The Confessions of an Ottoman 'Irregular': Self-Representation and Ottoman Interpretive Communities in the Nineteenth Century

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Bir Osmanlı Başıbozuğunun İtirafları: 19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kişinin Kendini Temsili ve Yorumlayıcı Çevreler

Öz ■ Bu makale pek alışılmadık bir Osmanlı tarafından yazılan otobiyografik bir eseri incelemektedir: Çok az tanınan Anadolulu bir başıbozuk, Deli Mustafa (d. 1791/2), ya da kendisini el yazması metninde tanıttığı isimle Kabudlı el-Haccî Mustafa Vasfî Efendi. Eser paramiliter birliklere katılan sayısız Müslüman köylünün karşı karşıya kaldığı çalkantılı günlük hayat ve manevi ikilemlere dair nadir bir bakış sunmaktadır. Deli Mustafa'nın anlatısı ve öz-biçim verme stratejileri paramiliter gruplara hizmet eden sıradan Müslümanların Osmanlı tarihinin bu fırtınalı dönemi boyunca geçimlerini sağlamak için ne yapmak zorunda kaldıklarını, ve daha da önemlisi şaibeli ve çekişmeli hayat biçimlerini nasıl açıkladıkları ve meşrulaştırdıklarını anlamamıza yardımcı olmaktadır. Mustafa'nın anlatısının doğruluğunu tartışmaktan daha önemli olan onun – veya metni derleyenin – yazınsal seçimleri, hedeflediği okuyucu kitlesi, ve imparatorluğun doğu sınırlarından batı sınırlarına doğru hareket ettikçe şiddeti betimleme tonunun zaman ve mekanda nasıl değiştiğidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ben-anlatıları (ego-document), Yunan İsyanı, Dinî gruplar arası şiddet, Eşkıyalık, Düzensiz Askerler (Başıbozuklar), Osmanlı Serhadleri, Kabudlı Vasfî Efendi, Rumeli

This paper will analyze an autobiographical account attributed to a very unlikely Ottoman author: an obscure Anatolian cavalryman (*deli*) Deli Mustafa (b. 1791/2), or Kabudlı el-Haccî Mustafa Vasfî Efendi, as he is fashioned on the title

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page of the only surviving manuscript of his narrative.[1] In it, Deli Mustafa sets out to tell about the military campaigns he took part in between 1801/2 (AH 1216) and 1832/3 (AH 1248) although the story cuts off some time in 1825. His narrative provides rare glimpses into the tumultuous everyday life and moral dilemmas faced by countless Ottoman irregular soldiery, or "military laborers," most of whom hailed from Muslim peasantry and joined paramilitary bands either because of the opportunities such pursuits provided or because in this way they could protect their kin and communities from similar bands that roamed the Empire.[2] Deli Mustafa's narrative and self-fashioning strategies help us understand what common Muslim men serving in irregular military forces had to do to make a living during this tumultuous period of Ottoman history, and most importantly, how they explained and legitimated their precarious and contentious way of life.

This paper will therefore examine how the author inscribes his place in Ottoman society as he describes his long journey and adventures from the eastern Anatolian frontier west to the Rumeli frontier as an itinerant Ottoman soldier. Deli Mustafa's ego-document is rare in the sense that it points to how someone from "below" coped with and responded to the fickle patronage of his superiors, how he explained the moral compromises and violence that marked his way of life, as well as how he fashioned himself (both materially and symbolically) as a lower-order Ottoman warrior with an apparent knack for telling a good story. His account captures the options available to those who suffered the consequences of intra-elite intrigues plaguing the Ottoman war machine. That being said, however, men like him were not passive spectators who accepted their situation as *fait accompli*. Deli

1 Leiden University Library, Ms.Or. 1551. The manuscript is dated 22 *zi'l-ka'de* 1249 (April 2, 1834). It was translated into English and commented upon by J. Schmidt, "The Adventures of an Ottoman Horseman: The Autobiography of Kabudlı Vasfî Efendi, 1800-1825," in his, *The Joys of Philology. Studies in Ottoman Literature, History and Orientalism (1500-1923)* (İstanbul: İsis Press, 2002), 166-286. In this paper I will be referring both to Schmidt's translation and to the actual manuscript, especially when it comes to the wording in Ottoman Turkish that might reveal important nuances of meaning. I have chosen to refer to the narrator as "Deli Mustafa" (which can also mean "Crazy Mustafa") since he refers to himself as such in the narrative as opposed to using the his embellished name (El-Haccî) signed at the beginning of the text. As I will discuss below, the authorship of this account is in question.

2 In terms of nomenclature for different types of military forces in Ottoman history, there were many types of "irregular," mercenary-like forces such as *deli*s, *sarıca*, *levend*, *sekbân*, etc. that the Ottomans used in warfare. For more on these types of forces, dubbed most recently as "military laborers" by Virginia Aksan because of the blurry boundaries among these different categories, see *idem*., *Ottoman Wars, 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow, 2007).

Mustafa's account provides rare insight into how violence during this period of Ottoman history and economies related to it mediated social relations. In this context, it opens vistas onto the nature of power that trans-regional, itinerant military support networks wielded against both their superiors as well as local communities throughout the Ottoman realm. In order to highlight this correlation between endemic violence and the multivalent exchange of material goods, commodities, and professional status as well as symbolic goods such as loyalty, honor, and moral capital that Deli Mustafa refers to, in this paper I will use the notion of "economies of violence," a concept that I have developed in the context of my work on banditry and endemic violence in turn-of-the-19th-century Rumeli.[3]

Can one derive a sense of what "Ottoman" or "Ottomanness" meant to a low-ranking irregular from reading Deli Mustafa's account? Would such a definition pivot upon loyalty to the state, and if so, can we discern what loyalty meant to him? Is there a distinct Muslim, itinerant warrior community one can decipher from the audience to which he speaks? How does the narrator see himself and his social status vis-à-vis imperial and local elites, other Muslim groups, and Christian communities in Anatolia and Rumeli? What kind of sensibilities and textual repertoires do the text's recurrent tropes of violence draw upon? And finally, how does the narrator use religiously-charged discourse against Christians to bolster his position and claims among his own co-religionists?[4]

These are some of the questions that I hope to adress in this paper. It is important to preface the discussion, however, with the caveat that this essay will address the sometimes gruesome aspects of ritualistic violence described by the narrator that marked the lives of Ottoman soldiery and subjects during the Greek Revolution (1821-1832). It will examine how Deli Mustafa frames the stories about violence he inflicted upon non-Muslims and Muslims alike, and how he juxtaposed them to the descriptions of the exact same type of violence Greek insurgents tried to visit upon him, his comrades, and Muslim communities in Rumeli.

3 See T.U. Esmer, "Economies of Violence, Governance, and the Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Banditry in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1800," *Past & Present*, Vol. 224 (August, 2014), *forthcoming*.

4 I refrain from using the term "identity" as a category of analysis in this essay and give preference to less congested terms such as self-fashioning, self-representation, social/spatial location, and commonality and inter-connectedness. The term identity bears a multivalent, even contradictory theoretical burden given that identity cannot capture the multiple, fluid, fragmented, and negotiated ways the narrator talks about self and his connections with other groups in his ego-document. For more on moving beyond identity as a social science register, see R. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: 2004).

Rather than debating the veracity of Mustafa's jumbled historical account full of inaccuracies and contradictions, this essay focuses on his—or the compiler of the text's—editorial choices, his target audiences, as well as how the tone of his description of violence changes over time and space as he travelled from the eastern to western frontiers of the Empire in order to determine what was at stake for such an obscure author and his intended audiences to tell his story.

I. The Narrator, His Text, and His Interpretative Community

Nothing is known about Deli Mustafa aside from what he—or a scribe to whom he most likely dictated his account—writes in the manuscript. From the account, one learns that he and his father were professional, itinerant cavalrymen (*deli*) who traveled together first from their native village of Kabud (near Tokat in Anatolia's mid-Black Sea region) to the eastern Anatolian frontier to engage in skirmishes with unruly *paşa*s, "schismatics" on the Georgian frontier, "rebellious" Kurds, and Russian forces across the border. From there, they travelled west to Rumeli first to participate in an imperial campaign that hunted down the rebellious governor Tepedelenli Ali Paşa (d. 1822) in Yanya (Ioannia in Greece) and then on to the Morea to fight insurgents during the Greek Revolution.

