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# The Sulaiman-nama (Süleymanname) as an Historical Source

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# Shahnama Studies

## III

The Reception of the *Shahnama*

*Edited by*

Gabrielle van den Berg  
Charles Melville



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## The *Sulaiman-nama* (*Süleyman-name*) as an Historical Source

*Fatma Sinem Eryılmaz*

### Introduction

The principal aim of this study is to discuss the potential of the *Sulaiman-nama*, a work well-known in name but not studied comprehensively or in depth, as an historical source for the reign of Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–1566). As such, I aim to cast aside the prejudice caused both by its sophisticated literary language and the general designation of the work as a panegyric, and display some of the ways in which *shehnameci* ‘Arif’s *Sulaiman-nama* could be of significant use for researching cultural and political history.

The name *Sulaiman-nama*, or in its Turkish version *Süleyman-name*, is a title shared by many works that describe the events of Sultan Süleyman’s reign.<sup>1</sup> These works with a thematic similarity were in fact written by authors of varying levels of refinement, some in Turkish and some in Persian, some in verse and others in prose, and are now scattered all over the libraries in and outside Turkey. Alongside these less ambitious works, the official version of the events of the sultan’s reign between 1520, the year of his ascension to the throne, and 1555, is recorded by Fethullah Çelebi (‘Arif) in a lavishly prepared book composed in an elegant Persian verse.<sup>2</sup>

‘Arif’s *Sulaiman-nama* is the fifth and last volume of a world history project that formally followed the model of Firdausi’s *Shahnama* and exploited its cultural legacy. Indeed, by calling his work “*Shahnama-yi Al-i ‘Osman*”, ‘Arif himself states his model overtly. The formal resemblance of the Ottoman work to the Persian classic is clear: ‘Arif’s work is also composed in Persian, in the *masnavi* form and the *mutaqarib* metre like Firdausi’s. Its writer was the first *shehnameci* (*shehname* narrator or *shehnameguy*) of Sultan Süleyman.

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1 “*Sulaiman-nama*” is preferred over “*Süleyman-name*” as the work studied was written in Persian and not in Turkish. On the other hand, the name of the sultan is spelled as “*Süleyman*”. The letters “ç,ı,ü,ş” are used in Turkish proper names. “Sh” is preferred over “ş” unless it appears in a proper name or in a published source.

2 This manuscript (H. 1517) is currently preserved in the Topkapı Palace library [TSMK].

Descriptions of Ottoman military expeditions occupy a large section of the textual and visual narrative of the *Sulaiman-nama*. These descriptions also enable 'Arif and his team of artists to manipulate the literary and visual *topoi* of Firdausi's *Shahnama*, including textual and visual references to hero-identifying traits. The epithets and distinguishing adjectives of the heroes and their postures in the visual representative tradition of hunting and combat scenes in the *Shahnama* are used in order to praise the army, its commanders, and especially its ultimate commander, the extraordinary Sultan Süleyman.

However, the *Sulaiman-nama* is not a mere chronicle of military history. In its 617 folios and 69 illustrated pages, it also records Ottoman ceremonies, and provides a detailed account of the state structure as it was in effect in the 1550s. Before beginning the narration of the events of Sultan Süleyman's reign, 'Arif lays out the detailed administrative regulations that the sultan is known to have issued.<sup>3</sup> To this end, he provides a noticeably comprehensive list of the ranks, responsibilities, and salaries of the military and bureaucratic personnel. This section constitutes 49 pages between folios 26r and 50r—about 8 percent of the whole text—and includes the depiction of the recruitment of tribute children on folio 31v and the double folio representation of the Divan in session on folios 37v–38r. As such, the tedious explications of the administrative and military structure of the state distance the book from other histories of Süleyman's time.

The careful narration of the ceremonial and the attention given to the textual and pictorial representation of the state structure reflect the desire of the court to register their contemporaneous model of state and the court as an ideal for emulation for future generations of the palace. Ironically, it reveals both the confidence of the court in the perfection attained at the period and hints at a certain fear that their model is vulnerable to degeneration. Once the Süleymanic model is calcified in letters, so to speak, it also becomes a self-conscious reference of perfection and hence, sets its own mythologizing process.

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3 In modern academic literature, these regulations are often referred to as part of Süleyman's "law code". In the *Sulaiman-nama* they are often referred to as "qanun", a word generally translated as "law". However, to avoid confusion with the modern sense of law, it would be better to think of and translate them as "regulations". I thank Snjezana Buzov for helping me clarify this point.

### The *Sulaiman-nama*: Literature or History?

It might first come as a surprise that this highly prestigious work prepared for the most renowned of the Ottoman royal patrons has not been adequately exploited in academic literature. 'Arif's work has been esteemed as having high aesthetic value on account of its display of the arts of the book, but deserving very little attention as an historical source.<sup>4</sup> The literary pretensions of its ambitious composer, who openly vied with Firdausi's masterly usage of Persian, have not made the text easy to tackle for many researchers of Ottoman history.

In the entry on the *shehnameci* that is simultaneously appreciative and subtly critical, Aşık Çelebi reveals 'Arif's literary ambitions and self-appreciation, as well as his need for the approval of the biographer. We read that in one social encounter with the biographer, 'Arif compared himself to Firdausi and that he intended to imitate the purity of Firdausi's Persian. Like the great Persian poet who was praised for not having used Arabic vocabulary in his work, 'Arif claimed that he too had recently composed two thousand verses without a single word from Arabic. Aşık Çelebi then proved him wrong with an example from 'Arif's work. The word chosen was "*raihan*"—i.e. sweet basil. The *shehnameci* first tried to argue that the word *raihan* had already been naturalized and entered Persian common usage. When the biographer proposed the common

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4 The miniature paintings of the fourth and fifth volumes of 'Arif's *Shahnama* have been published in their entirety and with brief introductions. See Esin Atıl, *Süleymanname: The illustrated history of Süleyman the Magnificent* and Ernst J. Grube, *Islamic paintings from the eleventh to the eighteenth century in the collection of Hans P. Kraus*. Individual paintings from the first, fourth and the fifth volumes have also been published in various art historical studies. I discussed two of the three illustrations on Adam's life in 'Arif's first volume within the context of 16th-century Ottoman artistic and political culture in "From Adam to Süleyman: Visual representations of authority and leadership in 'Arif's *Şāhnāme-yi Āl-i 'Osmān*". A comprehensive examination of the paintings of 'Arif's *Shahnama* is still pending. The phenomenon of Ottoman *shehname* writing has been the topic of several general studies: see Christine Woodhead, "An experiment in official historiography: The post of *Şehnameci* in the Ottoman Empire c. 1555–1605", and "Reading Ottoman *Şehnames*: Official historiography in the late sixteenth century". See also Baki Tezcan, "The politics of early modern Ottoman historiography". For a close analysis and a comparative study of the text and miniatures of 'Arif and his works see Fatma Sinem Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis of Sultan Süleyman: 'Arif and Eflatun and their dynastic project*. For the patronage of illustrated books in the Ottoman court in the 16th century, see Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing history at the Ottoman court*.

