

Narration Beyond Genres: The Military Memoirs of Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi

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Türlere Sığmayan Bir Anlatım: Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi'nin Askerlik Hatıraları

Öz ■ Leiden Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi'nin zengin elyazması koleksiyonundaki bir eser, Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi isimli bir Osmanlı askerine aittir. Kabudlu, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ilk çeyreğinde Osmanlı ordusunda deli olarak hizmet etmiş ve görevi gereği Anadolu ve Balkan topraklarında seyahat etmiş biridir. 1834 yılında kendi maceralarını kaleme alan Kabudlu, kitabının girişinde gezdiği şehirleri ve katıldığı savaşları bir bir nakledip bir “*tevārîh*” yazdığını ifade etmektedir. Literatürde ise bu eser seyahatname ve otobiyografi türleri altında tanıtılmıştır. Bu makale, bir deli askerinin anılarını kaleme alma sebeplerini, yazma eserlerden matbuat çağına geçişin yaşandığı on dokuzuncu yüzyıldaki Osmanlı kitap kültürü bağlamında tartışmaktadır. Osmanlı topraklarında matbuat kapitalizminin arifesinde yazılan bir elyazmasını inceleyerek, Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi'nin sıra dışı seyahat notlarını neden “*tevārîh*” olarak isimlendirdiği ve bu eserin hangi açılardan seyahatname veya otobiyografi olduğu sorusuna cevap aramaktadır. Ayrıca, o döneme ait muhtelif seyahatname, kronik, hatırat ve günlükleri de ele alarak bir deli askeri tarafından yazılan bu ben-anlatısının önemini göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Askeriye, Elyazması, Seyahatname, Otobiyografi, Ben-Anlatısı.

Classifying and discussing Ottoman texts within the framework of literary forms such as autobiographies, life writings, self-narratives and ego-documents is a recent approach in the field. This approach signifies a difference from traditional categorizations and represents a recognition of the dynamic nature of literary

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expression within the Ottoman context. The influence of studies on autobiographies during the modern period has been particularly discernible in shaping both Ottoman literature and the academic discourse surrounding this subject. Although there is a need to classify literary culture in this regard as a means of expanding on the existing research, we also need to consider the genres to which such books were assigned in the Ottoman period and the genres to which authors and readers thought they belonged.¹

Modern researchers categorize genres when examining the lives of individuals in history. In doing so, they consider the author's identity, the purpose of the text, its language, and narrative structure to assign a classification. If it is a self-narrative classified as autobiography, memoirs, diary, and so forth, it serves functions such as "self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, self-formation, self-presentation, self-justification" to comprehend the lives of historical figures.² Studies in the last few decades on the existence and diversity of self-narratives in the Ottoman Empire have resulted in productive research. A large number of texts penned by ordinary people who wrote their own life stories and memoirs by drawing on their own experiences and travels have been identified, examined and published within the framework of various classifications. In that context, an article by Cemal Kafadar on the diary of an Ottoman dervish broke new ground in the field.³

In recent years, the term "Ottoman ego-document" has started to be commonly used in studies on self-narratives in Ottoman literature.⁴ Within the scope of this exciting development, a large number of genres are being examined, ranging from entirely self-narrative books to short notes in the margins of manuscripts. Along with these narratives, analyses of Ottoman identity will surely continue to

1 For a study that examines the autobiographical features of early modern Ottoman miscellanies in light of these issues, see Derin Terzioğlu, "Autobiography in Fragments: Reading Ottoman Personal Miscellanies in Early Modern Era", *Autobiographical Themes in Turkish Literature: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Olcay Akyıldız, Halim Kara and Börte Sagaster (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007), pp. 83-99.

2 See Karl J. Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness", *Critical Inquiry*, 1/4 (1975), pp. 821-848.

3 Cemal Kafadar, "Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature", *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989), pp. 121-150.