Deli Mustafa's narrative is conceptualized as a chronicle in the traditional style: on the title page, the author states that by telling the stories about the countries and provinces he travelled and the war and death he witnessed ("…*il ü vilāyeti, cengi ü fāli birbir nakl idüp bir tevârîh itdüm*…"),[5] he wrote a chronicle (*tevârîh*) covering the years 1216 (1801-2) to 1248 (1832-3), but the text misses its final pages and ends abruptly sometime around 1825. In terms of its value as a source of information on contemporary events, his vast descriptions of unsuccessful Ottoman campaigns against Greek insurgents (*e.g.*, the infamous Battle of the Moral Pass, today Dervenakia) provide not only facts but an extraordinary perspective on crucial details that the imperial chronicler Ahmed Cevdet, one of our main Ottoman sources on this and other battles of the Greek Revolution, simply glosses over as embarrassing details of late Ottoman history.[6] Nevertheless, as Jan Schmidt points out, it is in his often emotional autobiographical passages that Deli Mustafa was at his best as a story-teller who brings us closer to the life of common peasants who filled the lower order of the Ottoman war machine, and one can easily imagine how he captivated his audiences with these or similar tales around a campfire, in a coffee-house, or in the confines of acquaintances' homes.[7]

5 Ms. Or. 1551,1a.

6 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 172.

7 Ibid., 178-179.

In her work regarding the rising number of common men who took up the pen to write histories in the Ottoman Levant during the eighteenth century, Dana Sajdi argues that this phenomenon can be understood as the "trespass of commoners and marginals" (both Muslim as well as Christian) into the elite space of historiography, a space traditionally reserved for scholars and statesmen.[8] Deli Mustafa's ego-document, though expressed in the context of a traditional chronicle, must also be considered representative of larger institutional and social change concomitant to shifts in inter-imperial power constellations that were characteristic of the turn of the nineteenth century. The fact that someone of such humble origins would feel the need to have his stories recorded reflects not only a growing self-awareness among the Ottoman population at the time but also the desire of these new authors to negotiate for (or in) new social positions. Thus, Deli Mustafa's account along with those of his contemporaries can be taken as a reflection of both a "new social order" and a new "sociability."[9]

Sajdi also argues that new *littérateur*s from the period appropriated formal chronicle-writing by imposing old literary habits (popular genres such as epic story-telling with its particular linguistic constructions and rhyme patterns foreign to the scholarly chronicle) combined with their new cultural wealth onto a genre that used to be out of their reach, thus creating a new cultural product.[10] One can also see a mixing of genres in Deli Mustafa's narrative because the author sometimes addresses his audience directly, which suggests that he actually did not write this book himself but dictated a series of oral accounts to a scribe of limited literacy.[11] Although a large part of the narrative has the feel of a late-medieval Ottoman chronicle or a *gâzî* epic such as the *Saltuk-nâme*, replete with accounts of plundering and slaughtering "menacing infidels" (in this case, Ottoman Greek subjects) and priests, this paper will discuss

8 D. Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Middle East* (Berkeley: Stanford University, 2013). I thank Dana Sajdi for sharing drafts of chapters of her forthcoming book at the "Eighteenth-Century Crossroads in Ottoman Studies" workshop at Central European University in Budapest, May 2011. See also Sajdi's contribution in this volume.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Clues like these as well as the way in which he addresses his audience directly (*e.g.*, "dear friends," 4b, 25b or "now listen," in one instance followed by "he [i.e., Deli Mustafa] said..." 57a) suggest that his stories were dictated or narrated, which would also account for the lack of a flowing structure of the text as a whole. As Schmidt points out, the text is written in lapidary, colloquial Turkish in a phonetic style with inconsistent spelling and limited knowledge of Arabic and Persian. The vocabulary used by the author is also limited. Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 177-179.

how the narrator uses these established tropes from older genres to bolster his status and make new claims to his Muslim audience.

Deli Mustafa's narrative presents an interesting snapshot of a broader Muslim, military laborer community –and by extension, Muslim peasantry– around the turn of the nineteenth century. The concept of interpretative communities, that is micro-societies organized around a common understanding of "texts," is central to understanding the tropes and narrative strategies that the narrator employs.[12] A "text" did not necessarily have to be a literary artifact; it could also be a group experience (such as that of Ottoman military laborers coping with unemployment and fickle patrons or their crucial role in imperial campaigns), an individual life story (such as the life of Deli Mustafa who draws on older stories of warriors and saints to couch his own experiences and claims), or simply a term or concept. The participants in such a community, many of whom were listeners rather than readers, shared views and experiences that allowed them to coalesce around particular stories and texts and determine their meaning, claims, and practical implications.[13] Despite the appearance of the printing press in the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was a cultural milieu with restricted literacy, and society traditionally placed a special importance on the public performance of texts as a means of disseminating information to those who could not read.[14] Therefore, Mustafa's narrative can be approached as a repository of cultural values, concerns, contentions, claims, and honor codes shared within a large group of Ottoman society (itinerant military networks) that are often described by others in predictable ways (for imperial chroniclers irregular bands were almost synonymous to bandits) rather than on their own terms.[15] By keeping in mind that the narrative was designed for oral delivery, one can begin to imagine how a like-minded audience around Deli Mustafa dictated how he portrayed and fashioned himself and the larger profile of itinerant soldiers.

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12 On the notion of interpretative communities in the early modern Ottoman context see T. Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto: Stanford University, 2011), 26-27.

13 Ibid., 27.

14 Ibid., 27-28.

15 For newer interpretations of irregular warriors (e.g., *sekbân*) that places their ascendancy in Ottoman military campaigns and politics starting around the turn of the seventeenth century into broader financial and environmental transformations, see Baki Tezcan *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2010) as well as Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011).

The narrative strategies of the author suggest that his world was bound by an intricate set of beliefs and values – an ethos or unwritten code that revolved around notions of religious duty, honor, as well as vengeance. The religiosity and honor codes apparent in Deli Mustafa's narrative had a special flavor to it reminiscent of other borderlands of the Ottoman world in previous centuries. This preoccupation with honor was not unique to Ottoman soldiery but was typical of interpretative communities inhabiting contested borderlands and frontiers that also served as a way of justifying their less-than-holy ways in the eyes of their own coreligionists.[16] However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this borderland ethos became a fact of life *within* Ottoman hinterlands as Rumeli was gradually transformed from a "core" Ottoman province into a borderland contested not only by imperial rivals, but now, also by Ottoman subjects.[17]

II. Ottoman Irregulars and Their Superiors: The Trope of Unemployment and Victimhood

Among countless hardships that Deli Mustafa and his companions were subjected to on account of their military superiors, unemployment was the most common one featured in his account. The narrator's discussion of this ubiquitous problem hints at how irregular soldiers may have understood their position as both contested commodities in inter-elite imperial intrigues and victims of the same. It is in the context of discussing unemployment that Deli Mustafa also reflects on what he and others like him consider was the "legitimate" as opposed to "illegitimate" plundering of local communities and boundaries between banditry and the necessity of survival.

16 For instance, Wendy Bracewell provides a cogent analysis of the codes of religious duty, honor, and vengeance that informed the behavior of the Uskoks of Senj, Slavic, Christian pirate/bandits on the Triplex Confinium (i.e., borders among the Venetian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empie) who fashioned their contentious pirate activities against Muslims as well as Christians as a crusading war of faith against infidel Ottoman Muslim and Ottoman Christian "schismatics" (i.e., Orthodox Serbs, Vlachs, and Martolos). See W. Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1992), 159-164.

17 For a discussion of the overall significance of the transformation of Rumeli into a contested, inter-imperial borderland starting in the eighteenth century, see T.U. Esmer, "Economies of Violence..." See also, *idem.*, 'A Culture of Rebellion: Networks of Violence and Competing Discourses of Justice in the Ottoman Empire, 1790-1808' (University of Chicago, Chicago, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009).

