

## A book is read by how many people?

### Some observations on readers and reading modes in the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>

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The use of books is among the numerous subjects broached by Christoph Neumann in his stimulating article on writing and reading in the Ottoman Empire, printed in the first issue of *Tarih ve Toplum*.<sup>3</sup> Neumann writes that in the Ottoman world, the primary use of books was, obviously, to be read. However, they were also used as reference books, and as such were not read from start to end, and were also kept as objects of prestige. Neumann states that little more is known about how the Ottomans used their books and that we can only speculate that it was a widespread tradition to read the relatively few manuscripts in circulation aloud. He believes the aim of reading aloud was twofold: to memorize the text, and to enrich and edit the text, which could also be a way of subsequently adding it to a private journal. He then delves into the prefaces of manuscripts to enumerate the reasons why a writer may write. Claiming that the first reason is the author's wish for his work to be widely known, he asks the following question:

How can a person living in a manuscript culture expect everyone to know a text?

This motive gains meaning when seen as focusing on the text, rather than on the interlocutor and reader. The writer reviews an extant text to bring it to a wider

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1 Originally published as “Bir Kitabı Kaç Kişi Okur? Osmanlı’da Okurlar ve Okuma Biçimleri Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler”, *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 13 (Güz 2011): 7-43. This article could not have been written without the support of Oktay Özel and the help of Günhan Börekçi. I sincerely thank them both. I would also like to thank Christoph Neumann and Serpil Bağcı who read the article before printing and improved it with their suggestions and comments, as well as Richard Wittmann and Aslı Niyazioğlu -- the discussions we had as I wrote this article increased my enthusiasm, and the seminars they organized created occasions to debate with my colleagues. My library work was done with the support of the Suna-İnan-Kırac Foundation İstanbul Research Institute and The Council of Higher Education. I am grateful to both institutions.

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3 Editor's note: Also published in translation in this issue.

audience. Even if not everyone can make use of his text, he has taken a step toward them.<sup>4</sup>

But was reading a solitary activity for the Ottomans? Did people read aloud only to learn the text by heart or to “review” the text, as proposed by Neumann? Were some “popular” texts, at least, not read in another way?

The aim of the present article is not to provide general answers to these questions.<sup>5</sup> Such an aim would necessitate a larger and more intense study. Rather, it will draw on readers' notes from a group of manuscripts written or commented upon mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to observe how, where and with whom the Ottomans read.<sup>6</sup> In other words, I would like to make a small contribution to Neumann's discussion by giving substance to the readers and audience addressed by some Ottoman writers in their prologues or epilogues. The manuscripts I will discuss here range from classical romances and adventure stories to the biographies of religious or legendary characters, religious parables, stories of rogues from Istanbul, and even fictionalized historical texts. These works, for the most part anonymous, seem to have been written for a general audience. The readers' notes were written at the beginning, end or on the pages of the books and they indicate where, when and by whom the book was read (sometimes aloud). Sometimes they declare that everyone had a good time, and add the names of friends or listeners as well as a detailed account of the locations where the book was read. These notes and the names recorded therein

<sup>4</sup> Christoph K. Neumann, "Üç tarz-ı mütalaası: Yeniçağ Osmanlı Dünyasında kitap yazmak ve okumak," *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, n°1, Spring 2005, pp. 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Zehra Öztürk states that it is an ancient Anatolian tradition to read aloud to a group of people. She discusses which types of works were read in two articles: "Eğitim Tarihimizde Okuma Toplantılarının Yeri ve Okunan Kitaplar," *Değerler Eğitim Dergisi* 1, October 2003, pp. 131-155; "Osmanlı Döneminde Kıraat Meclislerinde Okunan Halk Kitapları," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi, Eski Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi I,5/9*, 2007, pp. 401-445. I am grateful to Hatice Aynur for bringing these studies to my attention.

<sup>6</sup> Until the nineteenth century, Ottoman Empire intellectuals produced works not only in Ottoman Turkish, but also in Arabic, Farsi, Greek, Armenian, Hebrew and Spanish. However, this article will focus only on works written in Turkish. See Johann Strauss, "Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)", *Arabic Middle Eastern Literatures*, 6.1, 2003, p. 40.

prove that the book was read aloud to a certain group of people.<sup>7</sup> Finally, many of the books and notes include a request that the readers or listeners pray for the writer.<sup>8</sup>

Mustafa Nihat Özön (1896-1980) makes a classification of Turkish stories in his *Türkçede Roman* [The Novel in Turkish], published in 1936. He creates a category of stories read in public from a written work. Özön discovered the genre while preparing the bibliography of novels and stories written between 1870 and 1874. Many of the small story books printed at the time were not printed in keeping with the "new story system," nor did they resemble classic Turkish literature. Although some were signed by the author, they all shared the stylistic and narrative characteristics of anonymous texts. The subjects ranged from classical Turkish literature written in verse to tales inspired by the *Arabian Nights*. Many of the stories took place during the reign of Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640) and revolved around common themes such as profligacy, elder women seducing youngsters, and drunkenness. These were later labeled "realistic folk tales/Istanbul stories" by literary historians. Özön was

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7 It is difficult to provide general information about the history of reading silently or aloud, because unlike in Europe, no systematic research has as yet been conducted on reading traditions in the Ottoman Empire. In the two articles referred to above, Zehra Öztürk asserts that the tradition of reading aloud existed from the Seljuk period to the Ottoman period, i.e. from the twelfth until the twentieth century and that certain religious and literary texts were read in public. Halil İnalçık claims that some early Ottoman chronicles were written to be read in public and that the interjections used in texts are proof to this. See Halil İnalçık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 157. For a study which builds on İnalçık and argues that Aşıkpaşazade's work is written in accordance with the epic rules of folk tales and should also be analyzed from an ethnological point of view, see Özkul Çobanoğlu: "Sözlü Kültürden Yazılı Kültür Ortamına Geçiş Bağlamında Erken Devir Osmanlı Tarihlerinden Aşıkpaşazade'nin Epik Karakteri Üzerine Tespitler," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, special issue, 1999, pp. 65-82. There exists a rich and multifaceted literature on the history of European reading. For a short summary on the history of silent reading in Europe, see Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 18. For a detailed study on the influence of silent reading on language structure, see Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words. The Origins of Silent Reading*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1997. Another useful work on the history of reading in Europe is the five-volume *The History of the Book in the West: A Library of Critical Essays*, ed. Alexis Weodon, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010.

8 The notes discussed in this article are the first findings of a work in progress. Some were found thanks to a systematic study of manuscripts, others through secondary literature. All books from the British Library and the Bodleian Library catalogs archived as story books, *mecmua* (journals) or miscellanea were investigated and works in other libraries were found either by coincidence or thanks to references I came across in the secondary literature. I will doubtless find many new notes during my more extensive research in the coming period. Furthermore, some of the manuscripts from the British Library used for this article are recent additions to the library collection and have not yet been cataloged. My references to these books do not mention the library catalog. I would like to express my thanks to Muhammed Isa Waley, curator of Islamic manuscripts at the British Library, who facilitated my work by giving me a list of manuscripts awaiting cataloging.

aided in his understanding of this genre by readers' notes in a manuscript of *Firuzşah Hikayesi* [The story of Firuzshah], given to him by İhsan Sungu. The notes were written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and told the manuscript's adventure. These notes, which I will come back to later, recorded where and when the manuscript was read, by whom, and add that it was lent by a bookbinder, revealing details of its circulation. The statement "this is the forty-fifth volume," written by the author at the beginning of the story, led Özön to argue that the manuscript reached a very wide audience:

It would seem that these were the remnants of an ancient culture which fulfilled the need for stories of a very large group of people. [...] Besides the classic stories known also in far-flung villages and the stories written by well-known authors writing mostly in verse, there was also another story tradition which was important in its own right.<sup>9</sup>

Mustafa Nihat Özön's "intermediate zone" between classical literature and texts known in every provincial village points to a significant issue. Many recent studies have argued that this "intermediate zone" is the habitat of story books targeting a general readership and of different types of texts. For example, Cemal Kafadar's study of the journal *Sohbetnâme* [Conversation] by the seventeenth-century Ottoman urbanite Seyyid Hasan describes this type of personal story as intermediate, classified as neither elitist, nor popular.<sup>10</sup> Nelly Hanna focuses on a similar "intermediate zone" in her study of the book culture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman Cairo. Hanna recognizes the existence of a population other than the palace, the elite, and those belonging to what can be called popular culture,

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9 Mustafa Nihat Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, ed. Alpay Kabarcı, İstanbul, İletişim Yayıncılığı, 1985, pp . 72-99.

10 Cemal Kafadar, "Ben ve Başkaları, On Yedinci Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Bir Dervişin Güncesi ve Osmanlı Edebiyatında Birinci Ağızdan Anlatılar," *Kim var imiş biz burada yoğun iken, Dört Osmanlı: Yeniçeri, Tıccar, Derviş ve Hatun*, İstanbul, Metis Yayıncılığı, 2009, pp. 40-41.

acknowledging a group of people with a certain level of education – though different from that of the ulema\* – and familiar with written culture, but with a more “realistic” perception of the world than the ulema.<sup>11</sup> Kafadar and Hanna's descriptions create a solid basis for the works discussed here and the study of how they were read aloud in homes, waterfront residences, coffee-houses, shops, and even in the streets and palaces, to various groups of people from palace residents to urbanites of different professions and social strata – all sharing the same taste for stories.

## **Two palaces, one book**

The most interesting notes discussed in this article are to be found in a story book recounting the tale of Ali, an early seventeenth-century cavalryman from Kastamonu.<sup>12</sup> To summarize: while on his way to Istanbul to collect his three-monthly salary from the palace, Ali runs into an old friend near Sultan Ahmet. This friend has just returned to Istanbul after a voyage to India and invites Ali to stay at his home for the night. They walk toward their destination and the friend tells Ali about India. On the way, Ali notices a crowd in front of a coffeehouse. He asks his friend about this, and although his friend is reluctant to explain, he finally gives in. The reason for the crowd turns out to be a storyteller named Çavuşzade, who is performing in the coffee-house. Everyone from the sultan to the dervish\* is obsessed with the storyteller and the friend warns Ali against entering the coffee-house. But Ali does not heed the warning. He goes inside and Ali inevitably becomes infatuated with the storyteller, spending his days at the coffee-house, and much more as events develop.

The story ends with the announcement that it is the same Ali who later became grand vizier with the help of his father-in-law and was better known as Güzelce Ali Pasha. Güzelce

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<sup>11</sup> Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2003, pp. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî*, Millet Kütüphanesi, Ali Emiri, Novel 146.

