

THE TRAGEDY OF POWER  
THE FATE OF GRAND VEZIRS  
ACCORDING TO THE *MENAKIBNAME-İ*  
*MAHMUD PAŞA-İ VELİ*

**A**bhorrance of tyranny and bloodthirsty despotism is, according to Joseph von Hammer<sup>1</sup>, a prominent *leitmotiv* in the anonymous *Menakibname-i Mahmud Paşa*. Hammer remarks, though, that its text cannot serve as a historical source, but is rather a kind of coffeehouse literature (lowbrow narratives presented by a story teller). Following this verdict, scholars did not show any particular interest in the *menakib* for a lengthy period, although the text was printed in Turkey in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. In 1854 an edition (using the manuscript Dresden Cod. turc. 181 and one of the Berlin manuscripts) with a French translation appeared in Friedrich Heinrich Dieterici's *Chrestomatie Ottomane*<sup>3</sup>, but this served largely didactic purposes. Thus, the view of scholars did not change, and Franz Babinger remarked as late as 1927 in his *Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen* that the *menakib* were of no historical value<sup>4</sup>.

In 1949, Halil İnalçık and Mevlûd Oğuz introduced a newly-found "*gazavat-ı Sultan Murad*", which contained at the end an incomplete

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph von HAMMER, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. IX, Pest 1833 (reprint: Graz 1963), p. 238, n<sup>o</sup> 116.

<sup>2</sup> Niyazi Ahmed BANOĞLU, *Mahmud Paşa—Hayatı ve Şehadeti—(Camilerimiz ve Bâniler)*, Istanbul, 1970 (Gür Kitapevi), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Berlin, p. 1-18 (Ottoman text), 63-81 (French translation).

<sup>4</sup> Franz BABINGER, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke*, Leipzig, 1927, p. 25, n. 1.

version of the *menakıb*<sup>5</sup>. This marked the beginning of a new, albeit moderate, scholarly interest. In 1970, Niyazi Ahmed Banoğlu presented an edition in modern Turkish, based on the printed edition of 1289 H/1872 D and a manuscript from his private library<sup>6</sup>. Then, in 1974, İlber Ortaylı examined the text's character, and gave a detailed summary and excerpts of the text on the basis of two manuscripts in the National Library in Vienna<sup>7</sup>. The next step was an edition of the *gazavat-ı Sultan Murad* by İnalçık and Oğuz in 1978<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, in his comprehensive biography of Mahmud Pasha, Theoharis Stavrides recently studied the *menakıb* in a chapter dealing with "Mahmud Pasha's Fame and Posthumous Legend"<sup>9</sup>. Working with the manuscript TY 2425 from the University Library in Istanbul, Stavrides gives an extended summary dividing the story into twelve episodes<sup>10</sup>. This method makes sense, because, as we shall see, it brings out more clearly the diverse motifs. Like other modern scholars Stavrides seems to be fascinated by this piece of popular literature on the one hand and puzzled by its total lack of historical reliability on the other.

Actually, apart from the fact that Mahmud Angelović established pious foundations and died by execution, none of the tale's episodes fits with his real biography. In the following I shall try to examine this deficit of historical trustworthiness and to reconstruct — at least partly — the process of the legend's emergence as a text of popular literature.

The number of surviving manuscripts reflects the *menakıb*'s popularity in Ottoman times<sup>11</sup>. A rough check of several catalogues of German libraries yields, next to the two Viennese copies, another eight manuscripts<sup>12</sup>, a further version lies in the Bibliothèque Nationale in

<sup>5</sup> Halil İNALCIK/Mevlûd OĞUZ, «Yeni bulunmuş bir 'Gazavât-ı Sultan Murad'», in *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, VII/2, 1949, p. 481-495.

<sup>6</sup> BANOĞLU, *Mahmud Paşa*, *op. cit.*, p. 7-38.

<sup>7</sup> İlber ORTAYLI, «Osmanlı Toplumunda Yönetici Sınıf Hakkında Kamuoyunun Oluşumuna Bir Örnek; Menâkıb-ı Mahmud Paşa-i Veli», in: *Idem, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İktisadî ve Sosyal Değişim, Makaleler*, Ankara, 2000, p. 37-56 (originally appeared in *Prof. T. Bekir Balta Armağanı*, Ankara, 1974, p. 459-481).