Deli Mustafa begins his manuscript by describing his journey from north-central Anatolia eastwards towards Erzurum in search of employment. It was in Erzurum sometime in 1816 that he and his companions came into the employment of a certain Baba Paşa who sent them to the Georgian borderland in the retinues of a Yegan Paşa and *bölükbaşı* Mahmud Kiran to lay siege to the fortress of Ahıska occupied by a *paşa* who was declared an outlaw by İstanbul.[18] He notes that they were ultimately successful in their overall objective of killing the outlaw, duly sending his head to İstanbul, and retaking fortresses occupied by rebels in the region. However, things went awry when the local Ahıskans (Turkic groups now living in Georgia and Ukraine) rebelled and captured their commanders and then lay siege to the Ardanuç castle where the narrator claims he and other irregulars tried to resist assailants for over 40 days.[19]

Deli Mustafa's description of events is generally jumbled and contradictory, and one cannot use his account to construe facts about these encounters per se, but his narration of recurring dynamics and intrigues as well as his responses to them tell us quite a lot about how such men understood and responded to the adversity stemming from the fickle treatment by their superiors. For instance, the narrator reports that while they were awaiting further orders from their commander Baba Paşa, they had obtained news from informants that the inhabitants of the region had lodged complaints against Baba Paşa and his men (presumably Deli Mustafa and his comrades included) to the sultan because his forces in the region had allegedly deflowered no less than 500 local girls and decapitated heads of several thousand Ahiskans while subduing the rebels. As a consequence, the author informs his audience that Baba Paşa was dismissed and ordered to assume a new post in Diyarbakır, which prompted Deli Mustafa and his companions to return back to Erzurum to their employer, presumably to collect their pay and seek new contracts. What is interesting is that the narrator alludes to how he and his men cut off the heads of 270 of their routed opponents prior to Baba Paşa's dismissal,[20] but when it came to complaints lodged against the latter, the author carefully distances himself from the excessive carnage and sexual violence—perhaps because he understood it as illegitimate in nature. Likewise, he goes on to state that Baba Paşa's former servant (the narrator's previous division leader) Mahmud Kiran then led "mischievous soldiers" in an assault on Baba Paşa's possessions and *harem* in Erzurum—most likely because the *paşa* withheld pay from these men. While Deli

18 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 189-191. According to Schmidt, Cevdet calls this *bölükbaşı* [division leader] Mahmud Tiran. See Cevdet, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, Vol. X, 249.

19 Schmidt, "The Adventures...,"191.

20 Ibid., 193.

Mustafa distances himself from the violence visited upon Baba Paşa, he betrays the fact that he and his companions later joined forces with Mahmud Kiran.[21]

What is clear in the text and indicative of a recurring trope throughout his travels in Anatolia is that Deli Mustafa blames his superiors like Baba Paşa for his misfortunes and accuses the *paşa* of tricking him and his companions into believing that they would be paid their monthly salaries for their services, while in reality, the *paşa* had no intention of paying them and simply abandoned them along with 15,000 other irregular soldiers.[22] It was after this episode that the narrator explains that as he and other irregulars were left unemployed ("*kapusuz*," i.e., without a patron), they were *forced* to roam eastern and central Anatolia "from this village and that" to make a living, though Deli Mustafa does not provide specifics regarding how he and his companions extracted a living from the local population.[23] Noteworthy in this context is that Deli Mustafa often distinguishes between elite officials who were labeled "outlaws" (i.e., *fermânlı*, those whose recalcitrance elicited an imperial edict against them) by İstanbul and local "robbers" (i.e., *harâmî*, those engaged in unlawful activity) whom they encountered in skirmishes and battles throughout Anatolia. However, when it came to him and his companions' having to resort to "roaming" Anatolia for sustenance, he is completely mum as to what practices they engaged in. This distinction suggests that the itinerant soldiers' "roaming" became sort of an "accepted" practice tacitly condoned by their superiors and understood as necessity by society at large. For Deli Mustafa, "unlawful" violence and plundering seems to be something pertinent only to other groups as opposed to his own plundering on account of being unemployed (*i.e.*, a condition imposed upon him because of the deceit of his superiors).

Whilst describing how he and thousands of irregulars were the victims of their superiors' intrigue and abuse, however, the narrator boasts that the contingents to which he belonged were very savvy networks capable of dealing with the adversity brought on by the whims of their superiors and taking advantage of their position as contested commodities. Put simply, their strategy consisted of entertaining, soliciting, and accepting more advantageous propositions of rival factions, be they elite *paşa*s or infamous "robbers."[24] For instance, while he and his companions

21 Ibid, 193-194.

22 Ibid., 194

23 "*...ve mezkûr paşaların ma'iyyet olan delî atlusuna icâzet virdiler kapusuz atlu dahî bu köyde şu köyde gezer iken bizim ile beraber iki yüz kadar deli atlusu olup bizler şimdi kapusuz bu köyde şu köyde gezmeğe başladık...*" Ms. Or. 1551, 13a.

24 Ottomanists working on the Balkans around this period have also noticed similar types of negotiation strategies among itinerant warriors in the Balkans, groups often labeled

lay under siege in Ardanuç castle prior to their patron Baba Paşa's fall, the narrator relates that one of their assailants, a local warrior named Kara Kadı (*i.e.*, the "Black" judge), actually offered them clemency (*bizlere re'y verüb*), which the author and his companions accepted. According to the narrator, Kara Kadı was allegedly "pleased" with him and his companions, and therefore provided them with food and shelter prior to their return to Erzurum back to their patron.[25] The fact that Mustafa and his companions entertained and accepted the overtures of their assailant in Ardanuç points to the fact that these types of soldiery clearly understood their position as men whose skills were very valuable in Ottoman society that put them in a position to negotiate better deals, salaries, and access to plunder for themselves, thus prompting one to take the narrator's recurring trope of victimhood and unemployment with a grain of salt.

Moreover, the dynamics Deli Mustafa relates calls to mind similar situations I discovered in my work on bandit networks in other regions a couple of decades earlier. For example, across the Empire on the Danubian frontier in October 1795, the Protector of Belgrade (*Belgrad muhâfızı*) El-Hac Mustafa Paşa reported to İstanbul that the retinue of a notorious Rumeli bandit Kara Feyzi was pillaging communities on his path to retake Belgrade in conjunction with the retinues of Belgrade Janissaries who were exiled from the city because of their abuse of the local population.[26] But what stands out in the *paşa*'s correspondence is the fluid nature of the boundaries between his own military forces and Kara Feyzi's network, betraying the perpetual dilemma officials faced in terms of recruitment. Namely, the sources consistently demonstrate that officials claimed that they struggled to find trustworthy and capable men who could be relied upon to make a stand against bandit/paramilitary networks. In this case, El-Hac Mustafa Paşa voices his concern that his *sekbân* (irregulars) defending Belgrade were unreliable because Kara Feyzi's agents were among their ranks persuading them into joining their network. However, the *paşa*'s correspondence concomitantly betrays that he withheld the pay of his men and refused to allow them to return to their places of origin in order to prevent them from joining the bandits. As was the case with Mustafa Paşa, such policies would only back-fire time and time again and encourage his various types of soldiery to join Kara Feyzi's bands.[27] Similar to the Kara Kadı option that Deli Mustafa alludes

collectively as "Albanian." See F. Anscombe, "Albanians and 'Mountain Bandits,'" in F. Anscombe (ed.), *The Ottoman Balkans*, 95-102.

25 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 192.

26 B.O.A. HH 2402C.

27 Ibid. See also Esmer, "Economies of Violence..." (University of Chicago, Chicago, Ph.D. Thesis, 2009).

to, Mustafa Paşa's comments underline Kara Feyzi's recurrent contact and negotiation with the low-ranking warriors who were supposed to protect local communities from but rather elected to join him because of their superiors' ill-treatment.