Persian equivalent of the word (“*sipargham*”) in its stead, however, ‘Arif yielded his position.<sup>5</sup>

‘Arif’s work after all is not a collection of historically significant data but a sophisticated literary product of 16th-century Ottoman court culture. Befitting the prestige of his assignment, the reader often encounters ‘Arif flaunting his skill by upholding the same metaphoric frame at length, conjuring up mental images that are at times humorous and at times gory. These artistic games make the text more interesting as a literary artefact. They add to it further texture and hence provide more insight into the literary and social culture of ‘Arif’s times. At the same time, for the less literary-minded, they can be perceived as hurdles obstructing the path to the text’s “meaning”.

‘Arif’s style was in part the result of his particular wide interests, self-appreciation, literary aspirations, and his sense of humour.<sup>6</sup> It was also conditioned by the parameters of the courtly literary language, where complexity and wealth of imagery were highly esteemed. Unfortunately, his style put his work at risk of falling into the crack between literary and political history in the current state of the field of Ottoman studies. The literary complexity of ‘Arif’s text has been a factor in casting a shadow over its historical value.

Şerafettin Turan, for example, in the second and revised edition of his highly analytical and informative study of the dispute over dynastic succession during the reign of Sultan Süleyman, does not consider one of ‘Arif’s works, *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han*, appropriate for historical research. This work was composed for the sultan about one year after the Ottoman *Shahname*.<sup>7</sup> *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han* begins with the appointment of Süleyman’s princes to provinces as governors and ends with the defeat of Bayezid, one of the two remaining sons of the sultan, in the battle against his brother Selim in 1559. Hence, it is undoubtedly related to Turan’s topic of study.<sup>8</sup> Even though he implicitly acknowledges its thematic relevance, Turan

5 See the section on ‘Arif in the biography of poets of the 16th-century *littérateur* Aşık Çelebi, *Meşār üş-Şu’arā*, f. 166r.

6 See chapter 11 in Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis of Sultan Süleyman*.

7 *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han* was also composed in Persian verse and in the *mutaqarib* metre of Firdausi’s *Shahname*. It was finished on 2 June 1559 (25 Sha’ban 966). The first volume of ‘Arif’s *Shahname*, the *Anbiyanama*, was completed on 2 March 1558 (12 Jumada 1, 965) and the fifth volume, *Sulaiman-nama*, in late June/early July 1558 (mid-Ramadan 965). Both *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han* (ms. Revan 1540 mük.) and *Sulaiman-nama* (ms. Hazine 1517) are preserved in the Topkapı Palace manuscript library, whereas *Anbiyanama* is preserved in the collection of the Bruschettini Foundation for Islamic and Asian Art.

8 Indeed, in the introduction of his book, Turan includes the work among those consulted in his research. He refers to ‘Arif’s work again when he states that it was one of the two sources



writes, “Nevertheless, this work written in an exaggerated and poetic idiom bears no significance for historical research.”<sup>9</sup>

Should we follow Turan’s lead and examine ‘Arif’s *Shahnama-yi Al-i ‘Osman*, like his *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han* solely as a literary output? Does its high-brow idiom reflect a prioritized interest in literary display rather than historical precision on the part of the poet? If so, should we also parallel ‘Arif’s priorities and examine his works not as historical documents but as literary texts?

We should begin to answer these questions first by noting that in the Ottoman court and educated circles of the 16th century, neither writing in such “exaggerated” idiom nor composing histories in verse was an anomaly. Even though the decision to write universal history including a book on Süleyman’s reign using Firdausi’s *Shahnama* as a formal model was not a common choice, it was a particularity within the boundaries of the cultural tradition to which it belonged.<sup>10</sup>

Neither was literature defined as so sharply distinct from historical writing. A history written for the sultan, his family and companions was expected to reflect the highest level of achievement in its form. The expectations of a literary output for the palace are comparable to the expectations of formal excellence and accepted innovation from any other artistic product manufactured for the

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he consulted that mentioned the sultan’s petition for a *fetwa* to lawfully order the execution of his son Bayezid and his supporters. Şerafettin Turan, *Kanuni Süleyman Dönemi that Kavğaları*, 100–101.

- 9 Ibid., 16: “Ne ki tümüyle abartılı ve şairce bir anlatımla yazılan yapıt, tarih araştırmaları için bir önem taşımamaktadır.” Translation mine. In her article “History as literature”, 1–55, Julie Meisami offers various examples that deal with the suspicions of historians of the literary devices in historical accounts. The wariness that Meisami exemplifies stems from the disguised introduction of “fictivity” in what is expected to be “factual,” or the literariness in what is supposed to be historical. The dialectic created between the treatment of narrative accounts as literary (fictive) or historical (factual) often results in either the devaluation of the text as an historical account or the neglect of its study as a literary text. In this article, my principle interest concerns the former danger. For the latter, aside from Meisami, who argues that “historical works are not merely records of the past, but literary texts that may be approached through literary analysis” (ibid., 1), see Stephan Leder, “Al-Madâ’ini’s version of *qissat ash-shûrâ*”, 379–98; and especially “Conventions of fictional narration in learned literature”, 34–60. For a learned and highly interesting example of cultural history through literary analysis see Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and narrative: Reading authority in medieval polemic*.
- 10 Julie Meisami’s treatment of Persian historiography, especially in matters of style and the relationship between political authority and historical writing, provides useful parallels to similar matters in Ottoman historiography; see her “History as literature”, 1–55.

palace, be it a book cover, a tiled wall, a carpet, or an architectural project such as a royal mosque.<sup>11</sup> Sophisticated and metaphorically rich language was part of the etiquette for linguistic self-expression appropriate for Sultan Süleyman's court that could at any point be honoured by the presence of the sultan. The claim of writing an Ottoman *Shahnama* as a literary response to the most prestigious epic in the Islamicate literary tradition could, in fact, only make sense within the context of cultural competition at the highest level.

