathnach, 'For health', pp. 163–4. ¹¹² Breathnach, 'For health', p. 160.

¹¹³ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 99. ¹¹⁴ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 188.

¹¹⁵ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54. ¹¹⁶ Bassano, *Costumi*, f.2v.

beating was administered,¹¹⁷ for seeing what one should not see was a great crime.¹¹⁸

As with cleanliness itself, this aspect of the baths also appealed to some European visitors. It certainly attracted the German Protestant priest Salomon Schweigger, who felt that his own co-nationals would benefit from a similar attitude to unnecessary displays of the flesh.

Men and women had separate baths. In the bath they cover themselves in a very modest way. In contrast, Germans behave in a shameless manner in this regard, almost as if they particularly wish to show their intimate parts, or, as I myself have seen in Venice, the men enter the bath completely naked. The Turks wrap around themselves a cover made from blue linen which goes round their hips twice and reaches to the ground. We Christians should take these barbarians as an example from the point of view of good behaviour and morality.¹¹⁹

In one respect, however, German behaviour was distinctly superior: the lack of lust.

The thing which the Turks and the Greeks cannot believe is that, although we Germans sit, women and men side by side on the same bench in the washing places almost naked, this does not lead to any excess, importunity, prostitution or adultery. I think that the jealous Greeks, Turks, Spanish, Italians and other peoples of races addicted to lust cannot imitate us from this point of view.¹²⁰

Although Germans may not have lusted, the imagination of many European men ran wild over the activities within the confines of the female Turkish bath. For many, the women's baths were filled with voluptuous females and 'many girls of extraordinary beauty brought together by various chances from every quarter of the world'.¹²¹ European male visions of female *hamams* filled the frames of many paintings, by artists such as the Irish portrait painter Charles Jervas, whose work would have been greatly improved by actual experience in the opinion of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. 'I had wickedness', she wrote in a letter of 1 April 1717, describing her visit to a *hamam* in Edirne, 'to wish secretly that Mr Gervase could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art'.¹²²

Luigi Bassano was convinced that the women's baths were dens of iniquity and that women washing each other there led to unsavoury practices.¹²³ Sandys agreed: 'much un-naturall and filthy lust is said to be committed daily in the remote closets of these dark-some *Bannias*: yea

¹¹⁷ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 66; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 86.

¹¹⁸ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 95. ¹¹⁹ Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung*, p. 115.

¹²⁰ Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung*, p. 115. ¹²¹ Busbecq, *Letters*, p. 120.

¹²² Montagu, *Letters*, p. 59. ¹²³ Bassano, *Costumi*, f. 5r.

women with women; a thing un-credible, if former times has not given thereunto both detection and punishment'.¹²⁴

Oddly, Sandys immediately follows this with the remark that 'they have generally the sweetest children that ever I saw; partly proceeding from their frequent bathings, and affected cleanliness'.¹²⁵ Some, including Bassano, argued that sometimes women did not in fact go to the baths at all, but used a trip there as an excuse for leaving the house to go elsewhere, for men did not allow them to go out otherwise.¹²⁶ Grelot, too, noted this tendency, for he remarked that men who had baths in their own houses were thus able to prevent their wives from 'gadding abroad' under the pretence of going to the baths.¹²⁷

Not all were so suspicious, other Europeans regarding the *hamam* as an 'innocent pleasure' for the women, a 'diversion they take great pleasure in',¹²⁸ where they 'chatted among themselves together without any constraint, and they passed there hours more enjoyable than they did in their own homes'.¹²⁹ Going to the baths was a source of great pleasure for the women of Egypt. There they frequently had entertainments and were often 'not a little noisy in their mirth'.¹³⁰ Women put much effort into their trips to the *hamam*, at least according to Tavernier, describing the women of Aleppo, for they would spend an entire week preparing food to take there.¹³¹ The bath was, in the words of Ubcini, a fundamental pleasure for Ottoman women, obligatory on Fridays and a social extra on other days. There they passed half a day eating, drinking and enjoying themselves.¹³² In the baths, 'the very paradise of Eastern women',¹³³ they conversed, worked, drank coffee and sherbet or lay 'negligently... on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners'.¹³⁴ They busied themselves with 'colouring their Locks, the nails of their toes and fingers, with the powder of an herb which the *Arabians* call *Elhanna*, the Turks *Alkana*, which makes them look red, and gumming and dying the hair of their eyelids, to render themselves more amiable to their Spouses'.¹³⁵ They went, according to Grelot, 'more out of wantonness than necessity; it being the chief place where the Gossips meet and spend

¹²⁴ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54. ¹²⁵ Sandys, *Travailes*, p. 54. ¹²⁶ Bassano, *Costumi*, f. 5v.