Deli Mustafa's tales also hint at how itinerant military networks that roamed Anatolia in search of employment decades later were constitutive of vast support networks that shared information and resources. At some point after his eastern Anatolian adventures, for instance, Mustafa relates that he and his companions were in the central Anatolian town of Kayseri and had secured the patronage of a certain Memiş Paşa and were then dispatched to Sivas to punish the local population for rebelling against and incarcerating their local commander Çarhacı (*i.e.*, Skirmisher) Ali Paşa.[28] However, the narrator indicates that he and 200 of his companions became unemployed and were forced to forage and roam "from this village and to that village." Apparently, their "roaming" was significant enough to draw the attention of "the *paşa*" stationed in Sivas (it is not clear if he is referring to Memiş or Ali Paşa) who sent another *delibaşı* and contingent of irregulars to go after them. However, Deli Mustafa notes that a *deli* among these men informed them in advance that they would try to launch a surprise attack and capture them, thus prompting the author and his men to flee in the nick of time.[29]

Deli Mustafa's account points to how the author and the vast number of paramilitary forces in Ottoman society were far from helpless souls who suffered as the collateral damage of elite intrigue. In recounting his adventures in the mountains of Kurdistan against rebellious Kurdish tribes, he likewise informs the reader about a quarrel that broke out again over the *deli*s' salaries in Patnos (an "infidel" village near Erzincan). Mustafa indicates that he and his companions were promised a monthly salary, but their commander, Hafız Ali Paşa, refused to pay them. The *deli*s therefore reportedly organized and went after the *paşa* who was forced to flee and seek refuge with a local *bey*.[30] In this case, the narrator even boasts that they were successful in extracting their pay through outright aggression against their patron. Ultimately, Hafız Ali Paşa and other *paşa*s thwarted the troops' rebellion, cut their pay again, and dismissed them to roam about the region once more. But it seems that the narrator and his companions' bad standing with the *paşa*s did not last long, because he states that they again hired him and his men for a mission against yet another rebellious *paşa* in Eastern Anatolia.[31] What one therefore sees

28 Schmidt, "The Adventures...,"195.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 198.

31 Ibid., 198-199. In another instance, Mustafa notes that he had another quarrel (*nizâ' edüb*) with a *paşa* on the Persian frontier in skirmishes with Persian troops. Once the

in Mustafa's narrative in conjunction with similar patterns from other types of Ottoman sources is that these itinerant military orders were not simply "masterless men" roaming the Empire to their hearts delight. Rather, they were men who had their own system of honor that bound them to one another as well as to their employers and local communities in ways that have escaped the radars of historians working on this era. What Deli Mustafa's narrative reveals is that these men's sense of honor was their primary weapon, a sort of social contract, they held with their superiors, and when the latter broke these unwritten agreements, itinerant soldiers had the means and wherewithal to organize themselves against them.

III. Ottoman Irregulars and "Infidels:" Tropes of Violence and Masculinity

One of the key strategies employed in Deli Mustafa's narrative is the difference between mere allusion to his and his companions' pilfering of local communities in Anatolia to get by and his detailed descriptions of the plundering and often ritualistic violence they visited upon (and endured from) Greek rebels and communities in the Morea during the Greek Revolution. Interestingly these narrative shifts have a discernible spatial dimension: the narrative turns more graphic in its descriptions of the narrator's plundering and violence as he relays his travels west into provinces steeped in civil war and national rebellion. It is only in this context that Deli Mustafa elaborates more fully on the repertoire of violence exhibited by different military groups and local communities throughout Ottoman society. Recent research has highlighted the extent to which the ritualistic violence described in Mustafa's narrative was common in other parts of the Empire under "normal" circumstances, but it is interesting to see how the author takes care only to describe it in the context of the Greek Revolution.[32]

Keeping in mind Deli Mustafa's primary audience of like-minded irregular soldiers, it is clear that his animated discussion of his prowess in pillaging Greek homes and shops, capturing and enslaving Greek maidens, as well as mutilating the body parts of Greek insurgents while personally avoiding a similar fate was expected to bolster his standing among his peers. These tropes were the building-blocks of male honor culture and the basic ingredients of bonding among those

paşa cut of their monthly allowance, they abandoned him at Kars and left for Sivas. Ibid., 207.

32 In the case of Anatolia in the eighteenth century, see B. Tuğ, 'Politics of Honor: The Institutional and Social Frontiers of 'Illicit' Sex in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Anatolia,' Ph.D. Dissertation (New York University, 2009).

who participated in or whose lives were affected by the militarization of Ottoman society due to the state's constant need for cheap laborers to man its policing and war machine. At the same time, these tropes place Deli Mustafa's manuscript in a larger textual continuum reaching back to the *gâzî menâkib-nâme*s (accounts of heroic exploits) and *velayet-nâme*s (hagiographies) of the fifteenth century.[33] What follows in this section is a discussion on the language of violence, both literal and literary, and its meaning for inter-communal relations during this period of Ottoman history.

To begin with, from Deli Mustafa's text one gathers that targeting Greek women was as an important a preoccupation of the Muslim warriors as stomping out the Greek insurgency, since booty was his primary means of sustenance. For instance, the narrator casually mentions that in Kabraniş he captured a Christian girl. He writes that he grabbed her, looked and saw that she was a virgin, and took her to the castle.[34] What is clear is that the sexual status of his prey certainly played an important role in determining her value on Ottoman slave markets that men like Deli Mustafa helped fuel. What is not clear is precisely how he determined she was a virgin: it may have been custom for different communities to wear certain types of clothes that denoted virginity, or he may have simply used another vile method of determining her sexual status.

Perhaps reflective of Deli Mustafa's understanding of what constituted legitimate violence, he recounts the full glory of his plundering adventures but without making specific references to the sexual violence he himself may have inflicted. His insistence on recounting his accumulation[35] of female slaves in Greece contrasts starkly with only vague references to problems he and his comrades encountered because of Anatolian "sweethearts" in Tokat[36] and Rumeli "beauties" in Malkara or Çırpan,[37] or passing reference to *other* men's deflowering local girls on the Georgian frontier. Deli Mustafa even seems to narrate his accumulation of other types of goods and plunder with more restraint than he exhibits in describing his pursuit of female booty. What strikes the reader on the subject of sexual economy in the narrative is Deli Mustafa's almost comical self-awareness of his

33 T. Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam.*

34 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 222.

35 At one point, Deli Mustafa even relays a conversation with his father in which he states that they had acquired many female slaves and should therefore leave Greece while his father insists that they stay there until there is reconciliation with the Greeks. See Ibid., 261.

36 Ibid., 185.

37 Ibid., 212-213.

and his companions' excessive pining after non-Muslim female slaves, a lust he acknowledges that the Greek insurgents were also very much aware of and used against Ottoman soldiers on a number of occasions. For instance, upon him and his companions' entering Kabraniş, the narrator claims that the Christians had taken the town and the castle, decapitated its Muslim inhabitants, and entrenched themselves there, but when Deli Mustafa and his men entered, the insurgents fled up the mountain while their women and girls fled in the direction of fields adjacent to the town.[38] Deli Mustafa states that he and five of his friends naturally chose to pursue the women. However, this turned out to be a near-fatal ruse, because upon their approaching the women, Greek insurgents came out of hiding and ambushed them. His friends having escaped, Deli Mustafa recounts that he was left alone and surrounded by Greek men who mocked him saying: "Oh my God who veils the shortcomings of men" (*yâ settârü'l-'ayyûb*).[39] The narrator recounts that he barely made it out of this precarious predicament alive.[40]

Deli Mustafa's text is full of all the requisite ingredients for a Muslim man of low stature to bolster his standing as a warrior of faith in the Balkans among like-minded men by providing them with exciting – and sometimes even self-effacing – tales about his pursuit of Christian beauties. The Greek Revolution provided low-ranking paramilitary soldiers like Deli Mustafa the chance to live up to the tales they might have heard about Ottoman *gâzî*s of ancient times who displayed their masculinity on the bodies of their enemies and pillaged newly conquered territories to their hearts' content. Pillaging Christians as well as enslaving and seducing/sexually using/marrying their womenfolk were part of a larger Muslim male ethos that resonated with the author's primarily male audience. In this sense, we see how his text invokes a larger and older corpus of Ottoman narratives. [41] But now that that Empire of yesteryear was gone, the Greek Revolution was one of the few opportunities that could prompt men like Deli Mustafa to record these facets of Ottoman military life with such gusto, since Ottoman armies no longer conquered new territories that provided their soldiery opportunities for free rein on "legitimate" booty from an "infidel" enemy.

38 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 221.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 For more on the role of Christian women in Muslim warrior epics, see Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 64-68. See also B. Flemming, "'Āşıkpaşazāades Blick auf Frauen" [A Glimpse of Women in Aşıkpaşa-zäde], in S. Prätor and C. Neumann (eds.), *Arts, Women and Scholars: Studies in Ottoman Society and Culture – Festschrift Hans Georg Majer*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul, 2002), 69-97.