At the same time, the rich variety of hues and textures manipulated by a skillful writer could allow him to narrate events otherwise unmentionable and share information in a coded language that would be obvious to the members of the Ottoman court of the mid-16th century but hidden from the *uninitiated* contemporaneous commoner. In other words, the complexity of the language can serve as an agile tool for gaining insight into the cultural and political environment of the 16th-century Ottoman court otherwise so distant from the 21st-century researcher. Rather than seeing language as an obstructive outer shell to meaning, it is possible and more constructive to see it as a further aid in deciphering the text's historical content.

### A Case Study: The Narration of the Execution of Prince Mustafa in the *Sulaiman-nama*

Once the veil of prejudice against his language is lifted, 'Arif's partial account of Süleyman's reign can indeed offer the reader intimate information relating to incidents that directly involved the members of the court and the dynasty. The sultan's ordering of the death of his first born in 1553 during the prince's visit to his father's tent is an example.

At the time of the incident, the Ottoman army was camping near Ereğli in Central Anatolia on their third military expedition against Safavid Iran. Ottoman military contention with its principal rival in the east, the Safavid Empire, was complicated. When compared with the expeditions against the Christian forces of the Habsburgs or its satellite principalities across the western Ottoman border, justification of war against the Safavids was more problematic, for it was less easy to present fellow Muslims as the enemy.<sup>12</sup>

11 For the rules of artistic and architectural etiquette and standards, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *The age of Sinan: Architectural culture in the Ottoman Empire*.

12 The Kurdish Beg Şeref Han writes that before the army set off on its march to Iran on the very campaign at the beginning of which Mustafa was executed, Sultan Süleyman openly and clearly declared the causes and reasons for the expedition in accordance with the

The fact that the Safavids upheld Shi'ite Islam as opposed to the Sunnism championed by the Ottomans was not a sufficient reason to stir fury among the Ottoman soldiers as many of them sympathized with the Shi'ite conception of Islam. The situation was further complicated as the eastern expeditions required more enthusiasm on the Ottoman side to compensate for the scarcity of water and booty. The difficult mountainous terrain that became even more treacherous in bad weather was another discouraging factor of these expeditions. Furthermore, the irregularities of the terrain often favoured the Safavid forces, who were already more familiar with the geography and used it to their advantage in their hit-and run tactics.<sup>13</sup>

We can observe the symptoms of the physical and psychological strains of the campaigns into Safavid territory in the notable frequency of scandalous incidents that occurred during or immediately after them. Before the execution of Prince Mustafa, the execution of two of the most powerful statesmen of the first long decade of Süleyman's reign, the treasurer Iskender Çelebi during the Persian campaign of 1533 and the Grand Vizier and friend of Sultan Süleyman, Ibrahim, in its immediate aftermath, provoked awe and terror in the Ottoman Empire.

Likewise, Prince Mustafa's execution in 1553 on the way to the third expedition brought the army to the brink of revolt against its chief commander, Sultan Süleyman. The incident also provoked an explosion of literary writing in Ottoman verse, in which the sultan's justice and compassion were openly questioned.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the references in these poems to the sultan's persona and those of his wife Hürrem and his Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, who were accused of being the instigators of the incident, often crossed the boundaries of propriety into plain insult.<sup>15</sup> The incident rapidly acquired a taboo status in its

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Ottoman manner and custom; Şeref Han, *Şerefname: Kürd Tarihi*, trans. Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, 350. One wonders if the explanation for war was given before each campaign regardless of the identity of the enemy, or customary only on the eastern campaigns against the Muslim neighbours carried on since the time of Süleyman's father, Selim. Şeref Han, for his part, would have had more knowledge of the Ottoman campaigns to the east.

- 13 In his *Tevârih-i Âl-i 'Osmân*, the Ottoman statesman Lütfi Pasha gives a clear description of the guerilla tactics of the Safavid forces in defense. For the Ottoman-Safavid conflict during the reign of Sultan Süleyman, see Adel Allouche, *The Origins and development of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict (906–962/1500–1555)* and Rhoads Murphey, "Suleyman's eastern policy".
- 14 Mustafa Isen notes that with 16 elegies (*marthiya*), Prince Mustafa is the person for whom the most number of elegies were composed in Ottoman literature. Mustafa Isen, *Acıyı bal Eylemek: Türk Edebiyatında Mersiye*, 10.
- 15 For examples of these poems see Isen, *Acıyı bal Eylemek*, 235–323.

aftermath. At the same time, it remained in the public memory of all echelons of society for centuries.

More than a century later, circa 1686, the Ottoman intellectual Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi in his *Telhisü'l-Beyan* (The Summary Declaration) held the incident responsible for various calamities including dearth and famine, and the conversion of the order of nature into infinite chaos. He added that with the ascension to the throne of Süleyman's son Selim II, the inappropriate change of customs, the turbulence in the hearts of the just and the religious, the competition for superiority of the malevolent, and the misery of those with insufficient provisions had become clearly visible and manifest.<sup>16</sup> Mustafa 'Ali, another Ottoman intellectual, this time writing in the late 16th century, saw the execution of the most deserving heir of the dynasty due to the Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha's trickery as the beginning of everything negative that the empire was experiencing in his time.<sup>17</sup>

There is a curious resemblance between the poem of Kadiri, possibly a soldier-poet about whom we do not have much information, and the assessment of the two intellectuals cited above. Despite his cruder yet more emotional style, Kadiri too speaks of the inversion of order. More interestingly, without the advantage of hindsight that Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi and Mustafa 'Ali enjoyed, he still blames future misfortunes on the execution of the crown prince. He writes with the warning—or threatening—words of a soothsayer who has already seen the breaking of the Natural Law and expects the worst in the future.<sup>18</sup>

16 “... Cumhûr müttelikleridir ki ol zamandan berü mülk-i Rum'un ucuzluğu kaht u galâya ve hilâtin intizâm u ahvâl-i ihtilâl-i bî-intihâya mübeddel oldu. Ne hâl ise ol şehriyârın ahdi güzerân edüp (81a) oğlu Selim Hân cülûsundan berü tegayyur-ı âsâr ve tekeddür-i kulûb-ı ebrâr ve tegallüb-ı eşrâr-ı bed-kirdâr ve tasallut-ı sefele-i kem-mikdâr katı zâhir ve ayân oldu.” Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi, *Telhisü'l-Beyân fî Kavânîn-i Âl-i Osmân*, 184. The first date Ilgürel suggested for the completion of this work, 1675, has been contested by Tülay Artan, “Royal weddings and the Grand Vizirate: Institutional and symbolic change in the early eighteenth century”, 352. Artan writes that the last date recorded by Hüseyin Efendi as a final note in the section on the *sheyhül-islams* concerned the dismissal of the Sheyhül'-islam Çatalcalı Ali Efendi on 27 September 1686, and the nomination of Ankaravi Mehmed Emin Efendi in his stead.