4 See Selim Karahasanoğlu, "Ottoman Ego-Documents: State of the Art", *IJMES*, 53 (2021), pp. 301-308.

increase in number.⁵ Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi's book, the subject of this paper, is also an ego-documentary narrative. The author referred to his work as a chronicle, while studies in the literature have defined it as a travelogue and autobiography. In that regard, the issues of why Kabudlu Mustafa referred to his work as such, why researchers discuss it as an autobiography or travelogue, and which genres its narrative style most closely matches are topics that are worthy of further discussion.

Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi and His Adventures

Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi was a *deli*—an irregular Ottoman cavalry soldier—and in the first quarter of the nineteenth century he served in the forces that were sent to put down rebellions in eastern Anatolia and later he served in Rumelia as well. The only source about Kabudlu is a manuscript titled *Tevârih*, which he wrote describing his extraordinary campaigns and travels. The work, which exists in the form of a unique manuscript that is housed in the Leiden University Library,⁶ is of crucial importance because it demonstrates the worldview of an Ottoman *deli*. Little is known about the daily lives of the *deli* due to a scarcity of information and sources, but Kabudlu's work provides crucial insights in that regard.

The epithet “Kabudlu” means someone who is from Kabud, a village that is now known as Bulgurlu, which is in the district of Akdağmadeni in the city of Yozgat. As indicated by his accounts, Kabudlu Mustafa travelled to “foreign lands” with his father when he was eight years old in 1801, meaning he was born in 1793. He says that he stayed in those “foreign lands” for twenty-five years, indicating that he likely returned to his village in 1826, which is the year when the janissary corps was abolished along with the mercenary *deli* units and a new army was established.⁷

In itself, the word *deli* means brave and fearless, as well as crazy. The military group known as *deli* is also referred to by the term *delil*, which conveys the meanings of guide and pioneer, and it is frequently mentioned in Ottoman sources

5 For more on the connections between autobiographical texts, especially concerning the issues of travelogues and identity, see: Richard van Leeuwen, “Autobiography, Travelogue and Identity”, *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998), pp. 27-29.

6 Leiden University Library, Special Collection, Cod.Or. 1551.

7 For a detailed examination of the Janissaries, see Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1994).

alongside volunteer (*gönüllü*) and rifleman (*tüfenkçi*) groups.⁸ *Deli* soldiers were fighting ahead of regular units, and 100-150 *delis* would be under the command of a *delibaşı*. They served the viziers, and if a pasha needed *delis* for security or a campaign, they would make the arrangements.⁹

In Kabudlu's narration, we can see how *deli* regiments made money, which is important because it seems that they struggled to earn a living. His accounts are also crucial as they shed light on the battles that took place as a result of the conflicts that arose between the center and rural areas in the Ottoman Empire in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. That tension mainly arose because of *a'yāns* (landed proprietors in the Ottoman territories) acting against the central government,¹⁰ three cases of which are noted in Kabudlu's story. The missions against those three *a'yāns* were carried out on the frontiers of the Empire in eastern Anatolia and Rumelia, making it possible for Kabudlu to travel across a wide geography.

Kabudlu's first mission was to serve in the forces sent to put down a rebellion incited by Hamşioğlu/Himşiaşvili Selim Paşa (d. 1815)¹¹ in the Acara Mountains, which today are situated within Georgia. The ruler of Erzurum, Baba Pasha (d. 1821),¹² was responsible for suppressing the rebellion, and he first sent *deli* soldiers to the region, among whom was Kabudlu. Kabudlu recounts how they were deployed around Acara castle, where Selim Paşa was holed up, and after several months, Selim Paşa surrendered, whereupon his head was cut off and sent to Istanbul. They then marched to Livane, today's city of Artvin. When the son of Selim Paşa rebelled in the same region, they returned to Acara and then went back to Erzurum.

At one point the chief *deli*, Delibaşı Mahmud Tiran (d. 1816), was declared a bandit and ordered to be executed, whereupon Baba Paşa's forces attacked

8 See Mustafa Cezar, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Levendler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2013), pp. 175-179; 216-220.

9 See Abdullah Turhal, *Osmanlı'nın Muhteşem Süvarileri Deliler* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2011); Abdülkadir Özcan, "Deli", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, 1994, IX, pp. 132-135.