What Deli Mustafa's uninhibited bravado points to is a sexual economy that played an important role in mediating social relations throughout the Ottoman period but that attains new dimensions in nineteenth-century Ottoman society when Christians were beginning to clamor for new rights.[42] In boasting about hunting down Christian women the narrator is asserting himself as a powerful Muslim male whose supremacy in the social hierarchy of the time was beginning to be threatened by non-Muslims in novel ways. The obverse of this assertion of sexual supremacy over non-Muslims and their women was the emphasis on his role as a protector of religious boundaries when it came to the Muslim community. For instance, when he describes the Greek attempt to take Ağrıboz castle, Deli Mustafa portrays himself and his companions as the protectors of Muslim women and children who would have been deflowered and enslaved by Greek men had it not been for their heroic defense.[43]

When it comes to violence against Greek men, what strikes the reader is the amount of space the narrator dedicates to describing particular punishments that Deli Mustafa and other soldiers inflicted onto insurgents. These vivid descriptions usually end with decapitation and other forms of bodily mutilation that are generally absent in the sections of the text devoted to Deli Mustafa's Anatolian travels. The next section of the paper will look more closely at the symbolic dimensions of this violence and its importance for Muslim intra-communal relations. However, here it is important to emphasize that according to Deli Mustafa's account, Muslims and Christians shared this culture of violence and language of mutilation.[44]

42 For a discussion of the stereotypical portrayal of the lustful "Turkish" warrior pining after Greek women in Greek and European period sources during national Revolutions in the Balkans, see İ. C. Schick. "Christian Maidens, Turkish Ravishers: The Sexualization of National Conflict in the Late Ottoman Period," in A. Buturović and İ.C. Schick (eds.), *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture, and History* (New York, 2007), 273-305. The insistence on the image of the "lustful Turk" is also prominent in Orthodox Christian neo-martyrologies of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. See N.M. Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437-1860* (Crestwood, NY, 2000).

43 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," Ibid., 252.

44 Plenty of work has been done on the role of Christian violence against Muslims in Greece and the Balkans during and after this period of Ottoman history as a similar Christian warrior-ethos against Muslim soldiers, their communities, and their womenfolk emerges. For discussions of this ethos and its attendant, ritualistic violence, see G. Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause: Brigandage and Irredentism in Modern Greece, 1821-1912* (Oxford, 1987), P. Sant Cassia, "Better Occasional Murderers than Frequent Adulteries: Discourses on Banditry, Violence, and Sacrifice in the Mediterranean," in J. Skurski and F. Coronil (eds.), *States of Violence* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 219-229, and most

For instance, on a number of occasions Deli Mustafa and his companions stumbled upon Muslim communities whose male population had been decapitated by Greek insurgents. In describing a vicious battle they encountered in Ağrıboz, for example, the narrator relates that the Ottoman troops were routed, and in flight, he fell off a wall in a garden and stumbled into the hands of a Greek soldier who grabbed him by the throat and almost decapitated him. After an intense struggle, Mustafa claims that he managed not only to stab his adversary but that he also inflicted the ultimate act of revenge and humiliation upon him, for at the moment when his soul had only half left him (*cânı yarı çıkmış yarı çıkmamış*), Deli Mustafa ritualistically cut off his ears and left him there to die in agony.[45]

IV. Narrating Inter-Confessional Violence, Bolstering Intra-Confessional Claims

At first glance, Deli Mustafa's descriptions of his role in the Greek Revolution may strike the modern reader as very "primitive," "fanatical," or even outright "barbaric" in the ways in which he ascribes religious significance to the violence he and his companions visited upon Greek warriors and their communities. However, just as in older Muslim legends, the narrator's latter-day *gâzî*-warrior ethos alongside the anti-syncretic tropes of ritualistic violence against Christians speak as much about the claims that men like Mustafa were making among their own coreligionists as they do about inter-confessional violence and enmity. It is not a coincidence that it is within the context of his recalling his pillaging and slaughtering Greek insurgents and their communities that most of the religious facets of the text surface.[46] In this sense, Mustafa's narrative betrays how much of his self-fashioning

recently, H. Grandits, Nathalie Clayer, and R. Pichler (eds.), *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire, and Nation-Building* (London, 2011).

45 Ibid. 270. His being on the verge of being decapitated is a recurrent trope throughout his description of his adventures in the Greek Revolution. For instance, in describing another brush with death, the narrator indicates that he was shot in the leg, and upon falling to the ground, a tall, "black-faced infidel" came and tried to cut off his head, but a comrade picked him up and whisked him away on his horse. Ibid., 227.

46 Throughout the text, Deli Mustafa makes reference to his and his companions' frequent observance of religious duties like prayers, but they are often in reference to violence against or revenge taken upon Greek soldiers and communities. For instance, at one point the author discusses how they came across a Muslim village whose inhabitants were slaughtered by Greek insurgents. There he mentions that after re-reading the Muhammedan call to prayers (*ezân-ı muhammedî*), implying that they reclaimed the place by doing so (in conjunction with unfurling their banners there), they also proceeded to slaughter "infidels" and plunder their homes near the fortress. Ibid., 259. In recanting

as an honorable warrior of faith ever vigilant and brutal against rebellious Greek communities was largely about the status he was inscribing for himself among Muslims, especially other branches of the Ottoman military who competed for the same resources and status-recognition. It is this bitter struggle among his own co-religionists that surfaces frequently throughout the text that best underlines how the Christian booty, slaves, and macabre trophies like decapitated Christian heads were used as currencies to negotiate status and material rewards among various ranks of Ottoman soldiery and their superiors. Deli Mustafa's passages on violence against Christians undeniably testify to a nadir, a veritable turning point, in inter-confessional relations in the Ottoman world. However, a closer reading of the text reveals that the narration of violence is at least as much influenced by intra-Muslim socio-economic relations, including professional competition among the narrator's co-religionists. Understanding the moral and symbolic dimension of economies of violence and their currencies (mutilated body parts being just one of them) is essential for comprehending how social relations and material exchanges were structured during times of political instability and civil war.

Before going more deeply into the question of symbolic and material exchanges that marked this economy it is important to consider how the narrator "read" and referred to distinctions among various groups comprising Ottoman society, especially among Muslims. Whereas he generally refers to non-Muslims collectively as Christians, Jews, *kâfîr*, *re'âyâ kâfiresi*, or '*âsî* (*i.e.*, rebel in the Greek case), he saves more specific ethnic descriptions primarily for the Muslim population. Deli Mustafa occasionally uses the word "Turk", usually in reference to himself, but this is only when he paraphrases the Greeks' labeling him as such.[47] For instance, he relays that he found himself in a precarious situation in which Greek infidels who surrounded him yelled in unison "You Turk (*ya Turko*), surrender yourself, be not afraid," but they opened fire on him, a predicament in which he claims only his horse miraculously managed to take a bullet.[48]

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the number of his companions that were slain in one battle, Vasfî offers a *fâtiha* (prayer) for all of the souls of Muslim martyrs; however, the author also goes on to explain how the Christians similarly did their utmost to fight with holy zeal, often citing the Gospels in the midst of combat. The author also notes that as a response to the Muslims crying "*Allâh Allâh*" in battle, the Christians would cry "*Lolololo*." Ibid., 247-248.

47 This was a frequent practice in early modern Ottoman chronicles as well and these ventriloquist references to the "Turk" are interesting because they demonstrate that the Ottomans were aware of how others referred to them while they refrained from using the same term themselves. See Kafadar, "Rome of One's Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum," *Muqarnas* 24 (2009), 7-25.

48 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 221. .