17 Jan Schmidt, *Muṣṭafâ 'Âlî's Künhü'l-aḥbâr and its preface according to the Leiden manuscript*, 32, manuscript f. 5v.

18 Isen, 323. Kadiri's words also suggest a latent sense of apocalyptic expectations with the imminent end of an epoch in human history.

Hem cihān aksine döndüğünü andan bilün(!)  
 Şol musibetler ki oldı bundan ibret alun(!)  
 Dahi neler göresiz devr sonuna kalanun(!)  
 Ağlaşun ey halk-ı âlem gitdi Sultan Mustafâ

*And know that is why the world has been rotating in the opposite direction  
 The misfortunes that came to pass, take warning from them  
 Those that remain till the end of the epoch, you are to see so much more  
 Weep together, oh people of the world, Sultan Mustafa has gone*

The language that was used by these writers makes one think that the strong reaction provoked by the execution did not only stem from the despair felt after the unjust death of a prince beloved by the army and the general population. The writers' choice of vocabulary suggests that Sultan Süleyman's order to kill his own son not only deprived the dynasty of its most capable heir, but also signified an unnatural overstepping of order. As such, the sultan's decision was wrong in its essence. Moreover, the incident had consequences stretching further in time. The evaluation of these writers suggest that at least for some, the prince's execution by his father's command jeopardized the future order of the world, as well.

It seems likely that the close association of the execution with the inversion of order is due to the nature of the incident. Fratricide was legalized by the regulations of Sultan Mehmed (r.1444–1446; 1451–1481) when it was deemed necessary for the well-being of the state, and its practice was grudgingly accepted by the subjects of the empire. In contrast, the relationship between the father/sultan and the son/prince was left untouched by law. Religious law and tradition governed the relationship between a father and a son.<sup>19</sup> A father and his son were not near-peers the way siblings were. While respect and obedience were expected from the latter, the father was to show compassion to his son. From what we read in all of the sources outside of the palace, Prince Mustafa

19 In the Qur'an the two parents, mother and father, are generally mentioned together. When there is a differentiation between a mother and father, good treatment towards a mother is prioritized. The child is expected to treat his parents well at all times and obey them as long as they do not ask him to disobey God. See for example the Suras 2:83, 4:36, 17:23, 29:8, 31:14, 31:15, etc. In the hadith tradition, disobedience to parents is considered the worst sin only after disobedience to God. See for example Muhammad al-Bukhari's *al-Adab al-mufrad: A code for everyday living*.

had not broken the rules of this relationship and disobeyed his father.<sup>20</sup> Sultan Süleyman's order for the execution of his son, hence, significantly disturbed the norms of familial order at the very heart of the empire, that is in the royal family.

In contrast to the blatantly negative assessment of the incident by authors writing after the reign of Selim II (r. 1566–1574) and by poets composing in fervent reaction to the beloved prince's execution, the contemporaneous Ottoman chronicles barely mention the prince's death and, fearing the sultan's disfavour, do not give further explanation. Consequently, aside from confirming the taboo status the incident had acquired in its immediate aftermath and maintained during the reigns of Sultan Süleyman and Selim II, the silent Ottoman histories are of no use in understanding one of the most important events of Sultan Süleyman's time. Fortunately, it is still possible to trace the probable outline of the incident using the elegies written after the execution, the foreign reports, and 'Arif's *Sulaiman-nama*.

We have already seen an excerpt from an elegy written after Prince Mustafa's death. While they varied in literary sophistication, all of these poems shared the emotional outburst that Kadiri's poem projected. Along with the foreign reports, these elegies help us decipher and compare the information given in the *Sulaiman-nama* pertaining to this taboo execution.

The authors of the reports were foreign agents—either diplomats, merchants, or spies and often engaging in a combination of these activities—who intended to communicate the most accurate and comprehensive information on events occurring in the Ottoman lands as long as they were potentially relevant to their home states in their political and commercial relations. The reports were often meticulously detailed and included eye witness reports for accuracy as well as gossip as an indicator of the public temperament. As could be expected, information concerning the Ottoman sultan, his family, and his close circle was particularly sought after, for it was hoped to provide an insight

20 All the poems written as a reaction to the incident claim the prince's innocence, while the evaluations written after the death of the protagonists portray it as a significant mistake. See Isen, 235–323, Jan Schmidt, *Muṣṭafā 'Alī's Künhü'l-aḥbār*, 32, manuscript f. 5v, Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi, *Telhîsü'l-Beyân fî Kavânîn-i Âl-i Osmân*, 184. Semiz Ali Pasha reports the incident in very discreet terms in *Menâkıb-ı İbrahim-i Gülşenî*, which was written by Muhyî-yi Gülşenî 16 years after the execution and three years after the sultan's death. In Muhyî's rendering of the incident the sultan is represented as an impotent individual who was easily manipulated by his wife, daughter, and Grand Vizier. Muhyî-yi Gülşenî, *Menâkıb-ı İbrahim-i Gülşenî*, 39–40.

to the psyche of the sultan and his court, as well as revealing their tastes and weaknesses.

Two of the foreign sources that report the Mustafa incident in a most detailed fashion refer to the strangling of the prince with the lasso thrown by the mute executioners. One of them, an anonymous and contemporaneous Venetian source, reports that when the prince advanced from the third to the fourth section in the royal tent to meet with his father, he encountered him with a set bow and arrow in his hands. When he bowed respectfully before his father and greeted him, his father's reply was full of indignation: "Oh, filthy dog, do you still have the courage to greet me?" With these words, the sultan turned his back to his son and thereby, according to the Venetian source, gave the signal for his son's execution. First, one of the royal doorkeepers attempted to strangle him with no success. Then the mute executioners caught him with the lasso they had thrown.<sup>21</sup>

In his *Turkish Letters*, the Austrian ambassador to the Ottoman court, Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, offers a description similar to the anonymous report.<sup>22</sup> He writes that the sultan was following the execution from behind the veil that partitioned his section of the royal tent from where the execution was taking place. When the execution took longer than he expected due to the unyielding struggle of the stout prince, he "directed fierce and threatening glancing upon the mutes, and by menacing gestures sternly rebuked their hesitation."<sup>23</sup> Another Venetian report sent to the city-state in 1554 confirms the presence of Sultan Süleyman in a separated section of the royal tent, observing the incident.<sup>24</sup> Aside from these foreign reports, the Ottoman poet Muini also writes about the lasso that leaped forward like a serpent. He damns the one throwing the lasso over the prince wishing that he turns mute, "*lal*," thereby revealing that the executioner was a mute servant.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, 'Arif's *Sulaiman-nama*, which was produced most probably in the royal workshop on the palace grounds, also records the details of the execution on which the contemporaneous historians could not dare to comment.