<sup>8</sup> Halil İNALCIK / Mevlûd OĞUZ, *Gazavât-ı Sultân Murâd b. Mehmed Hân. İzladi ve Varna Savaşları (1443-1444) Üzerinde Anonim Gazavât-nâme*, Ankara, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Theoharis STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović*, Leiden, 2001 (Brill), p. 356-396.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 369-378.

<sup>11</sup> Franz BABINGER, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke*, Leipzig, 1927, p. 25, n. 1, speaks of «the Mahmûdnâme circulating in numerous manuscripts».

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Manfred GÖTZ, *Türkische Handschriften (= Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland XIII/4)*, Wiesbaden, 1979, p. 243-245, n° 263 and n° 264. Heinrich LEBERECHEIT FLEISCHER, *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Orientalium Bibliothecae Regiae Dresdensis*, Leipzig, 1831 (reprint Osnabrück 1988), p. 27, n° 182/2. Wilhelm PERTSCH, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin. Bd. VI, Verzeichnis der türkischen Handschriften*, Berlin, 1889, p. 1 n° 6, p. 46 n° 20/9, p. 270 f n° 245. Joseph AUMER, *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften der k. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek zu München*, München, 1875 (reprint Wiesbaden, 1970), p. 8 f n° 18/5 (incomplete), p. 32 n° 106.

Paris<sup>13</sup>, and another belongs to Franz Taeschner's collection, now in the library of Leiden University<sup>14</sup>. In Turkey at present ten manuscripts are known<sup>15</sup>, and quite a number can be expected to be hidden in *mecmu'as* and, of course, in private libraries. Certainly a more thorough inspection will bring more copies to light. Furthermore, the *menakıb* is incorporated into an equally legendary kind of *Tarih-i Al-i 'Osman*, which exists in various manuscripts under different titles<sup>16</sup>.

A brief look at some versions of the *menakıb* is enough to be made aware of the considerable divergences, typical of popular history or rather, to be more precise, *oral history*. Although in the different versions the story is sometimes more or less the same, the choice of words is not. Thus, the tale seems indeed to be a part of coffeehouse literature, as already suggested by Hammer, an oral tradition related closely to the *meddah* (professional story teller) genre<sup>17</sup>. İlber Ortaylı sees it even as a means of shaping public opinion on the ruling class<sup>18</sup>.

We certainly have to deal with several layers of the story, which starts with purely oral traditions possibly originating from the lower circles of dependants around the legend's hero (or, as we shall see, heroes). The next step must have been the transformation into a literary form for the use by *meddahs*, enabling the latter to fascinate an audience. This implied, of course, a shift in the tradition's intention: entertainment, suspense-creating elements and the moral of the story prevailed over historicity. Only after this point, however, could the differentiation into two (or maybe more) groups of earlier and later versions develop, which İncalcık and Oğuz detected<sup>19</sup>. The different versions simply represent

<sup>13</sup> E. BLOCHET, *Catalogue des manuscrits turcs*, II, Paris, 1933, p. 182, n° 1154.

<sup>14</sup> I owe this information the courtesy of Jan Schmidt. The text is part of a *mecmu'a*, Cod.Or. 12.406, fol. 334 b — 349 a (*Risâle-i Maḥmūd Paşa*).

<sup>15</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 378-379. He counts, however, only seven, because he considers two mss. Ali Emiri 43/3 and Ali Emiri 6/1 (Millet Kütüphanesi) as one. According to the *İstanbul Kütüphaneleri Tarih-Coğrafya Yazmalar Kataloğları: I. Türkçe Tarih Yazmaları*, İstanbul, 1943, p. 547 f n° 345, these are different copies, though. A further copy, not listed by Stavrides, Ali Emiri Ef. Şer'îye (Millet Ktph.) is mentioned *ibidem*. Fehmi Edhem KARATAY, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu*, II, İstanbul, 1961, p. 359 n° 2996 has another one as part of a *mecmu'a*.