In contrast, Deli Mustafa does talk quite a lot about frequent clashes with the "rebellious" Kurds he and his companions encountered in the "mountains of Kurdistan."[49] For instance he and 8000 other *deli*s found themselves in a clash with 10,000 warriors whom the author identifies as Kurdish.[50] What is interesting is how the narrator compares his group of warriors to the Kurds based on important material markers of profession and place. He ridicules the Kurds for arming themselves with mere swords, shields and lances (though they did have thoroughbred Arabian horses), whereas, he and his men were equipped with rifles and pistols.[51] Likewise, in his travels through Rumeli on his way to participate in the imperial siege against Tepedelenli Ali Paşa in 1821, Deli Mustafa singles out Albanian communities as particularly insular and rebellious. For instance, the narrator describes Albanians in towns near Manastır (Bitola in modern-day Macedonia) as people who are rebellious and do not take in guests. On the contrary, when Albanian bands from these villages find strangers on the road, they rob them, but if there are soldiers among the travelers, then they refrain from doing so.[52]

But in describing encounters with Rumeli Albanians, Mustafa also identifies another important marker of identity that seems important to him: language. Though he only vaguely refers to "Turks," mostly because he is identified as such by Christians in Rumeli, it seems that to the narrator one's ability to speak Turkish was something that could potentially mean the difference between being labeled rebellious, disloyal, and/or a proper Muslim versus an unbeliever.[53] For instance, the first thing the narrator mentions upon describing "perfidious" Albanians is that they collectively did not know any Turkish, which seems to underlie his negative opinion of them.[54] In another instance in which he describes his pillaging a mansion near Bülbülce in the Morea, Deli Mustafa notes that he and his

49 Ibid., 198.

50 Ibid., 200.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 215. Deli Mustafa and his men were probably not ideal targets for Albanian highwaymen, since they travelled in large numbers and were heavily armed. For more on the term "Albanian" as a pejorative social category, R. Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (New York, 2009), 31-33.

53 Likewise, in his travels throughout Bosnia and Serbia in 1839-1840, the Croatian traveler Matija Mažuranić commented that Muslims from Anatolia and other parts of the Empire often had a marked disdain for Bosnian Muslims who spoke neither Turkish nor Arabic and could not converse with them beyond the greeting "*As-salāmu 'alaykum*." M. Mažuranić, *A Glance into Ottoman Bosnia, or A Short Journey into that Land by a Native in 1839-1840*, translated by Brank Magaṭ (London, 2007).

54 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 215.

companions were delighted to find women whom they wanted to capture and sell as slaves. However, the narrator reports that after asking them whether or not they were "infidels," they were unable to answer him in Turkish but successfully uttered the *shahaddah* in a last-ditch effort to save themselves.[55] Unconvinced, Deli Mustafa and his men took them into town to find a translator whereupon it was confirmed that the women were Muslim and that they were attacked by Greek insurgents who killed their husbands but left the womenfolk to burn in their mansion. Still not completely convinced, the narrator retorts that he and his men left the women in town, but they returned to the mansion and pilfered its belongings regardless.[56] Thus, though he does not refer to his own Ottoman identity, Deli Mustafa does seem to link political loyalty and Muslimness to knowing Turkish. Both non-Muslims as well as certain ethnic groups among Muslims such as Albanians and Kurds were consequently targets of his censure as well as his violence that used Turkish as a yardstick of loyalty to the faith and state.

Further insights into how Deli Mustafa "read" Ottoman Muslim society actually emerge from taking a closer look at the booty he and men like him pursued while fighting non-Muslims in insurgent Greece, which explains how the narrator's dwelling on particularly gruesome items such as mutilated Christian body parts was tied to his position among his own brethren. The narrator's obsession with these macabre trophies is artistically reinforced in the manuscript, for the scribe who wrote the text depicted decapitated heads on a number of folios. This is the only illustrative item featured in the manuscript that does not relate to the landscape represented by staple renditions of mountains, mosques, churches, and fortresses.[57] Towards the end of his account Deli Mustafa describes how he took enslaved bonded Greek insurgent and then beheaded him saying concomitantly "it is God's will (*niyet-i kazâ diyüb*)" after which he adds: "his blood flowed and his soul went away to dwell in hell (*kanı revân olub cânı cihenneme munzel ileğde* (*sic. iledi*))." Proudly, he took this trophy to his father, who responded: "My son, may your fate be blessed, God willing the infidels' eyes are hereby blinded; let us cut of many more infidel heads," after which his father offered his prayers.[58] The narrator also claims that he took this head to his commander Çarhacı Ali Paşa, who in turn, praised him and gave him to gold, "Mahmudiye" coins.[59]

55 Ibid., 259.

56 Ibid.

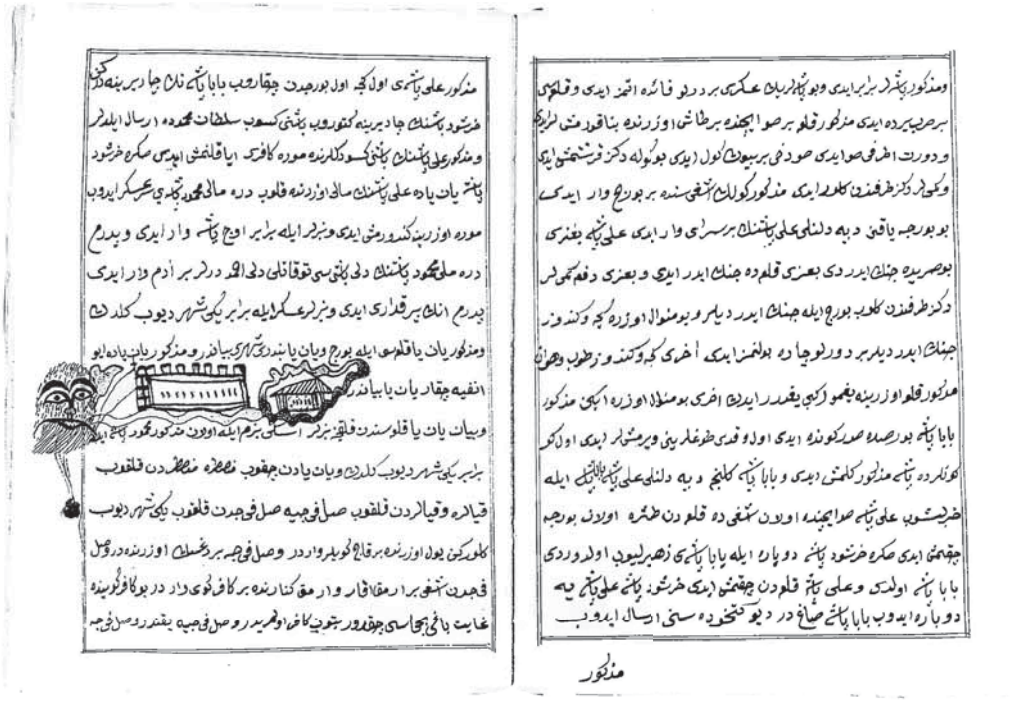
57 Interestingly, though he mentions decapitation in his Anatolian travels, it is primarily in his descriptions of Rumeli that depictions of these trophies are illustrated.

58 Ms. Or. 1551, 79a..

59 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 258.