21 E. Alberi, "Relazione Anonima della Guerra di Persia dell' anno 1553 e di molti altri particolari", 209–10, see Turan, *Kanuni Süleyman Dönemi Taht Kavgaları*, 38–39; Ahmet Atilla Şentürk, *Yahya Beğ'in Şehzâde Mustafa Mersiyesi yahut Kanunî Hicviyesi*, LXII, n. 49.

22 Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *The Turkish letters of Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster, 28–32.

23 *Ibid.*, 32.

24 Turan, *Kanuni Süleyman Dönemi Taht Kavgaları*, 38; quoted from *Aviso di Constantinopoli del modo tenuto dalla Roscia Moglie del S. Gran Turcho per far morire Mustafa primogénito suo*.

25 "Kurusin eli kemend atan ana lâl olsun", Isen, 297, 298.



Both in word and image, we encounter a description strikingly similar to the ones in the Venetian and Austrian reports, albeit in a coded language. We read of the lasso referred to as a chord. The involvement of the mute executioners is confirmed alongside a warning that nobody had the right to discuss the execution because no one but the shah knew the truth of the situation. According to the *Sulaiman-nama*, when the prince was in the tent of the shah,<sup>26</sup>

*His cord of livelihood grew short on him  
Was there then in that royal tent  
A sin that deserved the rage of the shah?  
No one except for the King of Kings of Religion (Şehinşāh-ı Dîn)  
Was aware of such a sin*

Slightly earlier in the text, 'Arif's narration suggests that he is referring to the sign language that was used by the mutes who were in service of the sultan in different capacities, including as executioners. In the stich below, the insistent usage of the word for finger, "*angusht*," and the pun on the word "*harf*," which is used both meaning "a letter" and "general talk" invite this association. We read:<sup>27</sup>

بحرف قضا جای انگشت نیست / که انگشت آن حرف در مشت نیست

*The talk of destined events is not a place in which one should put his finger  
For the finger necessary for that word is not in the fist*

With these lines, 'Arif tells his contemporaneous *and* future readers that any discussion concerning the incident is meaningless since no one—but the sultan—has the necessary means to say anything useful or sensible. In fact talking about it could only bring about negative consequences.<sup>28</sup>

26 The statement that the sultan was the only one aware of the sinning of the prince is a rather crafty interpretation of the matter on two grounds. First, it projects the image of Süleyman as the possessor of privileged information that was not available to others. Espoused with the epithet "The King of Kings of Religion," the reference to the secret knowledge in the text suggests that the sultan was blessed by divinely provided knowledge. Secondly, 'Arif's rendering of the incident absolves others, above all the Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, who was possibly 'Arif's main protector in the Ottoman court and was accused of being the mastermind of a plot against the prince.

27 TSMK, H. 1517, f. 571v.

28 Here there might be a reference to the common saying of "putting one's finger in the milk" or "putting one's finger in yoghurt (culture)". Both sayings refer to the interference in others' business often with malicious intentions of spoiling it. It would be useful to check this



Aside from the narration of the incident in verse, 'Arif's team of artists also represented the event visually. However, the related image is not placed in chronological accordance with the text. Instead, the representation of the Prince's prior and, in comparison, eventless visit to his father in 1548 before an earlier Persian campaign includes elements that strongly suggest that the true intention was to depict the visit where the Prince was executed.<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 7.1)

In the image, we see the sultan with a bow and arrow in his hand and his torso, in a gesture of rejection, turned away from his son, who has knelt down respectfully before him. This depiction follows in striking closeness the description of the incident in the Venetian report, which further dramatized the encounter by adding the reprimanding words of Sultan Süleyman while holding his bow and arrow. The only difference is the setting: the visit seemingly depicted in the *Sulaiman-nama* takes place in a kiosk rather than in a tent. Still, the partition of the different sections of the royal tent mentioned in Busbecq's account as well as in both of the Venetian reports is paralleled here by the placement of the sultan and his son in two distinct sections of the room. Here we should note that in no other reception scene in 'Arif's book can we see Sultan Süleyman with his head turned away from his guest, or with a bow and arrow, well-known symbols of justice.

In this way, 'Arif's account in his *Sulaimann-nama* confirms the involvement of the mute executioners who threw a lasso and the sultan's presence in a separated part of the same tent. The reason for the sultan's ordering his son's execution is described as a great sin of which only the sultan was aware. In addition, we are told that the scale of the sin justified its fatal punishment, and its nature made it inadvisable to discuss. Such an explication makes it more than likely that it was Prince Mustafa's disobedience to his father in the form of treason—the culmination of a major sin in Islam and the most serious crime against the head of state—that was the sultan's reason behind his son's execution.

This information is certainly not original or more detailed than what we can already read from the descriptions provided in other sources, in this case the foreign reports and the poems written in reaction to the event. However, the Ottoman *Shahnama*'s confirmation of the information on the prince's execution is very significant because it is the only quasi-direct report of the event

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possibility of meaning against the history of the saying to confirm its usage in the 16th century. However, this is a task beyond the scope of this project.

29 Esin Atıl, who had sensed the relation of this image with Mustafa's tragic death, noted, "it is as if the sultan has a premonition of the death of Şehzade Mustafa, who sits behind him, trusting and obedient." (Atıl, 196) My position concerning the image is much stronger here, and extends further than the foreshadowing suggested in Atıl's sensitive interpretation.



FIGURE 7.1 *Mustafa with his father Sultan Süleyman, Topkapı Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 1517, fol. 477v.*

on which all the other information we have is from sources that involve two or more people in the chain of transmission. 'Arif's working method of presenting the drafts of his work to the sultan and continuing with the final production only after his approval makes the involvement of the sultan in the *Sulaiman-nama*'s text more direct.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, we can comfortably say that it is the version of the palace that 'Arif voices in the *Sulaiman-nama*, albeit in his own authorial style.

Yet, we might ask ourselves: is 'Arif's proximity to the sultan and his Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, who were two of the protagonists of the incident as well as being the patrons of the *shehnameci*, really an advantage? Or does it make

30 For the working method of 'Arif see Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis of Sultan Süleyman*, chapter 1.