<sup>16</sup> For this latter text see Hedda REINDL-KIEL, «Fromme Helden, Wunder, Träume: Populäre Geschichtsauffassung im Osmanischen Reich des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts», in: *Journal for Turkish Studies*, vol. 26/II, 2002 (*Barbara Flemming Armağanı* II, ed. Jan Schmidt), p. 175-181. In addition to the manuscripts mentioned there one copy exists in the Tercüman Gazetesi Kütüphanesi in İstanbul, cf. Günay KUT, *Tercüman Gazetesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu* I, İstanbul, 1989, p. 171-172.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pertev Naili BORATAV, «Maddâh», in: *EF* V, Leiden, 1986, p. 951-953. Özdemir NUTKU, *Meddahlık ve Meddah Hikâyeleri*, Ankara, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> İlber ORTAYLI, «Osmanlı Toplumunda Yönetici Sınıf Hakkında Kamuoyunun Oluşumuna Bir Örnek», *op. cit.*, p. 37-39.

<sup>19</sup> İNCALCIK/OĞUZ, «Yeni bulunmuş bir 'Gazavât-ı Sultan Murad'», *op. cit.*, p. 494.

recordings of the tale at various stages. All versions, though, are products of oral traditions, and hence, a closer analysis of the legend has to take the methods for analysing this kind of literature into consideration<sup>20</sup>.

For instance, one fundamental rule for an investigation of oral traditions is to see whether names and even facts are being rendered according to the needs or intentions of the transmitter in the chain of transmission<sup>21</sup>. Hence, the legend's hero might be changed as well as the described incidents, transforming historical reality into a "mirage of reality"<sup>22</sup>, *i.e.* oral tradition.

In focusing now on several parts of the *menakıb-ı Mahmud Paşa I* following for convenience Stavrides' division into 12 episodes, which are sometimes only very loosely connected<sup>23</sup>.

The first episode ("Origins and Recruitment")<sup>24</sup> tells the story of an agent sent by Murad II to find out whether his officials are oppressing the population. Near Manastır (Bitola) he finds a large group of monks asking difficult questions about the Gospels. The one amongst them who is able to master all of the difficult questions will become abbot. A tall young man succeeds and is elected. When the Sultan hears this story he sends an envoy to the young monk's father, a butcher<sup>25</sup>, to ask for the boy. The father sends the envoy to the monks, because the boy is not under his jurisdiction any more. The monks finally decide by drawing lots. The young man becomes a Muslim taking the name Mahmud. Brought to Edirne, he is shown favour by Murad II, who hands him over to Molla Gürani to be educated.

<sup>20</sup> The basic study on this subject remains still Jan VANSINA, *Oral tradition, a study in historical methodology*, London, 1963. I used here the edition of Penguin University Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973. See further David P. HENIGE, *The chronology of oral tradition*, Oxford, 1974; Paul THOMPSON, *The voice of the past, oral history*, Oxford, 1978; Ruth FINNEGAN, *Oral tradition and the verbal arts*, London, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> VANSINA, *Oral tradition, op. cit.*, p. 76-113. A good example for this I witnessed in summer 2002, when I tried to find out whether any traces of the *saray* of Bozdağ Yaylası could be found. This place was according to archival material used by Prince Selim (later Selim II) as a summer resort when he was residing in Manisa. In Bozdağ, now a small town, it is common knowledge (although it remains unclear how old this tradition is) that the location marlı, where quite a group of enormous plane-trees (definitely several hundred years old) are standing was the place where Mehmed II while still a prince used to study under his teacher Molla "Güryani" (= Gürâni). When I was explaining that I found in an archival *defter* a *saray* of Selim, the tradition was immediately altered: the plane-trees were now standing in front of the *saray*, and it was Prince Selim who got there his education by Molla «Güryani».

<sup>22</sup> VANSINA, *Oral tradition, op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs, op. cit.*, p. 370-378. Vansina, *Oral tradition, op. cit.*, p. 59-62, suggests an even finer division, using the concepts of episode, plot, motif, setting and theme for a tale's closer analysis.