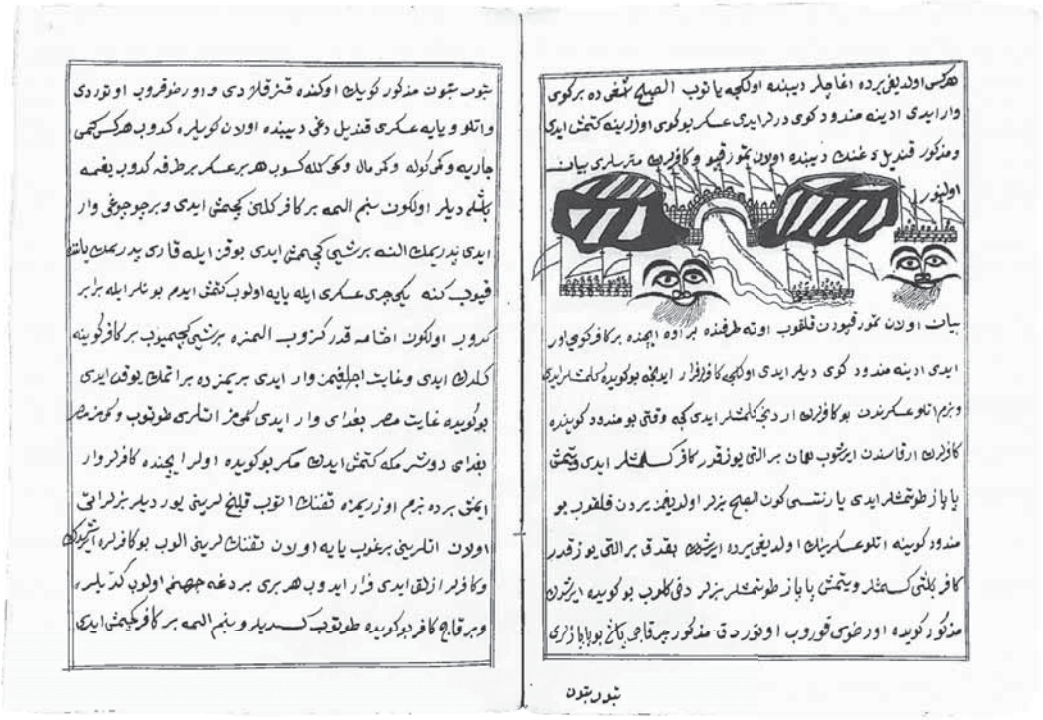
What is fascinating about this particular encounter is that it reads like a sacrificial offering in which Mustafa proudly boasts that this was the first infidel that he had slain. But the fact that the author describes this episode very late in the text, after including many other references to similar types of violence he visited upon Greek insurgents and their communities earlier suggests that this description was more of a narrative strategy than a reference to a concrete event. Its function in the account seems to be a sort of "a rite of passage into manhood" story that would win him the respect of his comrades, family, and commanders. The link between violence against Christians, especially religious figures, and religious duty is also underscored elsewhere as well in Mustafa's narrative. On one of a number of occasions, Mustafa records that after decapitating 600 infidels "as if they were pigs" and then proceeded to impale 70 priests to be displayed in front of Christian villages.[60] In this respect, the language of the narrative again echoes, down to specific expressions and images, that of the old *gâzî* epics like the *Saltuk-nâme*.

PLATE ONE: Folios 33b-34a illustrates and describes the narrator's participation in the imperial siege of Yanya and Tepedelenli Ali Paşa's decapitated head.



60 Ibid., 256. For the interplay between violence and the sacred, see R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (London, 1988).

PLATE TWO: The images on folios 78b-79a immediately precede the narrator's aforementioned discussion of his "first" decapitation of an "infidel." The image depicts Greek trenches as well as decapitated Greek heads.



All of the religious references and bravado aside, however, Deli Mustafa's portrayal of this rite of passage to seek the approbation of his community and family based on his accumulation of macabre Christian trophies also underlines very concrete exchanges marked by a fierce competition among the Muslim soldiery for material resources as well as status. At one point after a battle, the narrator alludes to the fact that various groups of soldiery would bring all of their mutilated trophies, booty, as well as bound Christian slaves to line up before their superior officers. In Mandüdköy, for example, the author mentions that he presented his newly acquired properties to the aforementioned Çarhacı Ali Paşa from Anatolia who then gave him yet another "bonus."[61]

Though Mustafa does not expand upon this in too much detail, what can be discerned is that the imperial commanders ran vast trading networks of booty, slaves, and even body parts that they accumulated from the different ranks of

61 Schmidt, "The Adventures...," 261.

soldiery to sell to other system-wide networks in order to line their own pockets and extract favors from their superiors and even the sultan himself. Men like Deli Mustafa could not possibly deal with the logistics of such a vast enterprise and were thus the "wholesalers" that fed this much larger, lucrative economy.

In this sense, in Deli Mustafa's text one begins to see the larger economy of violence and multiple functions beyond the symbolic and material: it is also entangled in Ottoman governance itself. In the case of Greek insurgents and their communities, the narrator's behavior can be seen as condoned by the state (hence his license to describe his violence in the Morea as opposed to his silences in describing his adventures in Anatolia) and an extension of Ottoman governance in this region. In his work on the "law of rebellion" during inter-imperial wars (e.g., the 1787-1792 Ottoman-Habsburg-Russian War) as well as national uprisings during this period (e.g., the Serbian uprising 1804-1815 as well as the Greek Revolution), Will Smiley argues that the Porte encouraged irregular military forces to capture and enslave its own *zimmî* subjects (i.e., tax-paying, non-Muslim subjects of the sultan) since these communities were labeled collectively as rebellious. When Ottoman forces confronted domestic, Christian bands during inter-imperial wars and insurgencies in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Porte exhorted their irregular forces to police Ottoman borderlands by killing Christian insurgents, pillaging their communities, and capturing their kinswomen and children for the slave trade since the latter's collective betrayal abrogated their status as protected subjects. But this violence and plundering also served as a legitimate and primary source of income and motivation for Ottoman soldiery like Deli Mustafa at a time in which the government could not compensate the large networks of men it relied upon to wage its massive campaigns.[62] One can therefore see how the nexus of the symbolic and material exchanges that mark the larger economies of violence outlined in this essay is also tied to imperial governance.

But being on the ground as a "wholesaler" in this larger nexus was marked by brutal competition among the different ranks of Ottoman soldiery, and it is in this context that one must consider the overall meaning of Deli Mustafa's narration of his heroics. Despite his inflammatory language vis-à-vis Christians, the narrator's account reveals that the relationship with Christian rebels he and his comrades encountered is also much more complex than it appears at first sight. Namely, Deli Mustafa describes how at the mountain pass of Kandil Dağı (Kandillio Oros)

62 W. Smiley, "'When Peace is Made, You will Again be Free': Islamic and Treaty Law, Black Sea Conflict, and the Emergence of 'Prisoners of War' in the Ottoman Empire, 1739-1830," PhD. Dissertation (Queens' College, Cambridge University, 2012), 113-118. See also Smiley's contribution to this edition.

he and his comrades engaged in conversations with Greek rebels in a trench before them. According to the narrator, his opponents allegedly addressed him and his comrades: "*Deli*s, the Persians (*'acem*) have come and have taken your country (*vilâyet*). The Persians defeated your *paşa*s and took your land and fortresses. Tomorrow you should go to the province of Anatolia. [Why] are you fighting with us here? Go to your [own] country. Sultan Mahmud outlawed us (*sultan mahmûd bizi fermânlı idüb*) and sent Janissary troops against us. We will fight them; let us be friends [*isdifîl* (sic. *istif'al*) *oluruz*]."[63]

What is interesting about this vignette is that Mustafa ventriloquizes Greek voices to demarcate differences among men in his own Muslim community, namely between Ottoman Janissaries and itinerant, military laborers and volunteers like himself. It is not exactly clear how the narrator and his men reacted to these overtures by the Greeks, but he adds that while they were speaking with them, a regiment of Janissaries came upon them both. The author relays that the Janissaries proceeded to insult the Muslim irregulars, mocking them for engaging in dialogue with the infidels and reproaching them by saying that they were not worthy of the "sultan's bread."[64] He notes that one of the volunteer officers among his ranks swelled with anger as a result, yelling "you Janissaries, I have fought with infidels in this country for three years and nobody has ever said such a thing [to me]. Now that you have said this, let us see who will flee from the infidels," whereupon he charged toward the Greek trench but was immediately shot dead off his horse.[65]

The narrator more clearly conveys this competition and enmity among the different ranks of Muslim soldiery, especially among irregular and Janissary forces, in the very last passage of his manuscript before it abruptly ends. Namely, he describes how he and his companions (along with dozens of female Greek captives) came upon a big church near Kûmiye full of "infidels" hiding inside. After taking

63 Ms. Or. 1551, 71b.

64 "...*bizim gönüller ağası ile birbirlerine fenâ kelâm söyleşüb kâfirden korkaruz dimişler idi ve padişah etmeği* (sic. *ekmeği*) *sizlere harâmdır dimişler idi*...," Ibid., 72[a]-72[b]. Noteworthy here is also that the title page of this text indicates that this text was compiled in 1249 (1834) and deals with Deli Mustafa's experiences from 1216 (1801) to 1248 (1833). One could argue that this text reflects post *Vaka-yı Hayrîye* (The Auspicious Event) biases, the fateful event in 1826 that marked the imperial government's brutal destruction of the Janissary corps. Nevertheless, as this essay focuses on how Mustafa fashions himself vis-à-vis other Muslim groups over a long period, one should not dismiss his understandings of the Janissaries and his encounters with them as a *post* 1826 bias.