'Arif's account too partial and therefore, untrustworthy? Like the *Timurnama* of Hatifi and the Safavid *Shahnama* of Qasimi, 'Arif's Ottoman *Shahnama*, too, strongly "bears the traces of the political use of history put into practice", as Michele Bernardini observes in one of his important contributions to the study of Hatifi and Qasimi's works.<sup>31</sup> In the same essay, Bernardini sympathizes with Jean Aubin's judgment of Hatifi's and Qasimi's dynastic *Shahnamas* written for their Timurid and Safavid patrons as having "limited historical value."<sup>32</sup> Should we assess the *Sulaiman-nama* similarly, that is of limited historical value; not just because of its lofty language, but because it is purely panegyric?

### *Sulaiman-nama* as an Historical Source: Document or Text?

According to one of the most prestigious statesmen of Sultan Süleyman's time, Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi (ca. 1490–1567), no writing or verse composition of his time other than 'Arif's *Shahnama* was of "true exactitude" (*sahih al-ʿayār*).<sup>33</sup> In the same breath, Celalzade praises 'Arif's style, comparing his verse to precious pearls and the line and dots of his writing to the elegance of the nymphs in the realm of the sublime Garden of Paradise.

It is clear that for Celalzade, literary form and historical value could exist together. It was in fact preferable that it did so: he himself wrote in the elaborated and artful style of his time on matters of the state and praises 'Arif, who did the same in his universal history. In the same sentence Celalzade also states that the intentions of the rest of the writers of his time are too ambiguous to be trusted.<sup>34</sup>

Celalzade's comparative assessment of 'Arif's *Shahnama* comes in the introduction of his ambitious project titled *Ṭabaḳātü'l-Memālik ve Derecātü'l-Mesālik* ('Echelons of Ottoman dominions and hierarchy of paths', hereafter referred to as *Ṭabaḳāt*) which was left unfinished upon his death.<sup>35</sup> Aside from his high esteem of the *shehnameci*, his words reveal a sharp awareness on his

31 Michele Bernardini. "Hâtifi's *Timûrnâme*h and Qâsimî's *Shâhnâme*-yi *Ismâ'il*: Considerations for a double critical edition", 7–8.

32 Ibid., 7 and Jean Aubin, "Chroniques persanes et relations italiennes. Notes sur les sources narratives du règne de Šâh Esmâ'il I<sup>er</sup>", 247–59; esp. 251.

33 Celalzade Mustafa, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân Ḳânûnis von 1520 bis 1557*, f. 10v.

34 Literally, Celalzade says that their lot of ambitions are not seen (or witnessed) in the mirror of reliability. Celalzade Mustafa, f. 10v.

35 For an examination of this work and Celalzade's career in general see Kaya Şahin, *In the service of the Ottoman Empire: Celalzade Mustafâ* (ca. 1490–1567). For an evaluation of *Ṭabaḳāt* within the context of Ottoman historiography see the same author's

part of the multiplicity of contemporaneous accounts on the Ottoman state of affairs and history. It seems that these accounts represented the “truths” in ways that are different from the way he appreciated them and from the way they are narrated in ‘Arif’s work. As such, in the analogy he makes between a written account and a metal alloy, he says that they did not possess the correct—or acceptable—percentage of truth in their composition.<sup>36</sup>

His introductory remarks also reflect Celalzade’s unease at this multiplicity. His confidence in ‘Arif is defined against his mistrust of the rest of the writers whose motives for writing were not clear to him. Celalzade was the most senior member of the sultan’s ruling elite during most of Süleyman’s reign, and it is obvious that he considered the *Shahnama* writer in his team, so-to-speak, unlike the other writers.

Like Celalzade, who held the office of the Chancellor for 23 years between 1534 and 1557, ‘Arif also worked for the Ottoman state and aimed to glorify its ruler, Sultan Süleyman.<sup>37</sup> It is apparent that for Celalzade, the truth value of a text depended on its writer’s intentions, which needed to be plainly observable by the reader. The fact that the Ottoman *Shahnama* was the result of an assignment to compose a laudatory work for the Ottoman sultan Süleyman confirmed that ‘Arif had the correct intentions and deserved Celalzade’s confidence.

Do we, however, with respect to our own criteria of “objectivity” and “perspective”, find the report of the sultan’s *shehnameci* trustworthy? Could the volume on Sultan Süleyman’s reign that is written on his order to glorify him offer the researcher reliable material to work with? Can we, in other words, use ‘Arif’s *Shahnama* and especially its last volume, the *Sulaiman-nama*, not merely as an interesting text but also as an historical document?

“Thucydides is not a colleague”, said Nicole Loraux more than thirty years ago, and with her article of the same title changed the orientation of ancient historical studies almost single-handedly. For Loraux, Thucydides’ History was “not a document in the modern sense of the word, but rather a text, an ancient

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“Imperialism, bureaucratic consciousness and the historian’s craft: A reading of Celälzâde Muşafâ’s *Ṭabaḳât ül-Memâlik*”.

36 This metaphor is made by the term “*sahih al-‘ayar*”, translated as “true exactitude” previously.

37 The first reference to ‘Arif on the palace payroll dates to 31 October 1545. Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and intellectual in the Ottoman Empire, the historian Mustafa Âli*, 30, n. 46. The final drafts of the existing three volumes of his *Shahnama* all date from 1558 while his *Vak’a-yi Sultan Bayezid ma’a Selim Han* was completed on 2 June 1559.

text, which is first of all a discourse situated within the domain of rhetoric.”<sup>38</sup> In this way, she forcefully reminded the historians of ancient texts that we cannot evaluate them with our own modern categories, disregarding the context in and the conventions with which they were produced. Writing not in Ancient Greece but in the pre-modern world, is ‘Arif our colleague? Is ‘Arif’s *Shahnama* a text or a document?

Let us start by replying the first question: No, ‘Arif is not our colleague. Neither is Celalzade for that matter. I have already argued that ‘Arif’s artful and at times abstruse language does not diminish the historical usefulness of his work. It merely reflects the generic convention of the literary culture in which he was educated, living, and working. As we have seen in the example of Prince Mustafa’s execution, the complexity of the language was even used to communicate information that had acquired taboo status.