Ali Pasha (d. 1621) was a statesman who rose to grand vizier in the reign of Sultan Osman II (1618-1622).<sup>13</sup> Drawing on this and on a mention of Murad IV's return from the battle of Revan (1635), Hasan Kavruk, the first to present the book titled *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhi-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî*, dates the story to the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup>

The name of the scribe, Lebîb Efendizâde Seyyîd Atâullah, appears on the front cover.<sup>15</sup> It is not known whether the scribe was also the author – I will come back to this later – but Seyyid Atâullah's name is also on the two seals on f. 1b and on one seal on f. 2a.<sup>16</sup> The readers' notes written on different dates at the beginning and end of the manuscript recount the book's adventures after being written.<sup>17</sup> All written during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, they suggest that the copy was produced at the latest somewhere around the beginning of the eighteenth century and that it was much loved, changing hands frequently. They also reveal its interesting itinerary. The book was read aloud several times for numerous audiences at the Campaigner Corps dormitory at Topkapı Palace and at Galata Palace. In order to better understand these notes, we will place them in their historical context and look at the relationship between the two palaces in order to establish the book's reading and listening history before focusing on the content of the notes in more detail.

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13 İdris Bostan, "Ali Paşa, Güzelce," *TDVIA*, 2 (1989), pp. 424-425.

14 Hasan Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında Mensûr Hikayeler*, İstanbul, Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1998, pp. 97-99. Kavruk also provides a summary of the story.

15 Mustakîmzâde Süleyman Sadreddin Efendi also mentions an eighteenth-century copyist named Seyyid Atâullah in *Tuhfe-i Hattâtîn*. He states that Atâullah Efendi was the son of Bandırmalı Mustafa Efendi, chamberlain of the Cavalry Corps, and that he was a copyist at the corps secretariat. He learned the *süliüs* and *nesih* scripts from Sheikh Mehmed Efendi and died in 1191/1777. Although he carries the same name as the copyist of *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhi-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî*, their fathers' names are different. Our copyist's father is Lebîb Efendi; the copyist mentioned in *Tuhfe-i Hattâtîn* is the son of Bandırmalı Mustafa. Mustakîmzâde Süleyman Sadreddin Efendi, *Tuhfe-i Hattâtîn*, İstanbul, Devlet Matbaası, 1928, p. 309; Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 3, 1960, p. 1259.

16 The same pages contain the seals of three different individuals. Although we can see that these seals belong to three different individuals, we cannot read the names. The manuscript also contains the waqf seals of Ali Emiri on ff. 1a and 53b.

17 The first and last pages of the book contain numerous notes. Some are illegible, others have been crossed out. We will discuss the legible ones, which establish where, when and by whom the book was read. While Hasan Kavruk mentions the existence of these comments, and says that they demonstrate that the book was appreciated, he refrains from giving any information about their content. Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında*, p. 97.

The Campaigner Corps Dormitory, where *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* was first read, was situated in the Topkapı Palace Enderun [inner palace]. The pages based there received a basic education focusing on Islamic sciences and language and learned the art of war, calligraphy, and music. Those who had no talent for the arts or sciences could not hope for advancement. Once the pages from the Campaigner corps graduated, they would be sent to various cavalry squadrons depending on their seniority.<sup>18</sup> The second place where our book was read, Galata Palace, was the most important of the external palaces which provided education for pages recruited from the barracks at the Topkapı inner court.<sup>19</sup> The teachers were chosen from among the ulema and successful teachers and students would be promoted to the Inner Palace. Those who graduated with honors after between seven and fourteen years of education would be sent to the Inner Palace dormitories, including that of the Campaigners; less successful students were sent to the *Kapikulu Ocağı*, the sultan's household troops, especially to the cavalry squadron.<sup>20</sup> There was plenty of movement among both students and teachers in both institutions where the book was read.

The dates indicate that the first comment in the *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* manuscript was by Feyzullah Bey from the Campaigners' dormitory. Having read the book, one of his aims in writing the note was to ask for prayers.<sup>21</sup> The date is given simply as 23.

18 The Campaigner Corps was instituted by Sultan Murad IV before he went on the expedition to Revan, in 1635. While its first duty was to launder the clothes of the residents of the Inner Palace, it soon began training artists. Many of the palace's leading musicians and artists studied there. There were 81 members at the end of the seventeenth century and 149 by 1772. It was disestablished in 1831. See Tayyâr-zâde Atâ, *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi, Tarih-i Enderun*, vol. 1, ed. Mehmet Arslan, İstanbul, Kitabevi, 2010, pp. 252-255 and Ismail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988, pp. 311-13.

19 Galata Place was established by Bayezid II, first as a school for children taken in as *devshirme*, then, from the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) onward, for the children of members of the Janissary corps. Students learned languages, religion, reading, calligraphy and music. There were between 160 and 600 students between the years 1715 and 1833. Galata Palace was used this way until 1675, when it was transformed into a madrasah, but thanks to Ahmed III's (1703-1736) Grand Vizier Şehid Ali Pasha, who was educated there, it was reinstated. See Tayyârzade Atâ, *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi*, pp. 167-176; Fethi İsfendiyaroğlu, *Galatasaray Tarihi*, vol. 1, İstanbul, Doğan Kardeş Yayınları, 1952, pp. 134-266, 433-435, 485-488; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 302-306; Mehmet İpsirli, 'Galata Sarayı,' *TDVİLA*, 13 (1996), pp. 322-323.

20 İsfendiyaroğlu, *Galatasaray Tarihi*, p. 134-266, 433-435, 485-488.

21 "Bu kitabı sarây-ı hümâyûnda der-hâne-i seferlide Feyzullah Bey kırâ'at eylemişdür. Bunı yazmadan murâd duâdur. Duâ ise kamu derde devâdur. Sene... [11]23." ["This book was read by Feyzullah Bey of the Campaigners' Dormitory at the Palace. His aim in writing [this note] is to ask for a prayer. Prayers provide the

Taking into account the dates in the other notes, we deduce that this means 1123 (1712-3 in the Western calendar). While this note proves that the book was first read at the Campaigners' dormitory, it unfortunately provides no clues as to Feyzullah Bey's identity.

The second note, written in 1131/1718-19, states that the book was read by Dâye-zâde Mustafa, again at the Campaigners' dormitory at Topkapı Palace.<sup>22</sup> This may be the historian Dâye-zâde Mustafa cited in Bursalı Mehmed Tahir's *Ottoman Authors*, [Ottoman Authors], whose dates match precisely. Mehmed Tahir describes him as a scientist and historian living in Istanbul. After receiving a somewhat patchy education, he became a state official and was eventually posted as chamberlain to the revenue office in the province of Rumeli. He was incarcerated in Kars Castle in 1743 and wrote a book on Selimiye Mosque.<sup>23</sup> However, although this Dâye-zâde Mustafa Efendi seems the perfect candidate to read a book aloud, it is impossible to confirm that the two men were definitely one and the same.

The third note dates from 1137/1724-25 and indicates that the book was read by Molla Çelebi from Galata, who took much pleasure in reading it together with his friends.<sup>24</sup> Although the note does not say where the book was read, the expression "Galatalı" [from Galata] was used for those who arrived at the Inner Palace from Galata Palace.<sup>25</sup> As the title "Molla" was generally used for members of the ulema, Galatalı Molla was likely to have been a teacher promoted from Galata Palace to the Campaigners' dormitory or another barrack at Topkapı Palace.

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solution to all problems. The year... [11]23."

22 "Saray-ı Humâyûnda ve (der?) hâne-I seferlîde dâye-zâde Mustafa okumuşdur. 1131." ["Read by Dâye-zâde Mustafa at the Campaigners' dormitory at the Palace. 1131."] The note indicates the place of reading as "Saray-ı Humâyûnda ve Hâne-i Seferlîde" [Campaigners' dormitory at the Palace] but the other note reads "der-hâne-i Seferlî," and the notes are missing some letters and contain spelling mistakes. I therefore consider that this note also reads "Saray-ı Humâyûnda ve Hâne-i Seferlîde".

23 Bursalı Mehmed Tahir Efendi, *Ottoman Authors*, 1299/1915, vol. 3, Ed. Ismail Özen, İstanbul, Meral Yayınları, 1975, p. 46.

24 "Bu kitabı Galatalı Monlâ Çelebi okuyub yârân-ı bâ-sâfâyla gâyet hazz olunmuşdur. 1137, el-ma'rûf." ["This book was read by Monlâ Çelebi from Galata and he and his friends greatly enjoyed it. 1137"]

25 İsfendiyaroğlu, ibid., p.488.

*Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* was read three times in 1138/1725-26. In July 1726, Hafız Muhammed Agha from the Campaigners' dormitory read it with great pleasure.<sup>26</sup> The other two readings took place at Galata Palace, where Yahya Agha and Çerkes Ali Agha read it together<sup>27</sup> and Berber Süleyman Agha greatly enjoyed reading it in the *Hâne-i Kebîr* [Big Room].<sup>28</sup>

The Ottoman authors who wrote of the Inner Palace left much information about the lives and careers of the pages living there, giving some idea of the nicknames given to pages. For example, Hızır İlyas wrote in *Tarih-i Enderun* that he gratified a few pages who were waiting to graduate from Galata Palace by admitting them into the Inner Palace, in honor of the victory of Sultan Mahmud II (reigned 1808-1839) over the Wahhabi rebellion. Round-faced Tortop Ali Agha and Dervish Hafız Ali Agha from the Big Room, Falcı (fortune-teller) Ali Agha and Nöbetçi (guardsman) Said Agha from the Middle Room, and Berber (barber) Şükri Agha and Rıfat (long) Mustafa Agha were selected for the Palace on the Sultan's order.<sup>29</sup> Another author who wrote extensively about the Inner Palace, Tâyyârzâde Ata Efendi, recorded that the Inner Palace pages were given titles such as efendi, bey, halife, and çelebi.<sup>30</sup> The pages living in the dormitories were given different titles inspired by their physical characteristics, duties, and their qualities. Hafız Muhammed Agha, who left a note after reading the book at the Campaigners' dormitory, was probably a page given the title "Hafız" for reciting the Quran from memory. Feyzullah Bey who read the book at the Campaigners'

26 "Bu kitabı seferlide Hâfız Muhammed Ağa kirâ'at eylemişdür ve gâyet hazz eylemişdür. 1138, Zâlkaide [Zilka'de]." ["This book was read by Muhammed Agha at the Campaigners' Dormitory and took great pleasure from it. 1138, month of Zilka'de"]

27 "Bu kitabı Sar(â)y-ı Galata baş ol-dâre (?) Yahyâ Ağa ile Çerkez Ali Ağa okumuşdur. Sene 1138." ["This book was read by Yahya Agha and Cherkez Ali Agha in the Big Room at Galata Palace. Year 1138."]