<sup>24</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs, op. cit.*, p. 370.

<sup>25</sup> The Viennese manuscripts seem not to have the butcher detail, although the place of the setting is Manastır there too, cf. ORTAYLI, «Menâkıb», in: *Makaleler*, p. 45, 51.

As Halil İnalçık indicated, the profession of the boy's father, *kassab*, butcher, points to another Mahmud, one with the by-name Kassab-zade, tutor of Mehmed II, a cousin of the historian Tursun Beğ<sup>26</sup>. The name of Kassab-zade might be a remnant of a different saga, focusing on the descendants of Firuz Beğ, the governor of Ankara (1387) and Antalya (1392)<sup>27</sup>. The text of the legendary *tarih* (in the copy kept in my private library), which contains a late version of the *menakıb* mentions Cübbe 'Ali<sup>28</sup>, the father of Kassab-zade Mahmud. Yet, the story is so distorted in the "chronicle" that Cübbe 'Ali is a Byzantine saint and, according to Mahmud Pasha (Angelović), the conquest of Constantinople is only possible if this saint dies. Ak Şemseddin, Molla Gürani, Şeyh Vefa and Yahya Efendi<sup>29</sup> pray for this end a *fatıha*, which produces the coveted result<sup>30</sup>. Maybe an investigation of several other manuscripts could bring more fragments of this tradition to light.

The two Mahmuds of this episode indicate an evident possibility: the legend's Mahmud in some of the other episodes might also stand for another additional historical figure.

In the third episode, for example, Mahmud, in the meantime appointed grand vezir, but slandered by his enemies, is arrested and going to be executed. At the very last moment he miraculously disappears, taken away by the Islamic *deus-ex-machina*, Hızır. Eventually a villager sent by Hızır convinces the Sultan to reverse his decision and Mahmud is re-installed in his office<sup>31</sup>. If we take this episode's Mahmud as the historical Mahmud Paşa Angelović, we have an immediate difficulty in connecting the event to any historical context or in interpreting the incident.

The same is true for the fourth episode, where forty thousand Tatars from the Crimea attack Edirne to take over the Sultanate from the new Sultan Mehmed II. Mahmud, however, has poisoned garments distributed to the Tatar soldiers who thereupon die in large numbers<sup>32</sup>.

A closer look at the story on the conquest of Constantinople (sixth episode) and Mahmud's appointment to various offices (seventh episode) reveals, in my view, some traces of the suspected addition of an historical figure.

Mahmud secures the conquest by recommending that ships be carried overland into the Golden Horn and "with the help of Gedik [Ahmed] Paşa, created a galley at the Ok Meydanı. They furled up the sails and

<sup>26</sup> İNALCIK/OĞUZ, *Gazavât, op. cit.*, p. VIII, 79, n. 2. See also Halil İNALCIK, «Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time», in: *WZKM* 69, 1977, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> İNALCIK, «Tursun Beg», *op. cit.*, p. 56-57 and 71.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 57-58 and 71.

<sup>29</sup> Probably this Yahya stands for the famous milk-brother of Kanunî Sultan Süleyman.

<sup>30</sup> Fol. 39 a-40 b of my *Tarih-i Fatih*.

<sup>31</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs, op. cit.*, p. 371 f.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 372.

marched by land, and at an auspicious hour they threw the galley into the sea”<sup>33</sup>.

For our understanding of the story it does not matter whether Mahmud Angelović or Gedik Ahmed Pasha ever initiated the pulling of ships overland into the Golden Horn; what is important is that here both names appear. Thus, we should take into consideration that Mahmud Pasha in some of the episodes might in fact be a Gedik Ahmed in disguise. If, for example, we replace in the third episode (about his miraculous rescue from execution) Mahmud’s name with that of Gedik Ahmed the story makes sense. Naturally, the wonder worked by Hızır masks a more mundane occurrence, mere armed pressure.