65 Ibid.

care to decapitate the Greek men outside of the sanctuary, Mustafa and his men took these trophies, slaves, as well as what he claims were five thousand of their sheep back to their camp but came across Janissaries on the road. Things went awry according to the narrator when one of the Janissary *ağa*s who had his eyes on their loot complained that irregulars were moving in on places ahead of the Janissaries (*i.e.*, claiming first dibs to booty) taking all of the Greeks' possessions, women, and girls before the Janissaries could do so. Deli Mustafa adds that the *ağa* even accused the irregulars of allowing "infidels" to flee. On account of this, the *ağa* moved to confiscate the irregulars' booty, and he ordered his men to raise their rifles and march upon Deli Mustafa and his comrades. The narrator notes that his *deli* horsemen fled leaving him there once again on his own with two female captives, decapitated heads, and a couple of animals. Having no opportunity to flee, the Janissaries robbed him of all his possessions and horse, rendering him, he complains, into a "simple foot soldier (...*hemân piyâde kaldım*)." [66]

But this anecdote does not end here. Further reflecting intense, inter-regimental rivalries among the Ottoman soldiery, Mustafa claims that he then came upon another Janissary from the same division as his aforementioned assailants, this time a Kurdish Janissary, and after exchanging greetings and talking about where they were from in Anatolia, Deli Mustafa complained to him about what his companions had done to him. The narrator claims that he said to the Kurdish Janissary: "My friend (*karındaşım*), I am also a Janissary. Does it befit your corps (*ocak*) to take the possessions and the severed infidel heads belonging to a man like me? Indeed, it does not." His fellow Anatolian agreed and took him back to the culprits to scold them for tarnishing the reputation of the Janissaries by treating their "compatriot" in such a fashion and demanded that they return Deli Mustafa's horse, women slaves, and severed Greek heads in full.[67]

The narrator's overall strategy for telling this story is not clear. Surely, his audience of itinerant warriors could identify with the tensions among different

66 Ibid., 113a. Being relegated to a simple foot soldier (*piyâde*) was a common theme in Mustafa's narrative when he describes horses being stolen or shot beneath him. It seems that the author took pride in being a *deli* as opposed to a foot soldier or volunteer (*gönüllü*).

67 Ibid., 113[a]-113[b]. Note: Deli Mustafa also convinces the Kurdish Janissary that he himself was a Janissary by pulling out a certain badge that apparently proved his membership in the corps. It is not clear whether a *Pejvend* was some material Janissary marker. It could also mean, "pazu-bend" or "bazu-bend" (i.e. simply any cloth or leather wrapped across one's bicep (*bazu*); however, it seems clear in the text that Deli Mustafa uses it to brag that he tricked the Kurdish Janissary he mentions.

types of Ottoman soldiery and abuses more elite corps delved out to lower orders. Certainly, they would appreciate Deli Mustafa's resourcefulness in pulling out a Janissary badge and tricking the Janissaries into believing that he was one of them. In this sense, one can appreciate how the author's portraying himself as a sort of trickster who wore a number of different hats would endear himself to his audience.[68] Nevertheless, regardless of the veracity of this anecdote, the author goes on to explain what really was at stake in such an encounter. Namely, after bragging about how he tricked the Janissaries and re-acquired his possessions, he says that he immediately sought audience with his commander, a certain Osman Paşa, and told him his discomforting story about the Janissaries. Then he presented Osman Paşa with the contested "infidel" heads for which he was awarded, again, two golden *mahmudiye* coins. The narrator claims that he was not only rewarded for the trophies that the Janissaries stole from him but that the commander also kept him at his side as a sort of protector against menacing Janissaries – indeed one of Deli Mustafa's most menacing assailants in his narrative.[69]

V. Conclusion

At some point toward the end of his manuscript, Deli Mustafa recounts a story about his telling a story. Somewhere near Ağrıboz, he survived a vicious battle with Greek rebels in which the bulk of the Muslim forces were martyred and he and his comrades were hopelessly surrounded. Mustafa explains that they were forced to charge their opponents in desperation in a battlefield that resembled "a butcher's shop" with bodies strewn about the field.[70] He even describes a Christian warrior and priest who took aim at the his chest and fired, but the bullet allegedly ricocheted off his rifle and killed a Muslim comrade next to him, whereupon his assailants forgot about him and immediately mutilated and despoiled the body of his comrade instead.[71] Deli Mustafa miraculously escaped the "butcher's block" and was reunited with his grateful father, whence they were both summoned by their *delibaşı* (irregular cavalry commander).[72] Exhausted and immobile with swollen legs, Mustafa adds that the *delibaşı*'s men carried him to

68 Deli Mustafa does point out that he joined the Janissaries as an infantryman on a number of occasions, which suggests that the lines among the regular and irregulars were much more blurry than the narrator conveys in other points of the text.

69 Ibid.

70 Schmidt, "The Adventures..," 278.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 279-280.

the latter's mansion and asked him to retell his miraculous story in front of the commander's guests, whereupon the *delibaşı* blessed him for returning from the field of death more or less safe and sound (*sizler şimdi bir eyüce 'ecel sahrâsından geldiniz*).[73] Deli Mustafa brags that the audience at his commander's mansion was so impressed with his story that the *delibaşı* gave him a superior horse as well as a superior sword for crafting such a great narrative—and presumably for persevering in such adversity. Moreover, in addition to allowing him to remain in the comfort of his mansion for fifteen days to recover, Deli Mustafa claims that the *delibaşı* even saw to it that every day his legs were rubbed with tar and olive oil and suspended over a hot fire to ensure his speedy recovery.[74]

The point of retelling this final anecdote from Deli Mustafa's fascinating manuscript is that it reminds the reader how much was at stake in telling a good story that reflected the sentiments and views of one's audience. Rather than analyzing this rare source in terms of its veracity and usefulness I have concentrated more on analyzing how the narrator explained and legitimated his precarious way of life to select audiences. In doing so, we see how important political geography was in determining what men like Deli Mustafa and the vast numbers of itinerant warrior forces in Ottoman society understood and explained as the legitimate versus the illegitimate plundering of local communities that marked this period of Ottoman history. For Anatolian, Muslim peasants like Deli Mustafa, this westward journey across the Empire provided him the means and wherewithal to fashion himself and his contentious way of life in new ways. Mustafa's particular style of violence he inflicted upon (and avoided from) Greek insurgents must be placed into the larger context of Muslim male epics that long-predated the nineteenth century, in order to argue that much of the anti-syncretic tropes prevalent in the text had more to do with his own standing among Muslims than with interconfessional violence and enmity. At the same time, this essay has underlined the nexus inherent in such story-telling between endemic violence and the exchanges and negotiations around material goods as well as symbolic goods such has loyalty, honor, moral capital, and professional status that together determined how social relations were regulated in times of political instability. Deli Mustafa's narrative points to how much of this economy of violence was predicated upon crafting a convincing story—a point that is also reinforced by a careful reading of archival sources on bandits.

73 Ibid., 280.
74 Ibid.

The Confessions of an Ottoman 'Irregular': Self-Representation and Ottoman Interpretive Communities in the Nineteenth Century

Abstract ■ This paper will analyze an autobiographical account attributed to a very unlikely Ottoman author: an obscure Anatolian irregular cavalryman Deli Mustafa (b. 1791/2)—or Kabudlı el-Haccî Mustafa Vasfî Efendi as he fashioned himself in his manuscript. His narrative provides rare glimpses into the tumultuous everyday life and moral dilemmas faced by the countless Muslim peasants who joined itinerant military orders in the Ottoman Empire. Deli Mustafa's narrative and self-fashioning strategies help us understand what common Muslim men serving in paramilitary forces had to do to make a living during this tumultuous period of Ottoman history, and most importantly, how they explained and legitimated their precarious and contentious way of life. Rather than debating the veracity of Mustafa's jumbled historical account full of inaccuracies and contradictions, this essay focuses on his—or the compiler of the text's—editorial choices, his target audiences, as well as how the tone of his description of violence changes over time and space as he travelled from the eastern to western frontiers of the Empire in order to determine what was at stake for such an obscure author and his interpretative community to tell his story.

Keywords: Ego-Document, Inter-Confessional Violence, Greek Revolution, Banditry, Irregular Soldiers, Ottoman Frontiers, Kabudlı Vasfi Efendi, Rumeli

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