28 "Bu kitâb[ı] Galata Sarâyında hâne-i kebirde Berber Süleyman Ağa bir sa'atde kirâ'at eylemişdür. Vâfir haz[z] olunmuşdur. Bunu yazmadan murâd belki bir âşinânun eline gider ise bu sebeb ile bizleri bende-i 'âbâd [âbâdan?] itse [temâ]m fi sene 1138." ["This book was read by Berber Süleyman Agha in one hour. He enjoyed it very much. The aim in writing this note is that if someone else reads this book, it will gladden my heart."] The word "bende-i" was added underneath afterwards.

29 İsfendiyaroğlu, ibid., p. 487; Hafız Hızır İlyas, *Tarih-i Enderun*, İstanbul, Darültibbatü'l-amire, 1276, p. 44.

30 Tayyârzade Atâ, *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi*, p. 241.

dormitory, Berber Süleyman who read it at the Big Room at Galata Palace, and Yahya Agha and Çerkez Ali Agha who read it together again at Galata Palace must have been pages studying there.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Yahya and Ali Agha read the book together shows that the readings sometimes went on for a long time and that two people would read alternately so the other could rest – a point I shall return to later.

The notes indicate that *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* was read from 1712-13 until 1726 by the residents of the Campaigners' dormitory at Topkapı Palace. There are two possibilities for what happened next: either the book was read for one last time in 1726 at the Campaigners' dormitory and was then lent to Galata Palace, or the book was transferred back and forth in 1725-26. In the latter case, how was the book carried from one palace to the other?

The first hypothesis is that the book was placed in the library at either the Campaigners' dormitory or Galata Palace and was carried back and forth by teachers or students. We know that there were books in both locations. But the readers would not have dared to write so many notes and comments on a library book. The book had therefore probably been bought, inherited or lent by a number of people. One of the owners must have been Lebîb Efendizâde Seyyîd Atâullah, whose name is given on the front cover as the copyist and on three seals inside. There are a further three illegible seals, which may have belonged to the book's other owners.

While it may seem logical for a book to go from hand to hand, a note written at the end of the colophon casts doubt on this scenario: “This book was taken out on the fifteenth day of the fourth month and was entrusted.” So the book was taken out of *somewhere* for a while. The expression “was entrusted” could mean that the book was entrusted to a copyist. If that were the case, even if the book were in the possession of private individuals, it belonged

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<sup>31</sup> There were many barbers among the residents of the Campaigners' dormitory. Tayyârzade Atâ, *ibid.*, p. 253.

at one point to an institution or person who lent out books on a more formal basis, rather than to just friends and colleagues. The notes printed by Mustafa Nihat Özön are of use here.

The manuscript of *Firuzşah Hikayesi* contains a total of seven readers' notes, two undated. One of the undated notes is very interesting; it says that the book was read by Tahir Agha in the Treasury Room of the Inner Palace.<sup>32</sup> While this note demonstrates that this type of entertainment was common in the Inner Palace dormitories, it more importantly documents that a book lent from person to person and from place to place throughout the city could also enter the palace. The notes, which I will study later on, support this hypothesis. The manuscript contains another interesting note transcribed by Mustafa Nihat Özön: "There are no books like those of bookbinder Salih Efendi; they are one of a kind. But I must add that many pages are missing, and this lessens one's pleasure. Really, if it weren't for this defect, I couldn't stop reading."<sup>33</sup> According to Özön, this note establishes that the book was borrowed from a bookbinder, helping us to understand how *Firuzşah Hikayesi* traveled across Istanbul. The commentator's complaint that some pages are missing reveals that readers' habits have not changed much and that pages were sometimes torn out, just as they are today. The notes written in the books also reveal that such loans were governed by more informal rules than in libraries, and perhaps as a result readers ill-treated them, tearing out pages or writing notes throughout. The shared qualities and fate of both *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûfî* and *Firuzşah Hikayesi* hint that both were borrowed from a bookbinder, copyist – perhaps Seyyid Atâullah himself – or bookseller. As Süleyman Faik Efendi complained in a nineteenth-century journal<sup>34</sup>, some people borrowed *Hamzanâme* from booksellers to read and memorize, then relate it in coffee-houses, exactly as if they were *meddahs\**.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, p. 73.

33 Ibid., 74

34 Süleyman Faik Efendi's words in his journal are related by Fuad Köprülü in his *Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, vol. 1, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1986, p. 202.

35 Quoted by Fuad Köprülü, *Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, vol. 1, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1986, p. 202.

The principal conclusion to be drawn from the notes in *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* is that it was read with great delight by the pages of both palaces. The page Ali Ufkî Bey, aka Albertus Bobovius (1610-1675), relates valuable information about the lives of these young men: his account of their education and reading is especially significant for this article.<sup>36</sup> It seems that the pages learned mostly through reading a certain number of books in accordance with his intelligence. While the sultan did not aim to make scientists out of them, they were expected to value the books they were given and to respect the Quran. Pages who were ambitious and eager to learn would be promoted over the others to posts such as *kalfa* (apprentice) or *cüzhan* (a person who recites the Quran). Ali Ufkî Bey also mentions books read by the pages such as *Kirk Vezir*, *Hümayunname*, *Kelile ve Dimne*, *Seyyid Battal* and *Kahramanname*. This valuable information teaches us that the pages read popular books alongside their schoolbooks. These must have afforded them some entertainment and provided them with life lessons. However, the notes in *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* show that reading was not a solitary activity; reading aloud make the book group entertainment. The audience may have joked and made comments as they listened, which made it all the more enjoyable. Many of the notes add that the reader delighted in the book, ample evidence that the book was read for pleasure and implying a pleasant atmosphere. Was there a particular reason why *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* was so popular with the pages?

The hero, Ali Bey, is a cavalryman who goes to Istanbul to collect his three-monthly salary but is then unable to leave the city. He was probably a member of the cavalry, an important group attached to the Ottoman *Kapıkulu Süvarileri* ("Household Slave Cavalry"), also called the *Altı Bölük Halkı/Sipahileri* ("Six Divisions of Cavalry"). Most cavalry

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<sup>36</sup> Ali Ufki Bey, *Albertus Bobovius ya do Santuri Ali Ufki bey'in Anıları: Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, sunan ve notlayanlar Stephanos Yerasimos ve Annie Berthier, çev. Ali Berktaş (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2009), 105-197.

members were Janissaries or pages from the Inner Palace or from external palaces such as Galata. The soldiers were initially obliged to settle near Istanbul, but this rule was forgotten after the seventeenth century and the soldiers spread all over Anatolia. In the beginning, they would go to Istanbul in person to collect their three-monthly salary, but later on they preferred to send someone else in their place to avoid travel costs.<sup>37</sup> It may be a coincidence that Ali Bey was a cavalryman and that his story was so popular among the future cavalry at the palace, but the story was read time and time again by the pages of the Campaigners' dormitory and Galata Palace. Looking at the spelling and punctuation mistakes in the notes, it is not difficult to imagine that many among the audience would one day become soldiers.

The notes written in *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* disclose the book's adventurous life moving between Topkapı and Galata Palace. Another book which was loved just as much was being read not only in the palaces, but all over the city. This book tells the exemplary story of two youngsters, Halil and Süleyman, whom Koca Cafer Pasha encounters while he is governor of Egypt.

### **The adventure of two libertines and the story of one book**

The story takes place during the reign of Murad IV and starts with Koca Cafer Pasha, governor of Egypt, strolling about incognito. Hearing people having a good time in a coffee-house, he enters and meets Halil and Süleyman. Although they are blind and crippled, the two young men are handsome, so he offers them coffee and, after a short conversation, invites them both to the palace. They accept his invitation, and once there, tell him of all the experiences they have suffered. Both from Istanbul, both sons of tradesmen, each fell in with a bad tavern crowd after their fathers died. They soon ran through their fortunes and escaped

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<sup>37</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapukulu Ocakları*, vol. 2, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1984, pp. 137-189; Erhan Afyoncu, "Sipahi," *TDVIA*, 37(2009), pp. 256-258.

to Egypt. As if such misfortune were not enough, each was entrapped by a bad woman and found themselves on the street, scarred and maimed. By coincidence, they met at a place called Halil Han, which they started to use as sleeping quarters. Having heard their stories, Cafer Pasha orders his men to find the women who attacked the two youngsters. It turns out that it was the same woman who deceived them both. Cafer Pasha raids her house and distributes her possessions among her two victims. The story thus ends happily.<sup>38</sup>

This work, known through its copy written in 1144/1731-32, is again a seventeenth-century tale of womanizing, just like the book about Ali from Kastamonu. The only difference is that this tale involves two people and story partly takes place in Egypt. Another similarity is that there are true historical figures in both; just as *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûti*'s hero, Solider Ali is a stand-in for Güzelce Ali Pasha, here the story includes Koca Cafer Pasha, governor of Egypt under Murad IV. However, the real Koca Cafer Pasha governed under Osman II and not Murad IV.<sup>39</sup> Such historical/chronological lapses are not surprising in texts belonging to both oral and written traditions and occur frequently.<sup>40</sup>

The notes written by readers or listeners on nearly every page of the book bear witness to the fact that people living in Istanbul loved the story of Halil and Süleyman and that the story was read and heard countless times throughout the city. There are twenty-two notes of

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38 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Hacı Mahmud Efendi no. 6264. This manuscript is composed of 49 folios and is written in *nesih* script. Only one copy is known. It was first presented by Hasan Kavruk, who summarized it and added it to his genre of realistic Istanbul stories. There is a slight mistake over its inventory number, which was written as 4264 instead of 6264. See Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında*, pp. 100-102.

39 Koca Cafer Pasha began his career as the Sultan's chief butler and food-taster. He was appointed governor of Egypt after Osman II came to the throne and remained in office until August 1619. Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, ed. Nuri Akbayar-Seyit Ali Kahraman, vol. 2, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996, p. 361; Özgen Tok, "XVII. Yüzyılda Mısır Eyaleti," Unpublished doctoral thesis, Kayseri, Erciyes University, 2002, p. 176.