10 Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ayanlık* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1994).

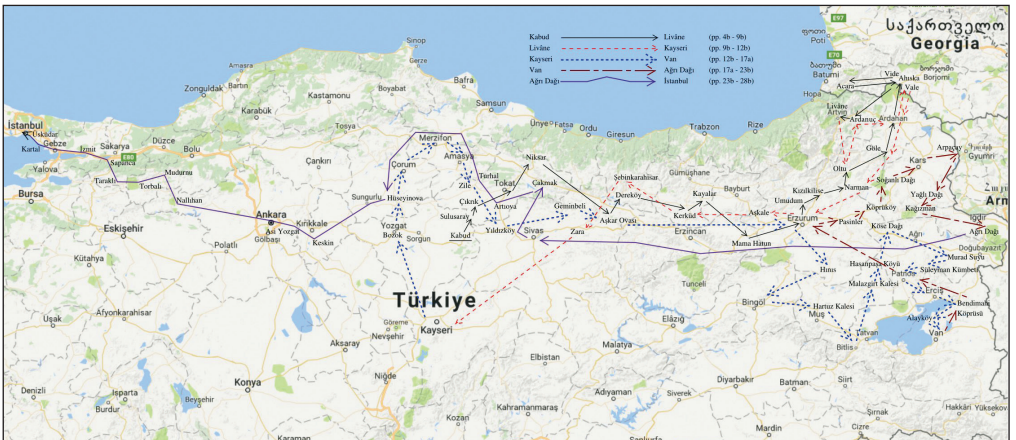
11 Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, V (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), p. 1493.

12 Baba Pasha was Pehlivan İbrahim Pasha. See Kemal Beydilli, "Pehlivan İbrahim Paşa", *DİA*, 2007, XXXIV, pp. 222-223.

Mahmud Tiran, but he was defeated by the *delis*. Kabudlu travelled with Mahmud Tiran towards Sivas and they were invited by a pasha in Şebinkarahisar to enter his service. However, when they arrived in the region, the pasha's men began shooting at them in the night and they killed Mahmud Tiran. Kabudlu fled with 300 *delis* and when they arrived in Zara, the vizier of Sivas sent troops against them. Kabudlu survived with only 25 other *delis*, and they journeyed to Kayseri, where they entered the service of Memiş Paşa.

Kabudlu says that after one year the *delis* were sent to put down a major rebellion against Çarkacı Ali Pasha (d. 1823) in Sivas. However, the rebellion was suppressed before they could get there, so they accepted an offer from the new governor of Erzurum, Hafız Ali Pasha (d. 1829). They arrived in Erzurum and then were sent to Van because another *âyân*, Derviş Paşa of Van, had been sentenced to death. They travelled to Van and took the castle, whereupon they executed Derviş Paşa in 1819 and sent his severed head to Istanbul.¹³

The mission now accomplished, Kabudlu and his friends returned to Erzurum and the governor of Kars offered them a new mission, which was to save Armenian villagers who were being taken by Russian soldiers to Russian territories. It turned out, however, that the villagers actually left voluntarily with the Russians, and then a skirmish broke out between the *delis* and Russian soldiers. The *delis*, whose ranks were very weak, found that their only option was to flee. Ultimately, they cancelled their agreement with the governor and journeyed towards cities in the western territories, and that's how their travels in Rumelia began.



Map 1: The Routes Kabudlu Followed During His Eastern Expeditions

13 For the document of this event in the Ottoman archives, see BOA, HAT, 1227/47927.

During the journey they were summoned to take part in a major campaign against Tepedelenli Ali Pasha (d. 1822) in Ioannina,¹⁴ who had been proclaimed a rebel and sentenced to death. They travelled via Istanbul and reached Ioannina, where twelve pashas had gathered their forces against Tepedelenli. During the siege, a Greek rebellion, the Greek war of independence, erupted in the Morea, and Kabudlu along with other *delis* were ordered to go there.¹⁵