Gedik Ahmed Pasha’s fate was in a way rather similar to that of Mahmud Pasha Angelović. Where Mahmud Pasha was graced by others as “Sultan of Vezirs”<sup>34</sup>, Gedik Ahmed bears in an inscription of a mosque built by his son the epithet *sultanü’l-guzât, âsafü’l-İslâm, nasrü’l-âbidîn* (“the Sultan of the *gazis*, the Asaph<sup>35</sup> of Islam, the help of worshippers”)<sup>36</sup>. Ahmed too was executed in the end for being too powerful, just as Makbul/Maktul İbrahim Pasha was more than a generation later. It is probably this kind of—what I would like to call—Wallenstein motif<sup>37</sup>, which made the material above all attractive for a *meddah*.

Although in Gedik Ahmed’s case the literary component (patronising poets, writing poetry himself) is lacking<sup>38</sup>, his career shows many parallels to that of Mahmud. This and the fact that Gedik was Mahmud’s successor in the grand vezirate (and certainly also the related names Mahmud — Ahmed) led, it seems, even in early times to confusion between the two vezirs.

The sources contain some hints that Ahmed Pasha’s execution went less “smoothly” than Mahmud’s. As Gedik was the venerated hero of the janissaries, Bayezid II first had him arrested in Istanbul, but was forced to set him free again before he finally succeeded in having him strangled after a feast in Edirne, followed by a janissary uprising<sup>39</sup>. It might be this first arrest, obviously meant to lead to Gedik’s execution, which is connected to the third episode about Mahmud’s miraculous rescue by Hızır.

The fourth episode of the *menakıb* looks at first glance rather enigmatic. There is no historical evidence that Crimean Tatar soldiers ever

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 373.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 297 and 359.

<sup>35</sup> Vezir of King Salomon.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Machiel KIEL, «Observations on the History of Northern Greece during the Turkish Rule», *Balkan Studies* 12, 1971, p. 435.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Friedrich von Schiller’s play, *Wallenstein*, 1800.

<sup>38</sup> See Hedda REINDL-KIEL, «Gedik Ahmed Paşa», *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* 13, p. 543-544.

<sup>39</sup> Hedda REINDL, *Männer um Bāyezīd: Eine prosopographische Studie über die Epoche Bāyezīds II*, Berlin, 1983, p. 113-114 and 123-124.

appeared in Edirne, nor were they a threat to Mehmed II, nor was Mahmud Pasha involved in a struggle against them. The riddle can be solved, though. The episode seems to be equally connected with Gedik Ahmed, who conquered Kaffa and other towns on the Crimea from the Genoese in 1475. The setting of the story in Edirne doubtless reflected a vague memory of the settlement of Aktav Tatars (from the Golden Horde) in the region after 1398 by Yıldırım Bayezid. This was connected with the extinction of their leader Aktav and other prominent figures<sup>40</sup>.

In episode seven, which deals with an accumulation of offices in Mahmud Pasha's hands, we could be confronted again with Gedik and Mahmud as one person, since there are reports that Gedik held in 1478-1481 the office of Sandjak Bey of Valona and that of Gallipoli at the same time<sup>41</sup>.

One figure in the *menakıb* seems to be completely fictitious, that of Koca İbrahim Pasha. The name possibly points to one of the Çandarlı İbrahim Pashas, probably the father of Çandarlı Halil Pasha<sup>42</sup>, but maybe also to the latter's son<sup>43</sup>. Both were, however, neither involved in the struggle for power with Mahmud Pasha nor with Gedik Ahmed. There could, however, be confusion with Çandarlı Halil Pasha, who was executed after the conquest of Constantinople. According to some sources Halil was Mahmud's predecessor as grand vezir<sup>44</sup>. In the aftermath of Halil's execution the whole Çandarlı family had a bad press in Ottoman historiography. A dim memory of this might have helped in the choice of a member of this family as the villain of the piece. The machinations of İbrahim Pasha in the *menakıb* text seem in fact to be the result of an entire jumble of historical facts and rumours.