40 Adam Fox, who provides an in-depth study on the relationship between written and oral traditions, argues that history is generally shaped through interpretation and perception. He states that when it comes to historical facts, there is a gap between the information handed down by primary or secondary sources and events which are believed to have taken place in the distant past. It is one of the characteristics of oral tradition to look at the past as through a telescope and to leave out many elements. Here, historical knowledge ignores chronology, meaning that events and dates can be easily mixed up. In these types of narratives, myth takes over when memory reaches its limits. See Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 222-225.

which fifteen include a date. Most of the readings took place between 1747/48 and 1811/12, in many different parts of the city including the Topkapı and Galata Palaces.

According to one of the notes, the work was once read by Muhammed in the Campaigners' dormitory at Galata Palace.<sup>41</sup> However, the Campaigners' dormitory is at Topkapı Palace. The rooms at Galata are known as the big, medium and small rooms. The author most probably made a mistake and confused the two palaces. Another note indicates that the story was read by Dervish Sinan at the Inner Palace of Topkapı,<sup>42</sup> and a third that it was read by Berber Eylence Huseyin Agha in the medium room at Galata Palace.<sup>43</sup> Hüseyin's nickname [*Eylence*: Fun] seems to refer to his talent for reading. However, the readers' notes in *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* as well as in other books prove that many different places hosted readings, the preferred location being homes and villas.

### **Reading venues: Homes**

The readers' notes encountered during this study reveal that group readings were mostly conducted in private homes. This could be a middle-class Ottoman home, a villa or a *yah\**. The notes usually include the name of the reader and the host and can be so detailed that if we could travel back in time, we could easily find the venue's complete address.

For instance, at the end of a journal containing saints' stories, copied in a very bad hand, we learn that the work was read in the year 1136/1723-24 at Hafiz Mehmed Agha's house, on Tomruk Street in Istanbul's Yavaşça Şahin neighborhood. Another note in the same

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41 *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 10a.

42 Ibid., f. 33a.

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book states that it was read three years later, in 1139/1726-27 at the home of Abdulrahimi Efendi, the *kadi*\* of Gölhisar-ı Hamid<sup>44</sup> in Üsküdar's Gonca neighborhood.<sup>45</sup>

The notes in *Firuzşah Hikayesi* are also very rich in information. Listing the notes published by Mustafa Nihat Özön chronologically, the book was first read on 7 July 1793 at the villa of Silahşör-ü Hazret-i Şehriyari [Sultan's musketeer] Ahmed Agha. Four years later, on 11 February 1797, it was read in the home of Bende Ibrahim, a registrar's assistant at the Hocapaşa accounting office – and also a *silahşör-ü sadr-ı âli* [grand vizier's musketeer]. This note expresses delight but complains that the volume is coming apart. The work was next read on 22 November 1813 by es-Seyyid Yahya Aghazade es-Seyyid Hakem. Another reading in February-March 1815 was conducted by the chamberlain of boatmen, Hafiz Efendi, and was much enjoyed by the audience. It was read again in the home of Osman Efendi, on Yahnikapan Street, near Sultan Bayezid Mosque.<sup>46</sup>

The copy of *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr* was written on 27 December 1730. This love story was translated into Turkish verse by Hoca Mesud in the mid-fourteenth century. Cem Dilçin, who conducted a study on works in verse, confirms that the work in verse closely follows the prose version.<sup>47</sup> Two notes at the beginning and end of the manuscript state that it was read at Ömer Efendi's manor by Seyyid Hüseyin Efendi, the son of Ömer Efendi, *kadî* of the city of Mecca. The latter note includes the date 20 Zilka 1221 (29 January 1807).<sup>48</sup>

*Hikâyât-ı Mihr ile Vefâ* was also widely read throughout Istanbul in the same period. It tells of the love between Mihr, daughter of the Sultan of Oman, and Vefâ, son of the Greek

<sup>44</sup> A township (*kaza*) linked to the district (*sanjak*) of Hamid in the province of Anatolia. See Tahir Sezen, *Osmâni Yer Adları*, Ankara, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivi Yayımları, 2006, p. 2006.

<sup>45</sup> *Mecmua*, Oxford Bodleian Library, yearbook 77, f. 112a. For catalog information, see Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian library*, part II, Oxford, Oxford University Press, no date, p. 1173.

<sup>46</sup> Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> Cem Dilçin, *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr, İnceleme-Metin-Sözlük*, Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayıncılık, 199, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr*, İstanbul University Library, T. 1170, f. 1 and the inside of the back cover. Dilçin, *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr*, p. 68. Hasan Kavruk also mentions this note: Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında*, footnote 29.

king. The manuscript is undated. The numerous notes written at the beginning and the end testify to how well-loved the book was. A note dated 4 April 1804 praises the story for how excellently it describes the pain suffered by the lovers. The book was read at Kahveci Hasan Aghas's home on 22 February 1804. The house is described as lying across from the manor of Kîsedâr Efendi, near number 85 at Şehzadebaşı: it seems that Kîsedâr Efendi's manor was better known than Hasan Agha's house. The book was then read in 1803-1804 by Mehmed Agha, followed by Aşık Mehmed Bey in 1806-1807.<sup>49</sup>

Another book containing an interesting note was written in the early seventeenth century for Mehmed II by Dervish Hasan, "the storyteller" (*Medhî*). *Kıssa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ ve Eb'u'l-Hâris* recounts legends about the life of the famous physician İbni Sina (980-1037). A note at the end of the manuscript announces that the book was read by Duhânî (or Duhâncı) Rüstem-i Zal at Selim Agha's manor.<sup>50</sup> The nickname Duhânî may be because he was a tobacco dealer or consumer: the fact that this reader has the same name as Rüstem-i Zal, hero of the *Şehname*, makes us curious to know more about him. *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* was also read in different homes around Istanbul, for instance, at provincial representative [vilayet ayani] Hüseyin Efendi's home, by Hafiz Molla Mehmed,<sup>51</sup> and at a *yali* near Incirlikoy in 1747/48.<sup>52</sup>

### Reading venues: public spaces

At home, books were doubtless read to a small group of intimates, while public spaces provided an opportunity for larger, more heterogeneous groups. The main places for such gatherings were coffee-houses. One of the notes published by Özön announces that *Firuzşah*

49 This book is kept at the John Rylands University Library in Manchester (No. 156). The notes were studied from the detailed library catalog prepared by Jon Schmidt. See Jon Schmidt, *A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts in the John Rylands University library at Manchester*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011, pp. 260-261.

50 *Kıssa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ ve Eb'u'l-Hâris*, İstanbul University Library, T. 690, f. 77a.

51 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 49a.

52 Ibid., f. 34a.

*Hikayesi* was read by Hüseyin Efendi at el-Hac Berber Süleyman Agha's coffee-house near Çömlekçiler at Akçeşme, Eyüp, on 27 July 1817.<sup>53</sup> Another book read at a coffeehouse is *Kitab-ı Ferhad ile Şirin*. A copy of the book, found in St Petersburg, includes a note establishing that the book was read in 1171/1757-58 near Kasımpaşa, at a coffee-house belonging to the son of Cebeci Ali Teben (?).<sup>54</sup> A note in *Hikâyât-ı Mihr ile Vefâ* declares that it was read in Alemdar Riyazi's establishment, near Yeni Mosque on 30 November 1805 and that the audience greatly enjoyed the reading.<sup>55</sup>

A 1758 manuscript of Hacı Bektaş Veli's *Menakibnâme* includes an interesting note which demonstrates that readings also took place in dervish lodges. At the end of the book, the copyist prays for the readers, the audience, and the book's owner. A note dating from 1883-84 states that the work was read in Bursa's neighborhood of Kaygan, at Asitane-i Seyyid Molla by Ömer, and adds that the audience listened to and understood the prophecies of the holy men and recited prayers in their honor.<sup>56</sup> Asithane must have been a Bektashi dervish lodge. Lodge libraries were among the leading institutions giving city residents access to many different types of books, including *menakibnâme* (sacred biographies) authored and copied directly by the dervishes.<sup>57</sup>

Istanbul's markets, shops and open spaces also served as reading venues. The notes in *Hikâyât-ı Mihr ile Vefâ* again give interesting information. For instance, the book was read on 1 April 1807 at Leblebiciler [roasted chickpea] market by Cevizci [walnut seller] Ali, the brother of a shopkeeper from Thessaloniki named Şakir Ağaçzade Ömer Agha, giving his

53 Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, p. 73.

54 See V. D. Smirnow's detailed presentations in the catalog on Turkish manuscripts published by the Russian Oriental Languages Institute. Not only did Smirnow present the manuscripts, he also noted in Ottoman: "They read the book at the coffee-house of the son of Cebeci Ali Teben (?), in the neighborhood of Kasımpaşa. 1171." Vasili Dmitrievich Smirnow, *Manuscrits Turcs de l'Institut des Langues Orientales*, Saint Petersburg, Imprimerie de l'Académie Imperiale des Sciences, 1897, pp. 89-90.

55 Schmidt, *A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts*, p. 260.

56 *Menakib-ı Haci Bektaş*, London, British Library, Or. 11066, f. 292a.

57 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam, Ortaçağdan Yirminci Yüzyıla*, trans. Elif Kılıç, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2011, 7th ed., pp. 224-234.

audience indescribable delight. The writer of the note even signs his name, Katip (clerk) İzzet. Ali the walnut seller doubtless read the book in the market which housed his shop. This note proves that readings could be conducted just about anywhere. Another note indicates that the book was read on 1 April 1807, at Shoe Maker Sa'd Agha's shop on 10, Terlikçiler [Slipper maker's] Street. The writer, Sa'd Agha himself, adds that the reading was much enjoyed.<sup>58</sup>

Some notes mention only the name of the neighborhood without adding the name of the exact location. For example, one of the undated notes in *Firuzşah Hikayesi* says that the book was read at Kabataş by Yağlıkçı [handkerchief maker] Selim Agha.<sup>59</sup> By coincidence, a reader with the same name also made a note in *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* in 1793/94, declaring that the book was read by Yağlıkçı Selim Agha at Hayreddin Pasha, Beşiktaş.<sup>60</sup> As both men shared the same name and both works were read near to each other, they are likely the one and the same person. *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* has another note, dated 1801/2, which states that the book was read by Selim Agha at Aksaray.<sup>61</sup> Of two undated notes, one mentions Kumpkapı<sup>62</sup> and the other, “across from Çifte Saray”<sup>63</sup> as reading venues. Such notes which do not specify a precise location, but only the neighborhood or building, suggest that the reading was conducted out in the open on a street corner or in a square.