¹²⁷ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 192. ¹²⁸ Montagu, *Letters*, p. 134.

¹²⁹ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 67; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 88.

¹³⁰ Lane, *Customs*, II, p. 44.

¹³¹ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six Voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier Ecuyer Baron d'Aubonne, en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1679), I, p. 151.

¹³² J. H. A. Ubcini, *1855'de Türkiye*, 2 vols., trans. Ayda Düz (Istanbul, 1977), II, p. 104. Ubcini refers to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account of the baths on pp. 104-5.

¹³³ Pardoe, *Beauties of the Bosphorus*, p. 15. ¹³⁴ Montagu, *Letters*, pp. 59-60.

¹³⁵ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 190.

the Afternoons in tattling and junketing'.¹³⁶ Indeed, for the female population, the bath was, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu shrewdly noted, 'the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented'.¹³⁷

Going to the baths was not an entertainment that husbands could oppose, for 'the men who have any complaisance for their wives, do not refuse them these innocent Diversions'.¹³⁸ Perhaps the reason for this was less related to kindness of nature than to fear of divorce, for, at least according to Tournefort, 'too much Constraint makes them sometimes seek Reasons for Divorce'.¹³⁹ Women could not divorce their husbands, he explained, unless they failed to furnish them with what they needed: bread, rice, coffee and the money to go twice a week to the baths. If the husband did not provide them with one of these, the woman could go to the *kadı* and demand a divorce.¹⁴⁰

While the Europeans found much about the *hamam* and the washing practices peculiar, if not downright unpleasant, Mehmed Enisi experienced a rather similar feeling when, as an intern in the French navy in 1895, he went to a Turkish *hamam* in Nice. Although he took the whole experience in good spirit, he found it quite impossible not to twitch and flinch every time one of the strange, long-handled brushes was applied to his skin.¹⁴¹

Regardless of any European perplexity or suspicion, the *hamam* was a cornerstone of Ottoman daily life, an essential part of socialisation, particularly for women. It provided a space for religious ablution, an area of general cleanliness for a society which, except for the richer echelons, had no other access to such facilities, and a setting for social exchange, where important life events were marked and where people who otherwise could not socialise together could meet. It was a source of gossip, of brides and of diseases. It could even, in the words of Karagöz, be a den of iniquity. In short, it was a quintessential part of Ottoman life. It was also a largely unchanging one, for its centrality and popularity was as true for the early days of the empire as it was for the nineteenth century.

¹³⁶ Grelot, *Voyage*, p. 189. ¹³⁷ Montagu, *Letters*, pp. 59–60.

¹³⁸ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 67; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 88.

¹³⁹ Tournefort, *Voyage*, II, p. 67; Tournefort, *Relations*, II, p. 88.

¹⁴⁰ Thévenot, *Voyages*, I, p. 178.

¹⁴¹ Mehmet Enisi, *Bir Denizcinin Avrupa Günlüğü - Avrupa Hatıratı*, ed. N. Ahmet Özalp (Istanbul, 2008), pp. 173–5.

8 The nineteenth century

During the nineteenth century, Istanbul was to witness many changes that were to alter the lives of its citizens. New fashions arrived from Europe, new political ideas and concepts of state began to permeate the political circles of the capital, and even views on how a city should be laid out altered. Yet for all this innovation, Istanbul remained the lively, disorganised, chaotic and dynamic metropolis it had always been, and novelties arrived, were absorbed and became part of the Ottoman fabric just as they always had. What was different was the increasing political and financial weakness that delivered the empire into the rapacious hands of western imperialism, which squeezed ever tighter round the Ottoman windpipe until, with the First World War, all hope of survival was gone.

The traditional city

While much changed in the life of the city during the nineteenth century, much remained the same. Fire and plague constantly assailed the population of the late Ottoman empire and drove them to distraction.¹ *Mahalle* life continued much as it always had: those who sat behind the steamed-up windows of the coffee house in their *entaris*

were grandsons of those in the [nearby] graveyard. Only the waters of their water pipes moved while the people themselves seemed less mobile than those grave-stones. All frozen and insensible like the Seven Sleepers, they seemed untrammelled by cares. Their little mosque was just next door, their graveyard was there, the grocer and the butcher were near, the baker came every day, the water seller brought the water and God even provided them with neighbours.²

For many contemporaries, the city streets were a nightmare. The roadway in Pera was 'paved with all sorts of ragged stones, jammed down together without any regard to level surface; and encumbered with dead rats,

¹ Saraçoğlu, *Hatıralar*, p. 138.

² Celâl Esat Arseven, *Seyyar Sergi ile Seyahat İntibalanı*, ed. N. Ahmet Özalp (Istanbul, 2008), pp. 116–17.