In this episode İbrahim Pasha, after the death of his wife, was given a slave from the imperial harem by the Sultan. Hating Mahmud Pasha, İbrahim succeeds in procuring a blank paper with Mahmud's seal on it. İbrahim then writes a false letter in Mahmud's name, addressed to his, İbrahim's, wife that she should poison her husband (İbrahim), so that Mahmud could marry her. İbrahim brings this false letter then to the Sultan who becomes furious and has Mahmud imprisoned and (the eleventh episode) executed<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. DECEI, «Établissement de Aktav de la Horde d'Or dans l'Empire ottoman au temps de Yıldırım Bayezid», in: *60. Doğum Yılı Münasebetiyle Zeki Velidi Togan'a Armağan. Symbolae in honorem A. Zeki Velidi Togan*, Istanbul, 1950-55, p. 77-92. Aktav Tatars are mentioned still in 16<sup>th</sup>-century *tahrir defterleri*, see M Tayyib GÖKBİLGİN, *Rumeli'de Yürükler, Tatarlar ve Evlâd-i Fatihan*, Istanbul, 1957, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> REINDL, *Männer*, *op. cit.*, p. 104-115.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, Ankara, 1974, p. 46-55.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. REINDL, *Männer*, *op. cit.*, p. 213-222.

<sup>44</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 113-114.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 375 and 376.

Mahmud and Gedik Ahmed both had their own respective deadly enemies, Rum Mehmed Pasha<sup>46</sup> and Kara Mustafa Pasha<sup>47</sup>, who both did their best to defame them with the Sultan. It is very well possible that traits of both men were packed into the story, which resonates a faint echo of a scandal caused by Mahmud Pasha's second wife. A law suite against her by Mahmud's children after his death makes clear that she had severely damaged her reputation by spending a night "in the house of Prince Mustafa's mother" while her husband was absent on a campaign<sup>48</sup>.

This scandal must have become public, because contemporary Western sources made 'sex-and-crime' reports out of it, blending in the motif of the Biblical Susannah (or Bathseba) in the bath with rape, the rapist being the Sultan's eldest son. This served of course the prejudices of a Western public, for whom Muslim society, especially in matters of sexuality, is the counter-world to their own. A motif like this is certainly not possible for an Ottoman public, where the sexual propriety of the imperial family had to be beyond question. Thus, the Prince had to be dropped from the story and, to avoid any allusion the name, Mustafa, had to be left out, too.

For obscure reasons some Western sources attribute the indecent story not to Mahmud Pasha's but to Gedik Ahmed Pasha's wife<sup>49</sup>. We do not know what kind of rumours were circulating in contemporary Ottoman society; it is not completely impossible, of course, that Gedik Ahmed was in this respect also a target. For the Ottoman compiler of this episode this did not change very much, as the name Mustafa as Gedik Ahmed's enemy was not to appear in this context either. In any case, the motif had to be altered to promote the *menakib's* final intention, where a Mahmud Pasha whose honour was harmed by his wife's sexual misbehaviour was undesirable.

This change of the episode's original plot might have appeared to weaken the total story line and was therefore brushed up by the addition of a curse (episode ten). But, this malediction has a double function, as we shall see; it is also of paramount importance for the tale's moral.

A woman who lost her son during the campaign of Negroponte (Eğri-bos) had cursed the commander responsible for her son's death. Once uttered, the curse cannot be taken back (*atılan ok geriye dönmez*)<sup>50</sup>. Since both vezirs, Mahmud as well as Gedik Ahmed took part in this campaign, both men are fitting candidates for this part of the story.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Alexander H. de GROOT, « Mehmed Pasha, Rum », in: *EF*<sup>2</sup> VI, Leiden, 1991, p. 1000.

<sup>47</sup> REINDL, *Männer*, *op. cit.*, p. 292-301.

<sup>48</sup> İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, « Fatih Sultan Mehmed'in Veziri Azamlarından Mahmud Paşa ile Şehzade Mustafa'nın Araları Neden Açılmıştı? », *Belleten* XXVIII, 1964, p. 727 f.

<sup>49</sup> STAVRIDES, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 345-346.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 376.