Other books traveled further than Istanbul, moving across the whole Empire. A note in *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* states that the book was read, at Arslan Dede's coffee-house to an audience of four hadjis\* in Aleppo.<sup>64</sup> This note is significant in that it discloses how varied the readers and audience for a book could be. If the book was read to a

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58 Schmidt, *A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts*, p. 260.

59 Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, p. 73.

60 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 5a.

61 Ibid., f. 13a.

62 Ibid., f. 2b.

63 Ibid., f. 48b.

64 Ibid., f. 27a. Unfortunately, the listeners' names are illegible.

group of hadji in a coffee-house in Aleppo, it likely belonged to a member of the group going to Hajj, and that the reading was held to entertain the hadjis while staying overnight at Aleppo.

All of these examples establish that readings were conducted sometimes in a home, in a manor, sometimes in a coffee-house or in a shop or even on a street corner. How did listeners react to readings?

### Audience reactions

One of the books known to have been read aloud contains invaluable and entertaining information both about the identity of the people in the audience, the atmosphere of the reading – and a fight that broke out. The *Süleymaniye* was a biography of the Prophet Süleyman embellished with numerous folk tales. The manuscript was copied in 1227/1812-13. The anonymous writer declares at the end of the text that the twenty-eighth volume ends here and that he will start the twenty-ninth volume and continue until half of the sixty-ninth. Before finishing the work he expresses his fear and makes a request: “I call upon my friends who will read this book. Please be kind and do not ruin my book by writing in the margins or otherwise harming it. I entreat my friends to hear my request. Indeed, it is difficult to find *Süleymâname* and even if a copy is found, it will not provide as much delight. You are forewarned. I salute you.”<sup>65</sup>

The copyist's fears were soon fulfilled. The manuscript was read as soon as it was written and filled with highly critical readers' notes. The first, written in red ink, states that the work was read on the seventeenth day of the month of Receb in the year 1227 (27 July 1812), and that a good time was had by all.<sup>66</sup> Then the writer complains that throughout the seventy-

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65 *Süleymânnâme*, London British Library, Or. 14944, f. 91a

66 Ibid., f. 91a.

two volumes of *Şehnâme*, Rüstem is never defeated, and yet here he is defeated by other heroes, which is unacceptable.<sup>67</sup>

The next note heavily criticizes the writer of the previous note and makes an observation about the effect the reading had on the audience. It indicates that the reading took place on the eighth night of the month of Şaban in the year 1227 (17 August 1802), twenty days after the first reading, by Osman Agha, near Sultan Ahmed mosque and that everyone enjoyed themselves. The writer then criticizes the note in red ink: “what on earth is that previous note about; no one in their right mind would utter such a thing!”. The note reports that all twenty-eight parts of the book were read that night, and that twelve listeners were on the side of the hero Ecabez, eight on Kahir's and four on Rüstem's: a fight broke out, the tailor's son, Ahmed started trying to tear the book apart, but then refrained from doing so out of shame before Münir Molla.<sup>68</sup>

It is fortunate that Ahmed started the fight as this is how we know how many people were present, who they were, and what kind of an atmosphere there was during the reading. There were at least twenty-four people at the reading that night, meaning such readings were performed in front of quite a crowd. The fight starter Ahmed was described as “the tailor's son,” suggesting that he was young and did not have a profession of his own. Maybe it was the passion of youth that led him to start the fight. Münir Molla must have been a respected elder, since his presence is what made Ahmed hold back from tearing the book apart. This note shows that people from all ages and ranks participated in these readings and that the atmosphere could become as tense as a modern football match. Members of the audience supported heroes from the story as if they were team members. It was surely as much Osman Agha's talent for reading as the story itself which created such excitement. The copyist was

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67 Ibid., f. 91a.

68 Ibid., f. 91a.

also boastfully aware of the qualities of his book, warning readers and listeners from the outset that they would not find a *Süleymânnâme* as entertaining as this one, and that they should take care not to harm it with their notes. In this case, were works which were read aloud written with this aim in mind? Or were all texts appropriate for all audiences?

### **Books and urban storytellers**

It would be unrealistic to attempt to answer this question based on a few manuscripts, but it is possible to make a few observations through use of studies by literary historians. *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî*, read numerous times at the Campaigner's dormitory and Galata Palace, was first presented by Hasan Kavruk, who places this work in his category of realistic Istanbul stories<sup>69</sup> along with *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*.<sup>70</sup> Pertev Naili Boratav identified the genre “realist folk stories,” or folk narratives which cannot be considered as high literature, but which have a close relationship with folk stories in form and style. According to Boratov, the genre is made up of nineteenth-century urban storytellers' tales, put into writing for the first time. They draw on the same subjects, such as prodigality and womanizing, and are set in the heart of the empire, Istanbul.<sup>71</sup> The literary historian Şükrü Elçin claims that these stories were spread by urban storytellers and that their audiences encompassed a wide variety of people, from the palace to city residents. He justifies this claim by pointing to a reader's note in a manuscript of *Hançerli Hanım Hikayesi*. which states that the book was read by the son of a vizier agha in 1756/57. However, no distinction is made between *storyteller* and *reader*.<sup>72</sup>

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69 Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında*, p. 77.

70 Ibid., p. 100.

71 Pertev Naili Boratav, *Halk Hikayeleri ve Halk Hikayeciliği*, İstanbul, Adam Yayınları, 1988, 2nd ed., pp. 99-100.

72 Şükrü Elçin, *Halk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları*, Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı Milli Folklor Araştırma Dairesi Yayınları, 1977, pp. 128-129.

*Süheyli Nev-Bahâr*, another book that was read in public, is evaluated similarly. Looking at the inscription at the end of the aforementioned copy in prose which states that this is the end of the first volume, and studying the contents of the text, Cem Dilçin argues that this manuscript consists of three volumes and adds that Kilisli Rifat, who first wrote of this work, arrived at the same conclusion. In his work *Fehrengâme-i Sadî Tercemesi*, Kilisli Rifat states that *Süheyli Nev-Bahâr* was probably written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century in “pleasant Turkish” and that it may have been copied in small volumes so the storyteller could read a small section every night. Dilçin agrees with Kilisli Rifat's view and calculates that as the version in prose is equivalent to one-third of the version in verse, there should be two more volumes, each of which could be read in one night. Dilçin also studied the work from a textual perspective and found that it contains certain formulas which storytellers always added to the beginning, middle and end of their stories as part of the structural characteristics of folk stories in prose. Furthermore, he concluded that the work had the style of a storyteller's tale.<sup>73</sup>

Kilisli Rifat's assertion that these types of books were divided into sections to be read aloud each evening, must have been valid for most of the manuscripts discussed here. *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî* is composed of a total of fifty-four folios, *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* has forty-nine, *Ferhâd ile Şîrîn* has sixty-two, *Hikâyât-ı Mîhr ile Vefâ* has sixty-six, while *Kissa-i Ebû 'Alî Sînâ* is composed of seventy-seven folios in a single volume. These were probably read aloud over the course of one performance. *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî* has a reader's note which confirms that the book was read in one sitting. Another note in the same book testifies that the reading was conducted by two people, which means that in some situations, the readers took turns. Longer texts such as *Süheyli*

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<sup>73</sup> Dilçin, *Süheyli Nev-Bahâr*, pp. 62-68; Kilisli Rifat, *Fehrengâme-i Sadî Tercemesi yahud (Muhtasar-ı Bûstân) Tercemesi*, İstanbul, Matbaa-i Amire, 1340-1342, p. 13.

*Nev-Bahâr* were probably divided among several volumes for easier reading, as argued by Kilisli Rifat. Certainly, the forty-nine folios in the first volume of *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr* were easily readable in one sitting. The copyist of *Firuzşah Hikayesi* announced that this was the forty-fifth volume and, according to Mustafa Nihat Özön, this meant that there were more folios to this work. However, some multiple-volume books were simply too long to read in one sitting, such as *Süleymânnâme*. Just like *Firuzşah Hikayesi* and *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr*, it is a series with many volumes, but it is too long to be read in one go; the volume in question contains ninety-one folios. Only a section of the book was read each time, as testified by the aforementioned second reader's note, which records that a total of twenty-eight folios were read that evening. Another work of interest is *Hâsimnâme*, the story of the Prophet Hamza's son, Haşim. It was translated from Farsi into Turkish by Hacı Mehmed Tokatî for Sultan Bayezid's son Korkud (d. 1512-13). The introduction attests that these types of works were read or told in sections and that they could be written by the teller.<sup>74</sup>

It appears that Hacı Mehmed Tokatî read his translation piecemeal to the sultan, and that he was afraid the work would be acquired by the ignorant, which led him to hide the manuscript and refuse to show it to anyone. However, as he grew older, he wished for his friends to have a copy so that they could commemorate his name at readings and recite a prayer for his soul.<sup>75</sup> This information does not only indicate that the authors of the texts were also those who read them aloud; it also provides important clues as to how the stories were disseminated. While readers or storytellers performed in public, they hid their stories away from their rivals, but at the same time they could not resist leaving behind a memento to

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<sup>74</sup> The single known copy of the manuscript is at the John Rylands Library. It is undated. Jan Schmidt judged the language to be of a “simple and archaic” style. The manuscript's binding is of Italian make, probably from the end of the seventeenth century. Schmidt, *A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts*, pp. 52-53. A transliteration and facsimile of the text has been published: Aylin Koç (ed.), *Hâsim-nâme*, Giriş, Metin, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım, Konya, Palet Yayınları, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Koç, *Hâsim-nâme*, pp. 1-2.

ensure their work would be known once they retired. In a way, the copyright of these stories belonged to the person who compiled or translated them.

The opinions related above and the clues left in the texts could allow us to conclude that some of these were in fact storytellers' stories in written form. *Kissa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ*, read by Duhânî Rüstem-i Zal at Selim Agha's manor, was certainly written by a storyteller. Ahmet Ateş, who first presented the work in an article published in *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, explains that the manuscript was written by Dervîş Hasan Medhî in “common folk style” with “all sorts of spelling mistakes which an ignorant person could make.” Ateş admits that nothing is known about Dervîş Hasan Medhî apart from some vague information he himself gives in his text, but it can be inferred that he was a storyteller and dervish. He wrote his work for Murad III (reigned 1574-1595), who did not enjoy it. He then presented it to Mehmed III (reigned 1595-1603) instead. Ateş remarks that the copy at the library of Istanbul University is the only one in existence and that it was probably written in the seventeenth century.<sup>76</sup> Dervîş Hasan Medhî, who wrote *Kissa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ*, was probably the same Meddah [storyteller] Medhî who translated Firdevi's *Şehnâme* into Turkish prose for Sultan Osman II.<sup>77</sup> Duhânî Rüstem-i Zal, who read this book at Selim Agha's manor, had the same name as Rüstem, the son of Zal, the famous hero of the *Şehnâme* beloved by storytellers. He was likely also a storyteller, unless it is just an interesting coincidence.<sup>78</sup>

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76 Ahmet Ateş, "Türk Halk Hikayelerinde İbn Sînâ," *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Türkiyat Enstitüsü, XII (1955), pp. 265-275.