‘Arif’s proximity to and dependent relationship with the protagonist of his work, that is Sultan Süleyman, while it would be a serious obstacle for a modern historian, does not make the work of a past historian less interesting for modern historical research. In fact and ironically, it is the overtly subjective and eulogist position of ‘Arif’s work that makes it a particularly reliable historical source. Compared with any other source of Süleyman’s reign, the “biased” character of ‘Arif’s *Shahnama*, and hence its final volume the *Sulaiman-nama*, is not assumed but given from the beginning. There is no pretence; ‘Arif as the *shehnameci* of Sultan Süleyman was always on the side of his patron and sultan.

More significantly, ‘Arif’s narrative—especially in the *Sulaiman-nama* but also in the other volumes of his *Shahnama*—was not only one that was *approved* by the sultan, but it was also what he and his close circle in the court, including individuals like Celalzade and Rüstem Pasha, *wanted to project* to their contemporaneous and future readers as the essential truth. As such, the first Ottoman *shehnameci* ‘Arif’s narrative is particularly valuable as it came directly from the very centre of Ottoman power roughly between the years 1545–1560. In this respect, his output provides a privileged insight to the mentality of the centre of power constituted by the sultan and the core of his court. It reveals their priorities and evokes their fears. It offers a unique opportunity to evaluate the style and the parameters of Ottoman dynastic self-presentation and to observe what was considered necessary to register on paper and forward to dynastic memory and how this was appropriately done.<sup>39</sup>

38 Nicole Loraux, “Thucydide n’est pas un collègue”.

39 We have to acknowledge that reading ‘Arif’s work—or any other work produced for the palace for that matter—as a singular reflection of the culture of Sultan Süleyman’s court

In his *History and memory*, Jacques Le Goff takes Loraux's critique further and writes that "every document is a monument or a text, and it is never "pure," that is, never purely objective."<sup>40</sup> In this way, while he agrees with Loraux's critical stance and shares her sensitivity for the context in which the "ancient text" was produced, by extending her critique, he undermines her distinction between a text and a document. I would like to undermine the distinction from the other end by saying that every text is a document. That is, every text is a potential document revealing the mentality of its writer and the parameters of his cultural environment.

As such, the main difference between a narrative document and an archival one is the uniqueness of the former. As a cultural artefact, the narrative is one of its kind and unrepeatable. While an archival document also has to conform to an ideologically conditioned format and hence is never *completely* objective, either, its limits of subjective expression are drawn tighter. Whereas in the tax register or population census authorship is repressed, in a poem or a history it is claimed at times even vaingloriously. Subjectivity is the proud nature of the narrative and it is this lack of objectivity, and the abundance of "impurity" if you will, that potentially adds value to it as an historical document.

A text like 'Arif's *Sulaiman-nama* becomes a document for historical research when we take it on its own terms, taking into account all its partiality and letting its visual and textual language construct its own narrative. In the case of 'Arif's *Shahnama*, like its inspirational model Firdausi's *Shahnama*, though in a lesser degree, the narrative involves myth alongside history.

### Myth or History: Jamshid's Cup in Süleyman's Court

In the *Sulaiman-nama* one of the most intriguing images is the representation of Sultan Süleyman sitting in the princely position on a raised throne holding a reddish, shallow, delicate-looking cup. The cup seems to be filled with

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would run the risk of characterizing it as an artefact reflective of a homogeneous courtly environment. The members as well as the intellectual trends of the court naturally shifted in time. In addition, the preferences and opinions of the same individual are prone to change during his life time due to personal and circumstantial reasons. Nevertheless and with caution, we can say that 'Arif's *Shahnama* projected one of the most dominant world visions cultivated in the Ottoman court of the 1550s.

40 Jacques Le Goff, *History and memory*, 112.



a dark red wine “associated with Perso-Turkic princely traditions.”<sup>41</sup> (Fig. 7.2) The sultan appears to be raising the cup towards his four viziers who are all standing with their hands clutched in front of them in a respectful position and in ceremonial attire.

The scene represents a ceremony at the court held for the reception of the Cup of Jamshid, which was presented to the sultan by Iskender Pasha on the eve of the Nahçevan campaign against Safavid Iran. This is the same military expedition at the beginning of which Sultan Süleyman ordered his oldest son's execution.<sup>42</sup>

The image is organized in three vertical sections not equal in size. The widths of the sections appear to follow the hierarchical order based on the importance of the figures they host. The section in the centre where the sultan alone is placed is the widest. In size it is followed by the section on the viewer's left where the viziers are placed with Iskender Pasha standing closest to the sultan. The sections on both sides also host two palace servants and an individually placed figure at the bottom: a gardener in the section on the left and a doorkeeper on the right. As always in similar court scenes in the *Sulaiman-nama*, here too all the figures are grouped together according to their ranks and positions in the ideal Ottoman world order they represent.

From the text, we learn that the cup was as old as humanity itself. Adam had seen it in the Garden of Paradise and Kayumars had adorned his throne with it.<sup>43</sup> After Jamshid, Zahhak usurped it until Faridun took it from him. Iraj was the next to hold it followed by Salm and Tur. It was Manuchihr who then received his—kingly—lustre (*tab*) from the clear glow (*raushan*) of its crystal. He was followed by Kavus and Tus. Finally it was Kay Khusräu who made it into a World-showing (*giti numā*) cup and placed it firmly on his throne. Alexander the Great and Anushirvan are also listed in this lineage of mythic/historic kings, all of whom are also heroes of Firdausi's *Shahnama*.<sup>44</sup>

As 'Arif elaborates on the royal Iranian lineage of great kings, the cup becomes an emblematic part of the paraphernalia of kingship. Its brightness is likened to the sun (both as *khurshid* and as *aftab*), and its light is associated

41 Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, image, & cosmos in medieval Islam*, 93. For a masterly treatment of textual and visual semantics of colour related to the cup of Jamshid/Solomon, see Berlekamp, 93–97.

42 Atil, 215, mentions Iskender Pasha's seizing the cup in the Georgian castle of Ardanuchi and the diplomatic correspondence with Shah Tahmasb, who finally yields his claim to the cup. For more details on the story of the cup see H. 1517, 542b–557b.

43 TSMK, H. 1517, f. 556v.

44 TSMK, H. 1517, ff. 542r, 542v.



FIGURE 7.2 *Sultan Süleyman with the cup of Jamshid, Topkapı Sarayı Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 1517, fol. 557r.*



with the divine light of kingly fortune (*farr*). The passing of the cup from one king to the next while always retaining its lustre and power demonstrates the eternal nature of the cup—and of the concept of kingship that it symbolizes—as opposed to the vulnerable mortality even of the greatest kings.