As Stavrides pointed out, the formation of the narrative probably gained momentum after the execution of Maktul İbrahim Pasha in 1536<sup>51</sup>. But, the story obviously does not contain distinct allusions to this grand vezir. Evidently, when the *menakıb* eventually gained an established form as a piece of oral popular literature, the question of who served as the legend's model was definitely not important anymore. The *menakıb*'s Mahmud Pasha is a genius, especially in political and military matters, and although he is extremely powerful, enjoying even Hızır's supernatural protection, he cannot escape his fate. Yet he remains a strangely remote, somewhat faceless figure without clear-cut personal features. It is precisely this blurred personality that makes the legend an archetype, applicable to every tragedy of power, be it that of Maktul İbrahim Pasha or even that of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. This last component might eventually have been the factual reason for the longevity of the legend.

We should be aware that ordinary citizens of the Ottoman capital and other urban centres were again and again confronted with executions of powerful grandees<sup>52</sup>, whose sudden fall remained largely incomprehensible for people outside the direct ruling elite. Those events must have led to shock, anger and dismay among the population. The *menakıb*'s connection of the tragedy to a curse, one, especially, which could not be taken back, gives some kind of an explanation for such a tragedy. For individuals living (at least partly) in a world of magical ideas, this explanation was certainly satisfying, as it supplied a motive similar to that of a natural disaster. In this context we should point out that most manuscripts of the *menakıb* carrying dates were copied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (or later), a time, when the emergence of a kind of urban bourgeoisie gradually commenced.

It must have been Mahmud Pasha Angelović's large pious foundations which made his name prevail over the other vezirs who had served as models for the narrative. Despite the foundation's difficulties during the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>53</sup> its *imaret* provided food for the city's needy and thus guaranteed that it was Mahmud Pasha's name which was kept alive. Hence, it was Mahmud Pasha, who stood for the tragedy of all the vezirs and grandees who fell from the zenith of power into the black hole of an incomprehensible death.

In this sense, albeit based on blurred historical facts, the whole genre of *menakıbnames* represents a fairly reliable source for the spiritual needs of vast groups, the "mute" part of population, whose grievances were never directly communicated in written form. If we extend cultural history beyond the circles of ruling and intellectual elite then we must definitely give closer consideration to this field of literature.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 394-395.

<sup>52</sup> Ahmed MUMCU, *Osmanlı Devletinde Siyaseten Katl*, Ankara 1963, p. 73 counts 23 cases of executed grand vezirs between Sultan Orhan's and Abdülmecid's time.

<sup>53</sup> Suraiya FAROQHI, « A Great Foundation in Difficulties: or some evidence on economic contraction in the Ottoman Empire of the mid-seventeenth century », in: *Mélanges Professeur Robert Mantran*, Abdeljelil Temimi ed., Zaghuan, 1988, p. 109-121.

Hedda REINDL-KIEL, *The Tragedy of Power: The Fate of Grand Vezirs according to the Menakıbnâme-i Mahmud Paşa-i Veli*

The anonymous *Menakıbnâme-i Mahmud Paşa* has always puzzled scholars for its lack of historicity, since it does not fit to the known biography of its protagonist. The present article takes this legend as a product of popular literature, which has to be analysed with the methods of *oral history*. With this approach, focusing also on the text's aims, a series of historical events can be identified which are processed in several layers of the subject. In addition some historical personalities interwoven into a fictitious, but fairly faceless hero are detected. These individuals have only their tragic fate in common: to be executed at the peak of their power.

Hedda REINDL-KIEL, *La tragédie du pouvoir: le destin des grands vizirs selon le Menakıbnâme-i Mahmud Paşa-i Veli*

Le *Menakıbnâme-i Mahmud Paşa* (anonyme) a toujours laissé perplexes les érudits pour son manque d'historicité, puisqu'il ne correspond pas à la biographie connue de son protagoniste. Cet article envisage cette légende comme une production de la littérature populaire, qui doit être analysée avec les méthodes de *l'histoire orale*. Selon cette approche, et se fixant aussi sur le but du texte, on a identifié une série d'événements historiques qui sont traités à plusieurs niveaux. De plus, certaines personnalités historiques, mêlées à un héros imaginaire mais tout à fait anonyme, sont repérées. Ces individus ont seulement en commun leur destin tragique: avoir été exécutés à l'apogée de leur pouvoir.