Under the leadership of Dramalı Mahmud Pasha, they journeyed from Yanya (Ioannina) to Manastır (Bitola) and from there to Yenişehir (Larissa). Kabudlu says that several pashas had gathered their forces at Alamana Bridge and that there were about sixty thousand soldiers when they arrived in the Morea Pass, where the army suffered great losses. After their journey across Korinthos, thousands of soldiers began to die of hunger, but Kabudlu made a deal with the captain of an Austrian ship and he and his father sailed to Eğriboz (Euboea) Island in hiding aboard the ship.¹⁶

Kabudlu spent four years on the island, and he describes in detail the bloody battles in which he took part in Kızılhisar (Karystos), Salahur (Istiaia) and Kumiye (Kymi). For example, he describes how they took the city of Salahur, went out to find captives and began to collect booty.¹⁷ In another part, he says that their band of 800 soldiers was under siege for several months in Kumiye and that their food had run out. Since they had already eaten all of their cows and sheep, they started eating their horses, and when there weren't any more horses to eat, they ate dogs and cats and, finally, the bodies of dead men. They constantly thought about surrendering to the rebels, because only 300 of the original 800 soldiers had survived. However, some troops arrived from the city of Alivar and they helped the *delis* escape from the castle one night.¹⁸

14 See William Plomer, *The Diamond of Jannina: Ali Pasha 1741–1822* (New York: Taplinger, 1970); K. E. Fleming, *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

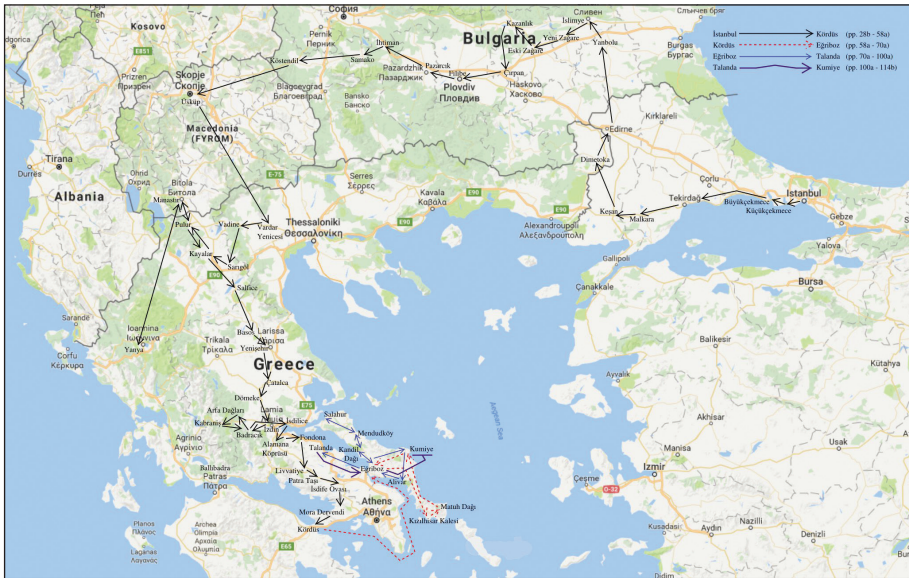
15 Just as the name Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi is not found in the Ottoman archives, there is also very little documentation regarding the role of the *deli* soldiers in suppressing the rebellion. For a study conducted based on Ottoman archival documents regarding the Greek war of independence, see: H. Şükrü İlicak, ed., “*Those Infidel Greeks*”: *The Greek War of Independence through Ottoman Archival Documents* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021).

16 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 55^a-62^b.

17 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 79^b-83^b.

18 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 88^b-92^a.

The most detailed narrative in the work concerns the Talanda (Atalanta) expedition. The *deli* soldiers who went on the expedition due to a shortage of supplies in the city of Chalcis returned to the city after suffering great losses. Kabudlu talks about his adventures, fears and sorrows here in minute detail.¹⁹ Upon returning, they spent time in different cities on Euboea Island; after a description of their journey to the city of Kumiye, the narrative ends because the remaining pages of the manuscript are now lost.