77 For detailed information on Medhî's life, see Tülün Değirmenci, *Resmedilen Siyaset: II. Osman Devri (1618-1622) Resimli Elyazmalarında Değişen İktidar Sembollerî*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Ankara, Hacettepe University, 2007, pp. 105-110. For a more in-depth discussion, see ibid. *İktidar Oyunları ve Resimli Kitaplar: II. Osman Devri Resimli Elyazmalarında Değişen İktidar Simgeleri*, İstanbul, Kitap Yayınevi, 2011.

78 Storytellers similarly used another version of the story of Ebu Ali Sina, written in the eighteenth century. Cahit Özelli wrote an article about this work of which he owns a copy. He explains that the legends surrounding Ibni Sina were created over the years and compiled and written by different people at different times. The text in his collection is included in a volume of poetry and was left unfinished. However, it contains short notes as if to remind the storyteller of the rest of the story. See Cahit Özelli, "Halk Hikayelerinde İbni Sina," *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten*, 286, 1968, pp. 213-219.

Texts written by or for storytellers must have been preferred for public performance for their subjects and their fluid style, tailored to be read aloud. Özdemir Nutku's book about storytellers states that they sought inspiration from their own lives or adapted existing stories from literary collections to suit their audience. He states that storytellers' stories were generally handed down through the generations via oral tradition and that it is rare to encounter them in written form. A few of these rare texts are to be found in an eighteenth-century *mecmua* (journal), forming the basis for Nutku's analysis of the characteristics of storytellers' styles: while these stories have much in common with folk stories, they also have their own, unique plot structure.<sup>79</sup> This difference is explained in the preface of another work by Meddah Medhî, the writer of *Kıssa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ*.

The work is *Kıssa-i Nevbâve*, which Medhî wrote for Sultan Murad III at the beginning of his career. In his introduction, he says that Murad III admired all four of the books which he wrote upon being appointed storyteller and asked him to write a book based on the ones told by Anatolian storytellers, never before told in Turkish.<sup>80</sup> It would appear that Murad III was bored of hearing the same stories and wanted to hear new ones.<sup>81</sup> Medhî found a book he knew the Sultan would enjoy: *Tarih-i Yemini*, translated from Arabic to Farsi, full of stories about Gazneli Sultan Mahmud (reigned 998-1030).<sup>82</sup> He then realized that the book contained many difficulties and asked a friend for help. His friend agreed to translate the

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79 Özdemir Nutlu, *Meddahlık ve Meddah Hikayeleri*, İstanbul, İş Bankası Yayımları, 1976, pp. 115-122, 123, 179.

80 Dervîş Hasan Medhi, *Kıssa-i Nevbâve*, London British Library, Or. 1134, ff. 4a-6a. For catalog information, see Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Osnabück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1978, pp. 42-43.

81 A similar situation occurred in Murad III's story with Cinâni. Sultan Murad III grew tired of listening to storyteller Eğlence's stories. He requested a poet who could create new stories. The Sultan's servants gave the job to Cinânî from Bursa. Eğlence, hearing of this, made a deal with the gilder employed to decorate Cinânî's book. The gilder would teach him the new stories, and he would relate these to the Sultan, one by one, before Cinânî ever got a chance to do so. Fuat Köprülü, "Türkler'de Halk Hikayeciliğine Ait Bazi Maddeler: Meddahlar," *Edebiyat Araştırmaları*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1966, pp. 384-385.

82 The work is the Farsi translation completed in 1205/6 by Ebû'l-şeref Nâsih of the Arabic work called *Kitâb el-Yemînî* on the history of Amîr Sebüktigin, his son Sultan Mahmud, and shahs of the period, written for Gazneli Sultan Mahmud's vizier, Maymedî by Utbî (961-1040) in the year 1021.

book, but added, “I know nothing about storytelling techniques; but if you perform *kissa-perdâzlık* (art of storytelling), then I will translate, and we will both leave our names to posterity”. Medhî accepted this proposal: his friend translated, and he performed the story.<sup>83</sup>

What was meant here by *kissa-perdâzlık* was doubtless writing in a style to attract and retain the listener's attention. Similarly, Aşık Çelebi observes in his *Tezkire* that İstanbullu Âhûr Emirizâde Hâsimî wrote of the adventures of Berk-i Pulad-Dil, the son of the Prophet Hamza, “in storytellers' language.”<sup>84</sup>

The atmosphere which developed during a reading was also reminiscent of storytellers' performances. For instance, the events that unfolded during the reading of *Süleymânnâme* echo another fight that took place in Bursa. This entertaining story is told in İsmail Belîg's *Güldeste-i Riyâz-i İrfan*. In the year 1616, a storyteller was relating the tale of Bedî' and Kâsim in a coffee-house where the poet Haylî Ahmed Çelebi was also present. One section of the audience supported Bedî, and another Kâsim, and supporters would cry out each time their hero's name was mentioned. At one point, Ahmed Çelebi, supporting Kâsim, became very emotional and a writer named Saçakçızâde, supporting Bedî, made fun of Ahmed Çelebi's eye problems by asking with which eye he had seen the event, provoking Ahmed Çelebi to stab Saçakçızâde to death.<sup>85</sup> Fortunately, the fight that took place during the reading of *Süleymânnâme* ended only with an attempt to tear the book apart, but the resemblance between the reactions exhibited by an audience listening to a book reading and those listening to a storyteller shows the connection between the two traditions.

Readings could also induce other reactions. Sometimes, the reader or listener would react to different aspects of the text, such as its length. There is a note in *Misir Valisi Koca*

83 Medhi, *Kissa-i Nevbâve*, ff. 4a-6a.

84 Mentioned by Köprülü, “Türkler'de Halk Hikayeciliğine,” p. 370. Aşık Çelebi, *Mesâ'irü's-Su'arâ (İnceleme-Metin)*, vol. 1, ed. Filiz Kılıç, İstanbul, İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2010, p. 532.

85 Köprülü, "Türkler'de Halk Hikayeciliğine," pp. 382-383. İsmail Belîg Efendi, *Târîh-i Burûsa, Güldeste-i Riyâz-i İrfan ve Vefayât-i Danişverân-i Nâdiredân*, published by Eşref bin Ali Bey, Bursa, 1302, pp. 463-467.

*Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, on the page where Koca Cafer Pasha, strolling through the city incognito, enters the coffee-house and meets Halil and Süleyman. In the coffee shop he is approached by a young coffee-maker with a coffee cup in his hand. Cafer Pasha takes the cup and, seeing the boy's face, is bewitched by his beauty. This boy is of a grace unequaled throughout history. His clothing makes him look like a peacock. With his bejeweled dagger at his belt and his peshtamal\* at his waist, he steals Cafer Pasha's heart.<sup>86</sup> It would appear that this rather long deviation from the main story and the extravagant description of the boy annoyed a reader, who noted “why ramble on for so long?” in the margin. Similar reactions existed in the public storytelling tradition in Europe. Roger Chartier has examined primary sources telling of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western European reading sessions. One of the classics of Spanish literature, Fernando de Rojas' (1465-1541) *La Celestina*, was first published in 1499 in Burgos. The editor of the 1500 Toledo edition added a six-stanza poem. He included some suggestions to the fourth stanza, indicating that when reading aloud, the reader must be careful about his tone of voice and be sure to impersonate the characters, because that was the only way the audience would enjoy the story. Another edition written after 1507 remarks that every listener will react in his own way, that some will find the work too short, and others too long, while still others will have no opinion.<sup>87</sup>

## **Eighteenth-century urban entertainment**

The readers' notes examined so far demonstrate that a group of popular works, including storytellers' texts written specifically to be performed,<sup>88</sup> were also read aloud by ordinary

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86 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 3a

87 Roger Chartier, “Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe,” *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman, Newark: University of Delaware Press, London: Associated University Presses, 1989, pp. 103-104.

88 Although many researchers claim that storytellers carried books with them, we have no clear information about how they used these books. Did they read their stories from these books, or did they recite the story from memory and use the books like a repository? Köprülü's detailed article, the most authoritative resource on the matter, asserts that while the words *meddah* and *kissas* were used interchangeably from the fifteenth century

citizens who were not professional storytellers. These types of texts were probably suitable for being read aloud due to their simple language and fluid style. Since readers took the time to note how delighted they were by the reading, these sessions must have been conducted mostly for entertainment. Some of the jokes and hints in the notes reveal the enjoyment of the participants. The refreshments and food served at the events must also have added to the pleasant atmosphere: the manuscript of *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* contains notes such as “tobacco was smoked here.”<sup>89</sup>

Different types of books were doubtless chosen for different reasons; while parables of a religious nature or sacred biographies were educational, adventure stories set in Istanbul were entertaining morality tales. *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, for instance, was read by someone who noted that he had read two other books such as this one and thus understood what pain a man could suffer in this world.<sup>90</sup>

Looking back on the readers' notes discussed so far, five were written in manuscripts read during the eighteenth century, four during the nineteenth, one overlapping the two, and the last from the second quarter of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Further research will certainly uncover more notes. If most notes date from the eighteenth century, it is probably because this is when the middle-class citizens of Istanbul were able to indulge in this form of entertainment as books became more easily accessible.

Nelly Hanna observes that book production increased after the seventeenth century in major cities such as Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo and Istanbul, and that many stories which had until then been conveyed only orally were committed to paper in plain language. Hanna

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onward for storytellers, only the word *meddah* was used after the seventeenth century. Köprülü declares that storytellers (*meddah*) read or recited their stories and thus affirms that both methods were in use; however, he does not delve any deeper into the subject. See Köprülü, “Türkler'de Halk Hikayeciliğine,” pp. 370-372. Selim Nüzhet Gerçek claims that a *kissahan* would read from the text, while a *meddah* would recite from memory. See Selim Nüzhet Gerçek, *Türk Teması: Meddah, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, İstanbul, Kanaat Kitabevi, 1942, p. 8.