While its enchanting quality creates awe in all of its beholders, each king makes use of it according to his own capacities. We read that it became a sign of Manuchihr's kingly lustre, a trophy between Jamshid, Zahhak, and later Faridun, an object of envy for Salm and Tur, and a mirror-like vessel that showed the world for Kay Khusrāu. We learn that Hippocrates told his shah about the condition of the stars, using it as an astrolabe.<sup>45</sup> Its usage as a mirror showing realities unrevealed to the naked eye links it to the idea of sacred/secret knowledge that God shared with Adam and through him with a selected lineage of humanity.<sup>46</sup>

What happened to this cup is a mystery. In fact, even its temporary appearance in the court of Sultan Süleyman is not attested by any other source but 'Arif's *Shahnama*. Whether there was such a cup which was thought to be the Cup of Jamshid, found and presented to Sultan Süleyman by one conveniently named Iskender (Alexander) and then lost enigmatically or not, by writing about it and representing it with an image, the *Sulaiman-nama* "materializes a myth."<sup>47</sup> From the point of view of historical research, this effort to materialize a myth in text and image is at least as interesting, and perhaps even more intriguing, than finding out if the story of the Cup in the court was true.

### Conclusion: Materializing the Myth

The idea of materializing a myth was not original to Sultan Süleyman's reign. In her *Wonder, image and cosmos in medieval Islam*, Persis Berlekamp shows how a cup known as the "Cup of Khusrāw" "generates in the modern world an oddly familiar type of discourse."<sup>48</sup> The discourse to which she refers pertains to the "elusive power of the world-showing cup."<sup>49</sup> We should add that here, in

45 TSMK, H. 1517, f. 556v.

46 For a discussion of the symbols of authority of the prophet-kings in *Anbiyanama*, the first volume of 'Arif's *Shahnama-yi 'Osman* and their relationship to the image of Sultan Süleyman, see Sinem Eryılmaz, "From Adam to Süleyman".

47 I borrow this terminology from an article by Cornell H. Fleischer, "Of gender and servitude, ca. 1520: Two petitions of the Kul Kizi of Bergama to Sultan Süleyman", 149.

48 Berlekamp, *Wonder, image, & cosmos in medieval Islam*, 95.

49 Ibid.

the pre-modern Ottoman context where we see a similar cup, its elusive power is directly associated with the contemporaneous sultan. In this framework and through the rhetoric—and possibly the physical—medium of the cup, Sultan Süleyman became the rightful heir to the mythic Iranian kings while simultaneously drawing a magical power from the mythic legacy of the cup.

Once again it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves that neither Thucydides nor 'Arif is a colleague, and that they belong to a cultural world that differed from ours in many aspects. To understand this cultural world, where myth and reality were not irreconcilable opposites and rather than undermining one another, they could be used in collaboration to construct a different type of "truth", it would be useful to look at a different attempt at materializing the myth.

About forty years before the narration of the story of the Cup in the *Sulaiman-nama*, Sultan Süleyman's father, Selim, ordered a "servant girl" (*kul kızı*) to travel from one town to another with goods worth 1000 aspers. "Would anyone stop her, interfere with her, and molest her? Let us see how things are," Sultan Selim reportedly thought aloud.<sup>50</sup> Needless to say, the woman suffered many physical injuries and lost the money entrusted to her during the several journeys she took to satisfy her sultan's whim of materializing the myth of an idealized peace in his realm. In fact, it is because of her petitions to Sultan Süleyman for compensation that we know of her case.

In his essay on this curious archival finding concerning the unfortunate yet courageous "servant girl", Cornell Fleischer writes that "such a gesture that sought to materialize the mythic seems consonant with the spirit of an age that, in its mystical and militaristic ferment and millenarian expectations and anxieties, looked forward to the imminent realization, on earth, of religious and philosophical dreams."<sup>51</sup>

Forty years later, in a grand project of universal history in five volumes, 'Arif attempts to materialize another myth, this time for Sultan Süleyman. In his Ottoman *Shahnama*, he goes beyond the mere borrowing of the bare format of Firdausi's epic and the stereotypical epithets of his heroes. In its stead, 'Arif composes a daring parallel-response, a *nazira*, to the Persian mythic-history by constructing an Ottoman mythic-history in a more Islamic vein than the Persian master did in his classic.

Indeed, the legacy 'Arif and his team of artists wanted to construct and preserve for eternity was one where Sultan Süleyman achieved the status of a prophetic king similar to those whose lives are explained in the first volume of

<sup>50</sup> Fleischer, "Of gender and servitude", 145.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 149.

the same Ottoman *Shahnama* project (*Anbiyanama*).<sup>52</sup> In fact, maintaining a much deliberated coherency from the first to the last volume in his work, 'Arif openly states in the *Sulaiman-nama* that Sultan Süleyman was the seal of kingship and faith (*shahi va kish*).<sup>53</sup>

In this framework, while Süleyman is projected as the last manifestation of prophetic kingship, the Cup of Jamshid becomes the symbolic medium through which he inherited Iranian mythic kingship. The reference to the cup as an item entrusted for safekeeping (*amanat*) until it passed to the possession of Sultan Süleyman confirms the rightfulness of this inheritance.<sup>54</sup> In this way, 'Arif indicates that Süleyman's selected kingship and divine light or *farr* was willed by God—the divine source in the Muslim context—from the beginning of history.

It would not make much sense to argue that in fact the Ottoman sultan Süleyman was *not* selected by God as the last prophet-king. Rather, it would be more worthwhile to understand the political circumstances and the intellectual and cultural environment that made such a vision of the sultan possible. Likewise, it does not further historical research to ignore 'Arif's Ottoman *Shahnama* including naturally its last volume, the *Sulaiman-nama*, as mere panegyric composed to please the sultan's ears.

In fact, it has already been stated that the *Sulaiman-nama*, which included a disproportionate amount of information on the running of the state and the performance of the court, was neither a mere panegyric nor a straightforward history of Sultan Süleyman's reign. The presence of the particular versions of disputed stories such as that of the execution of Prince Mustafa on the one hand, and the information on the state and ceremonial on the other, suggest that 'Arif's book was intended as a document that the palace wanted to pass on to its own future generations both as a memorial and a model for emulation. Hence, it would be more useful to study this multifaceted source to decipher the messages that Sultan Süleyman and the leading members of his court wanted to project through the *shehnameci*'s work in the 1550s, as well as to gain insight into the cultural and political environment that the Ottoman *Shahnama*'s text and its images reflect, not so deliberately but accidentally, as a natural consequence of their production.

52 Sinem Eryilmaz, "From Adam to Süleyman".

53 TSMK, H. 1517, f. 6r.

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