Map 2: The Route of Kabudlu During the Rumelia Expeditions

The *Tevârih* of Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi

Kabudlu’s adventures come down to us today through his work *Tevârih*, which was written in simple and broken Turkish with many misspellings. It consists of 114 folios, but we do not know the whole of the story because the latter part of the manuscript is now lost. On the first page of the work, Kabudlu states that he completed the text on April 2, 1834, presenting an account of events up until 1833. However, the narrative ends abruptly in the summer of 1824. Based on the fact that Kabudlu introduces himself as “Hajji” on the first page, we can surmise that he made his pilgrimage in subsequent years.

19 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 99^b-105^b.

The narration of the book is in a conversational tone, as if someone had taken down notes while listening to the story of Kabudlu. However, there is nothing in the text indicating that the work was written by way of dictation.²⁰ Indeed, it is more likely that this manuscript full of writing errors was penned by Kabudlu himself, as on the very first page it is emphasized that he is the author of the work.

Fig. 1: The first page of *Tevârih*. (MS, p. 1^a).

The narration likely had two target audiences, readers and listeners. There are sections in which readers and listeners are asked to draw a lesson from the story or to recite the *al-Fâtiḥa* surah.²¹ Although the narrative resembles a type of verbal transmission, it can be seen that Islamic book culture influenced the work. At the beginning of the work, there is a long *munâcât* (in praise of Allah) which employs complex language. Our research revealed that Kabudlu copied it from a book by Sinan Pasha (d. 1486) titled *Tadarru'nâme*.²² On the other hand, the drawings in the book demonstrate that Kabudlu intended his memoirs to survive in a well-organized manuscript rather than pen down his oral testimony in an arbitrary fashion.

Kabudlu does not offer a clear explanation for why he wrote about his adventures, but there are clues indicating that he was a good storyteller. For example, he relates that one day he and 300 *delis* went to Talanda from Euboea to find food because for four months their provisions had been running out. However, only 8 of the 300 soldiers survived in a major battle in Talanda, one of whom was Kabudlu. He says that they arrived in the city exhausted



20 See Ömer Koçyiğit, *Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi Efendi: Tevârih (analysis-text-maps-index-facsimile)*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2016), pp. 47-49.

21 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 4^b; p. 24^b.

22 See Sinan Paşa, *Tazarru'nâme: Yakarışlar Kitabı*, ed. Mertol Tulum (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2014).

and after a few days the *delibaşı* summoned them to narrate what they had been through. He relates how his audience had used to listen with admiration to his stories, which he later penned down.²³ Thus, we can surmise that his work is a reflection of his skills in storytelling and that good reception must have prompted him to write down his memoirs in his advanced years.

Although the location where the book was written and the individuals who read it are unknown, the only known fact is that Leiden University purchased this manuscript in 1839, five years after its completion. One of the members of the Testa Family, probably Gaspard Testa, who was the Dutch ambassador in Istanbul, obtained the manuscript and sent it to Leiden. In 1871, when Michael Jan de Goeje was cataloguing the oriental books in the library, he made an introductory comment about the manuscript in Latin.²⁴ The introduction of this work to academic circles was made by Jan Schmidt in the 2000s.²⁵ When Schmidt was cataloguing the Turkish manuscripts held by Leiden University, he came across Kabudlu's book and, because of the extraordinary story it tells and its interesting drawings, he became determined to write an article about it.²⁶ More importantly, these two scholars ascribed the book, which the author himself described as a chronicle, to two different genres: Travelogue and autobiography.

The Work as a Chronicle

Chronicles, known as *tārīḥ*, or *tevārīḥ* in the plural, are one of the most common genres in Islamic historical literary traditions. In these chronicles, which were based on the history of the dynasties that were in power, events that took place were often fictionalized to fit the chronology at hand. Starting in the fifteenth century, Ottoman chronicles started to become more widespread, and it became one of the most common genres in Ottoman literature.²⁷ The reason why the *Tevārīḥ*

23 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 106^b.

24 Michael J. de Goeje, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae*, V (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1873), pp. 191-192.