89 Ibid., ff. 9b, 25b.

90 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 16b.

argues that this increase was due to many factors, such as the improvement in middle-class purchasing power, the rising rate of literacy and the fall in the price of paper imported from Europe.<sup>91</sup> Hanna points to the library catalogs as evidence for the increase in books during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and underlines that most books we know are in fact eighteenth-century copies. It is safe to suppose that this relative abundance in book production led to the establishment of more libraries in many cities, including Istanbul.<sup>92</sup>

Ismail Erünsal's comprehensive study of Osmanlı waqf libraries corroborates this thesis. The end of the seventeenth century witnessed the creation of libraries linked to madrasahs\* and shrines open to the ulema and students, in mosques and dervish lodges open to all, and independent libraries. The first example of the latter is the Köprülü Library built in 1661. Although Erünsal argues that this library was freestanding only because of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's death before his *külliye*\* project was complete, he observes that from the beginning of the seventeenth century on, there was a clear increase in the number of libraries built outside major cities, reaching even higher rates during the eighteenth century. While the reason for this trend, he argues, was better literacy rates, it was mostly geared to the needs of madrasah students, rather than those of the population at large. Not only were more libraries built, but their collections were also expanded thanks to bequests.<sup>93</sup>

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91 Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, pp. 81 -89. This situation was also valid for Istanbul. In the mid-seventeenth century, the cheapest paper mostly came from Italy. After the eighteenth century, French paper started to be imported as well. Osman Ersoy, *XVIII. ve XIX. Yüzyillarda Türkiye'de Kağıt*, Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1963, pp. 19-26.

92 Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, pp. 81 -89. Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual's article studying estate inventories from Damascus between the years 1686-1717 gives a good idea about the number and type of books owned by the urban middle class in Damascus: Colette Establet, Jean-Paul Pascual, "Les livres des gens à Damas vers 1700," *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, Série Historie, n° 87-88, ed. Sylvie Denoix, Aix-en-Provence, 1999, pp. 143-175.

93 İsmail E. Erünsal, *Türk Kütiphaneleri Tarihi: II; Kuruluştan Tanzimat'a Kadar Osmanlı Vakıf Kütiphaneleri*: Ankara, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayıncı, 1988, pp. 54-56. Basing himself on Evliya Çelebi's writings, Frédéric Hitzel also emphasizes the vibrant book trade in seventeenth-century Istanbul: Frederic Hitzel, "Manuscrits, livres et cultura livresque à Istanbul," *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, Série Historie, n° 87-88, ed. Sylvie Denoix, Aix-en-Provence, Cédex, 1999, pp. 19-38.

Although it can reasonably be supposed that the Istanbul stories, which are set in the seventeenth century and contain the richest examples of readers' notes, were read in public from the seventeenth century onward, the notes indicate it was not until the next century that the tradition became widespread. The practice's rise in popularity must have been sparked by Istanbul's cultural structure, since most of the readings took place during what was known as the Tulip Era. According to Shirine Hamedeh, who has described eighteenth-century Istanbul as "an eternal source of sensual pleasures," one of the city's most distinctive characteristics was that it was a place where the desires of the elite classes and those of ordinary people continuously overlapped. Hamedeh writes that the urban middle class became more visible in public spaces over the course of the century, contributing to many new facets of urban culture. Various cultural styles, spaces and practices which had once been the preserve of the elite were now taken up more widely, and conversely practices and traditions which had hitherto been enjoyed by the urban classes spread to the palace elite.<sup>94</sup> Looking at the types of books which were read and the identities of the participants, readings were also an intersection where the cultural practices of the elite and the people overlapped.

The titles and professions mentioned in the notes reveal that while participants mostly hailed from the upper-middle and middle classes, there was no homogeneous structure; the same book could be enjoyed by a coffee-house owner or a regional administrator. The readings drew people from all social strata, from bureaucrats to tradesmen. The notes show that readings were organized and patronized both by people who were close to the palace or elite culture, and urbanites belonging to a social class familiar with the products of written culture, between the palace elite and the illiterate majority. Cem Dilçin describes the notes in *Süheyli Nevbahâr* as especially interesting because they show that the book was read not

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<sup>94</sup> Shirine Hamadeh, *Şehr-i Sefa, 18. Yüzyılda İstanbul*, trans. İlknur Güzel, İstanbul, İletişim Yayıncılığı, 2010, pp. 13-29.

only by the people, but also by high-level state officials.<sup>95</sup> Reading audiences were also varied in terms of age. Young or old, everyone listened to the stories with the same pleasure: Ahmed the tailor's young son and the elderly Molla Münir both attended a reading of *Sileymânnâme*. In other instances, participants were similar in age and social status, such as during a reading of *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* that took place in 1807. The reader's note states that the reading performed by Derviş took place near Balat, in the Molla Aşkî neighborhood, at Sadık Ağazâde İbiş Ağabeg's manor. It provides a list of participants: Gûrci-zâde Şeyh Hasan Efendi from the Gülşeni sect, the boatmen's chamberlain (?) Seyyid Es'ad Agha and es-Seyyid Nûrî Efendi.<sup>96</sup>

The readers' notes discussed here bear no trace of the presence of women, either as readers or as participants. There is mention of the existence of women's reading sessions in Ottoman society.<sup>97</sup> Insults slipped into the notes reflect the patriarchal atmosphere at these readings and insinuate that a woman would not find it easy to attend such a gathering.<sup>98</sup> Mustafa Nihat Özön also points to vulgar expressions in the stories and affirms that no women or children could have been present during the readings.<sup>99</sup>

To summarize, these readings were attended by male members of the urban upper-middle and middle classes, and came about as a result of specific developments and changes that took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As books became more readily available to urbanites and the city provided new opportunities, this type of urban entertainment flourished. Furthermore, such events did not take place only in Istanbul.

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95 Dilçin, *Süheyl ü Nev-Bahâr*, p. 68.

96 *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, inner side of front cover.

97 While Suraiya Faroqhi asserts that women also participated in such readings, she does not specify her sources. See Suraiya Faroqhi, *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam*, p. 222.

98 For instance, a marginal note in *Mısır Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* reads: "fuck the mother of he who reads this book" and right underneath: "fuck the mother of whoever reads this book and doesn't curse the writer of the note above," f. 18b.

99 Özön, *Türkçede Roman*, p. 84.

Around the same period, in the mid-eighteenth century, a barber in Damascus was also reading his self-authored work to his clients.<sup>100</sup>

### **Copying manuscripts: copyists and authors**

The only way to produce a manuscript at this time was to copy it. Neumann underlines the difficulty of differentiating between the copyist and the author in Ottoman manuscript culture and points out that neither copyists, nor calligraphers had a guild of their own. According to Neumann, this situation allowed book copying to be free of monopoly and to remain accessible.<sup>101</sup>

Nelly Hanna's work on Cairo is very interesting in this regard. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cairo, many people moonlighted as copyists despite the existence of a professional body. These people would work on speed-copying and create several copies of the same work. For instance, a tailor named Şeyh Mustafa (d. 1788) copied books in his spare time. Hanna states that alongside high-quality works, a large number of lesser-quality works were produced for commercial use, as indicated by the manuscripts surviving in library collections.<sup>102</sup> The situation was doubtless similar in Istanbul.

Certainly, the low-quality calligraphy of some of the manuscripts studied for this article suggests that they were the work of “amateur” copyists who would either borrow the manuscripts they were interested in, perhaps from a library, or be given them by their clients to copy. İsmail Erünsal explains that people would use Ottoman waqf\* libraries to read or copy books. He states that there is insufficient information about copying, despite the fact that provisions regarding this activity existed in all waqf libraries. Copyists were asked not to split

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100 Dana Sajdi claims that the work was written to be read aloud. See Dana Sajdi, “A Room of His Own: the History of the Barber of Damascus (fl. 1762).” *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies, Crossing Boundaries: New Perspectives on the Middle East* 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 19-35.

101 Neumann, “Üç Tarz-ı Mütalaa”, p. 60.

102 Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, pp. 89-90.

the manuscript into folios, spill ink over the pages or bend them.<sup>103</sup> Erünsal also observes that library rules for lending out books became stricter after the eighteenth century and that nearly all libraries forbade lending.<sup>104</sup> Under the circumstances, the majority of the popular books studied here were probably provided by book trade workers such as bookbinders or booksellers, in return for money. They could also be lent out by acquaintances: the inscriptions studied hint at the latter possibility.

Those who copied popular books – or, as Hanna expresses it, commercial productions – were not always very careful in their work. *Kıssa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ* carries an cover inscription indicating that it was written by a Galata clerk, es-Seyyid Mehmed Sadik Efendi, in handwriting which Ahmet Ateş described as “common folk style.”<sup>105</sup> Hasan Kavruk, who studied the language and style of *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî*, does not mention the copyist's signature on the book cover, but states that it was written in extremely simple Turkish by an “amateur copyist” and that there are many spelling and syntax mistakes.<sup>106</sup> A reader who added a note in the margin of the book (f. 53b) was of the same opinion, criticizing the calligrapher: “there is no respect whatsoever for punctuation or spelling.” Two possibilities come to mind. The first is that the copyists worked according to who their client was, as Hanna suggests: they might provide high-quality work for some, and lower-quality work for others. The latter type of book fulfilled a practical function: it was not an object of prestige; it existed only to be read. The second possibility is pure speculation: why, in the two examples provided above, did the copyists place their colophon not at the end of the book but on the cover? Does this refer not to the main copyist, but another copyist who produced

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103 Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri Tarihi*, pp. 240-241.

104 Ibid. pp. 246-264.

105 *Kıssa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ ve Eb'u'l-Hâris*, inside front cover. The note is dated simply as 73.

106 Kavruk, *Eski Türk Edebiyatında*, p. 99.

multiple copies of the work? *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tûtî* contains a note right underneath the copyist's signature which confirms that the book was lent out.

Identifying the author is just as complex as the copyist. The authors of most of these works begin with a formula stating that they will recite only what they have heard and what has been conveyed by stories: “râviyân-ı ahbar ve nâkilân-ı âsar.” Only a handful signed their books. However, writers would somehow re-invent old stories by reformulating them. The writing of Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha and his brother Oruç Reis's adventures at sea, *Gazavatnâme-i Hayreddin Paşa*, written during the latter half of the sixteenth century, is a case in point. The author, Seyyid Murad, nicknamed Muradî, declares that he was a witness to Barbaros' victories and that he wrote the stories in Turkish for greater comprehension. The surviving manuscripts contain readers' notes, which show that the work was read aloud to a certain group.<sup>107</sup> Significantly, Muradî's text was later re-written by another author.<sup>108</sup> The second author, called *Pseudo Muradî* by Aldo Gallotta, wrote a new work shortening certain sections of Muradî's, lengthening others, and adding new stories. Both its simple and comprehensible language and its style prove that it was written to be read aloud in public. At the end of the manuscript, the author asks for those who have read and listened to the story to pray for him. Interestingly, the oldest version of this second text is from the beginning of the eighteenth century, while the most recent dates from 1828.<sup>109</sup> The second text probably appeared at the same period as the books discussed in this study. It would appear that the

<sup>107</sup> Several versions of *Gazavatnâme-i Hayreddin Paşa* have been simplified and published. A doctoral thesis was written about a copy kept at the Library of Istanbul University (T. 2639) and was published along with the full transcription of the text: Mustafa Yıldız, *Gazavatnâme-i Hayreddin Paşa* (MS 2639, Istanbul University Library), Kommentierte Edition mit Deutcher Zusammenfassung, Göttingen, 1991.