25 Jan Schmidt, *Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and Other Collections in the Netherlands: Comprising the Acquisitions of Turkish Manuscripts in Leiden University Library between 1800 and 1970*, II (Leiden: Leiden University Library, 2002), pp. 112-122.

26 Jan Schmidt, "The Adventures of an Ottoman Horseman; the Autobiography of Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi Efendi, 1800-1825", *The Joys of Philology. Studies in Ottoman Literature, History and Orientalism (1500-1923)*, I (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2002), pp. 165-286.

27 Zeki Arıkan, "Tarih", *DİA*, 2011, XXXX, pp. 66-72; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

of Kabudlu can be categorized as a chronicle is that the author himself introduces his work as such. At the beginning of the manuscript, as mentioned above, he says that he had intended to compose a chronicle by providing an account of the cities he had visited and the wars he had witnessed.

During the times when Kabudlu was alive, printing started to spread in the Ottoman Empire, and while there were many printed chronicles, there were not any printed travelogues, memoirs or autobiographies.²⁸ Even the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, the most famous Ottoman traveler, was printed for the first time only in 1843 in Istanbul with the title *Müntehabât-ı Evliya Çelebi*.²⁹ The most prominent feature of Ottoman chronicles that were written in the same period as Kabudlu's work, such as *Asım Tārīhi* and *Şānizāde Tārīhi*, is that they narrate events in the third person and order them within a certain chronology.³⁰ However, Kabudlu wrote about events from the perspective of eyewitnesses and he provided few dates for the events in the work.

As an instance of this, in the beginning of the story Kabudlu says that they had met with Baba Paşa in Aşkar, which today is the district of Suşehri in the province of Sivas, with the plan of going to Erzurum, and that year, he says, Baba Paşa had been a captive in Shumen.³¹ The year of this event can be deduced from the biography of Baba Paşa.³² Moreover, in the Ottoman archives we can see that Baba Paşa reported about this journey, saying that he separated the *delis* and riflemen in Aşkar and sent them to Erzurum via two different routes so that they would not be a burden on the local inhabitants. They arrived in Erzurum in early March of 1815 according to the report.³³ So, it becomes clear that the first event he writes about occurred in 1815.

28 For the number of books published before print capitalism by subject, see Jale Baysal, *Müteferrikâdan Birinci Meşrutiyet'e Kadar Osmanlı Türklerinin Bastıkları Kitaplar* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1968), pp. 26-45; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 38-41.

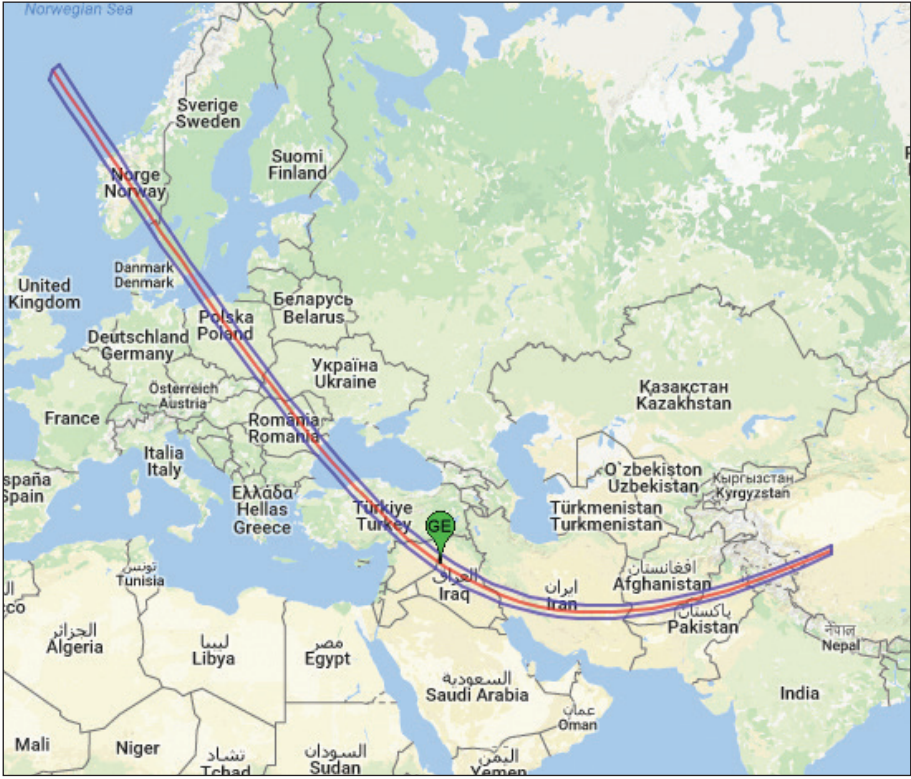
29 Uğur Demir, "Yasaklanan ve Sansürlenmiş Bir Kitabın Macerası: Evliya Çelebi *Seyâhatnâmesi*'nin İlk Baskıları", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 46 (2015), pp. 193-212.