<sup>108</sup> In his comprehensive essay on Muradî's identity and the writing of the book, Hüseyin Yurdaydin examined the surviving versions in prose and in verse and argued that the work was written piecemeal, then consolidated. Hüseyin Yurdaydin, “Muradî ve Eserleri,” *Belleten*, XXVII/107, July 1963, pp. 453-466. Aldo Gallotta, on the other hand, argued that the differences between copies which previous researchers had identified as separate compilations did not stem from different copyists and confirmed the existence of two distinct works. Aldo Gallotta, “Seyyid Murad’ın ‘Gazavat-ı Hayreddin Paşa’ adlı eseri”, trans. by Mahmut H. Şakiroğlu, in *Erdem Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Dergisi* 4 (1988): 127-165.

<sup>109</sup> Gallotta, “Seyyid Murad’ın ‘Gazavat-ı Hayreddin Paşa,’” 127-165.

popular tradition of reading out loud in the eighteenth century pushed *Pseudo Muradî* to adapt an existing text and to make it more appropriate for his audience. This writing process must be valid for many of the books analyzed in this article.

### **Why did readers write notes?**

The habit of writing notes on books was not welcomed by all. One reader left a note in the margins of *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi* cursing those who wrote their names on books: he clearly did not approve of this behavior.<sup>110</sup> Some notes were crossed out, likewise indicating disapproval. However, even curses were not enough to stop writers from leaving notes: quite the reverse, the more curses there were, the more notes were left – often scribbled in response to the original curse.

Readers' notes usually contain the name of the reader, the name of the venue, and the date. This type of note is quite reasonable; the reader likely wanted to immortalize a moment of enjoyment. But some include the name of the venue owner, or even his relationship with other people, a detailed description of the venue and its address, the names of audience members, and even the atmosphere created by the reading. These types of details suggest there must have been more behind the notes than simply wanting to leave a trace or a memento.

Roger Chartier emphasizes that reading to an audience in Europe had the important function of strengthening social ties. Just as silent reading was construed as a way to escape from society, state authority, family, and social ties, public reading would bring together a group of people and allow them to develop a social relationship through the book they all listened to. These reading sessions could be organized at someone's home by people who

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<sup>110</sup> *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 6a.

knew each other, or they could take place on the spur of the moment among strangers who had simply come together while traveling.<sup>111</sup>

The social connection identified by Chartier must also have been valid for Ottoman readers and their audience. The notes testify to a community formed by people gathered around a same book, sharing the same world view or indulging in a shared pleasure. Cemal Kafadar's analysis of Seyyid Hasan's diary provides an interesting perspective on this community and why its members wrote these notes. Kafadar relates that Seyyid Hasan wrote in detail about the food he ate with the other members of the community, the discussions they had over dinner and the names of the people who participated in these discussions. He argues that *Sohbetnâme* is a presentation of the network created by relations based on family ties, membership in the dervish lodge and neighborhood solidarity. When *Sohbetnâme* was written, there was a plague epidemic in Istanbul. Seyyid Hasan's family members and friends were dying. Kafadar writes, "Perhaps this is what Seyyid Hasan expected from his diary – a way to cling, albeit briefly, to a small portion of comforting human warmth which would help him to remember people; a warmth he now understood could easily disappear. To commit to paper what could seem to be unimportant events day in, day out, was actually very pertinent for those times when every day, every meal, each pleasure taken from each meeting with friends was an occasion for gratitude."<sup>112</sup> Just like Seyyid Hasan's diary, our readers' notes are the inventory of a certain community and are explicit in expressing their gratitude for the pleasure of the reading.

The term *yaran* [friends] used in many of the notes gives a hint as to the relationship between participants in a reading. The note-writer who lists the names of the readers, the listeners and the owner of the venue both presents the community created around a book and

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111 Chartier, "Leisure and Sociability," pp. 103-118.

112 Kafadar, "Ben ve Başkaları," pp. 62-63

leaves a trace to those who will read the book subsequently. The “friends” are not only those who are present at the current reading, but also those who will participate in later readings. Maybe this is why the person who wrote in *Hikâyât-ı Sipâhî-yi Kastomonî ve Tütî* that the book was read in the Big Room of Galata Palace by Berber Süleyman Agha adds that he was writing this note in case an acquaintance got a hold of the book. To describe the house where the reading was held in relation to another which is more familiar, or to mention a reader's name alongside a more widely known relation, seems to be the result of this desire to be acknowledged.

Another trace of familiarity between readers is to be found in a lengthy note on the first page of *Kissa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ*. The writer asks the reader to send him a sacred biography which had been read the previous night:

My dear benefactor, dear sir, my sultan, his majesty, could you be so kind as to send downstairs the book you read last night. If you ask me which one, it contained sacred biographies written in *tâlik* calligraphy. Please be so kind as to send it downstairs, dear sir. *Temme\**.<sup>113</sup>

This note demonstrates that books were lent as much as they were rented out, and that they mostly circulated within a common social sphere. A similar note can be found in *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*. This time the note probably targets the person who lent the book and suggests similar works:

Dear brother, I read this book. However there are two other books. One is called Câmasb and the other Tanbûrî Ahmed Çelebi. Read those and see what a wretch

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<sup>113</sup> *Kissa-i Ebû 'Ali Sînâ ve Ebû 'l-Hâris*, f. 1a.

humankind is and what can befall him. My dear sir, even this is a more than enough [life experience].<sup>114</sup>

Those who wrote the books, aware of the community that would form around their work, addressed its members at the end of their work. For instance, the anonymous writer/translator of a story book announces in his introduction that he wrote his story by compiling events from history books for the enjoyment of all and with the desire to receive a prayer. He states that there are many other books which resemble his, some translated from Farsi and others from the Indian language, and that those who wrote these books did so in order to provide an opportunity for communities to form, with the desire that these communities would pray for them. He in turn requests a prayer from his readers.<sup>115</sup> Hacı Mehmed Tokatî was another writer who, after concealing his *Hâsimnâme* throughout his lifetime, created several copies of it in his old age in order to have his name commemorated along with a prayer during reading sessions.<sup>116</sup> The need of writers to have prayers said in their name sometimes resulted in the same text being written over and over again. The first text (1b-64a) of *Mecmua*, which contained historical and religious stories, tells of Tiryaki Hasan Pasha's conquest of the Fortress of Kanije. At the end of the text, the writer says "there are many stories of the wars fought by Gazi Hasan Pasha, but I chose to tell of the battle of Kanije so that I would be remembered with gratitude."<sup>117</sup> It was doubtless cheaper to be remembered by writing a book than through other charitable work. *Dürr-i Meknûn*, written by Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcan in

114 *Misir Valisi Koca Cafer Paşa'nın Hikayesi*, f. 16b.

115 *Gerdankeşannâme*, vol. 2, London, British Library, Or. 14942, f. 341b.

116 Koç, *Hâsim-nâme*, pp. 1-2.

117 *Mecmua*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Nat. Diez A. Oct. 34, f. 64a. The title of the first text of *Mecmua* is *Kitab-ı Hikayet-i Hasan Pasa [ve] Kal'a-i Kanije* (Gazavât-ı Tiryâkî Hasan Paşa). The book also contains the texts *Vasiyyetname-i Resûlullah* (the story of how the Prophet Mohammed's tomb keeper Sheikh Ahmed dreamed of the Prophet who gave him the duty of spreading his teachings among the people]: ff. 64b-67a; f. 67b contains the single-page beginning of a story on the Prophet Adam. For catalog information, see Wilhelm Pertsch, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Berlin: A. Asher & Co, 1889, p. 57.

the fifteenth century, was much liked by both the palace and the people. In his introduction, the writer declares that the work is a compilation of other books and then explains why he wrote this book: “many people build soup-kitchens or monasteries, and inscribe their names above the doors so that onlookers will say that he was a charitable man, but I don't have the means to create such masjids\* or madrasahs, he says; a scholar's only possession and treasure is his knowledge, so I wrote this book.”<sup>118</sup>

Those who read the books or listened to them would fulfill the writer's wishes and create their own communities through the traces they left on the books. They would make a mark on history, become an important historical figure, and their name would be remembered. These records, which immortalized the names of ordinary Ottomans, are reminiscent of the French author Georges Perec's inventory of daily life. In this work, translated into English as *Infra-Ordinary*, he complains that the great and unexpected events of our lives silence “the background noise” of daily and ordinary occurrences. In search of the ordinary, he makes a list of things in his life – the street he walks in every day, the objects on his desk, etc.<sup>119</sup> Our readers' notes on an ordinary event seem to fulfill the same function by allowing us to hear the “background noise” behind significant historical events. The readers' notes discussed here do not only show that public readings were a popular urban pastime in the Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they also offer insights into the books that were read, and the worlds of those who produced the books and enabled their circulation, readers and even listeners. Thanks to these reading sessions, some books reached a relatively wide audience. Even those who did not have the power or capacity to buy or read a book could become a reader or listener. By adding their own successive notes to a book, readers and

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<sup>118</sup> Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican, *Dürr-i Meknûn (Tipkibasım) (İnceleme-Çeviriyyazi-Dizin)*, ed. Dr. Ahmet Demirtaş, İstanbul: Akademik Kitaplar, 2009, pp. 89-90.

<sup>119</sup> Georges Perec, *Olağan-içi (Gündelik Hayatın Envanteri)*, trans. Serdar Giritli, İstanbul, Everest Yayınları, 2009.

listeners would both fulfill the writer's wish and leave a trace of their own existence. This offers an at least partial answer to Neumann's question: "How can a person living in a manuscript culture expect everyone to know a text?" Even in the manuscript tradition, a writer's dream could come true. A book could be known, if not by everyone, by many, many people.

Translated by Başak Balkan