30 See Mütercim Ahmed Asım Efendi, *Asım Efendi Tarihi (Osmanlı Tarihi: 1218-1224/1804-1809)*, I-II, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2015); Şānizāde Mehmed Atullah Efendi, *Şānizāde Tarihi (1223-1237/1808-1821)*, I-II, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (İstanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yayın, 2008).

31 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 5^b-6^a.

32 Kemal Beydilli, "Pehlivan İbrahim Paşa", *DİA*, 2007, XXXIV, pp. 222-223.

33 BOA, HAT, 762/36026, 9 Rebiülahir 1230 (21 March 1815).



Map 3:
Map of
the Solar
Eclipse
that
Kabudlu
Witnessed

Likely, many of the events described in the narration can be corroborated with documents in the Ottoman archives and other sources, such as a total solar eclipse that Kabudlu witnessed in Kayseri, which occurred on November 19, 1816, according to NASA's website.³⁴ The last event that Kabudlu mentions in the existing pages of the manuscript is the janissary problem. Although Kabudlu says he will tell us what this problem is, the pages end there. In an archived report by Ömer Paşa, who was the governor of Eğriboz, we see that the Janissaries had become weak and feeble, and hence were useless in battle, so all of them were sent off from Eğriboz by ship.³⁵ It can be surmised that the problem of the Janissaries was actually this event and so the story of Kabudlu most likely stops in the summer of 1824.

³⁴ <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEsearch/SEsearchmap.php?Ecl=18161119> (accessed 10 April 2023).

³⁵ BOA, HAT, 510/25048, 7 Muharrem 1240 (1 September 1824). For more details about the dates of the events, see Koçyiğit, *Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi Efendi*, pp. 33-37.

So if Kabudlu's work is not like a chronicle in the classical sense, as it does not indicate the dates of events or take into account their chronology, why did he introduce his work as a *tevârih*? He may have thought that since his work discusses important events such as campaigns and wars as well as the situations of cities, it was a *tevârih* and hence falls into the genre of chronicle. Also, he mentions on the names of numerous important people in his times, especially people who were in the state and military service. However, we do not see the names of ordinary people—even Kabudlu's father's name is not given in the narration—and only a namesake soldier, Mustafa,³⁶ and a courier named Mehmed Ağa are mentioned.³⁷ As a *deli* who was under the command of a *delibaşı*, Kabudlu's mentality seems to have been shaped by hierarchical relationships. Probably in an attempt to make the narrative more remarkable, he gives the names of high-ranking individuals such as *delibaşıs*, commanders, pashas, viziers and sultans. By doing so, in a sense Kabudlu was more or less placing parentheses around the category of high-ranking people and situating himself among them. For instance, during the journeys of Kabudlu, the ruler of the Ottoman state was Sultan Mahmud II, so all affairs about governance were narrated with regard to him. Orders for executions were handed down by Sultan Mahmud II,³⁸ when *delis* executed someone they sent the severed head to Sultan Mahmud II,³⁹ when they purchased provisions from an Austrian ship in Korintos their pasha charged it to Sultan Mahmud II,⁴⁰ Topkapı Palace was the palace of Sultan Mahmud II,⁴¹ and Kabudlu introduces the Janisseries as the special servants of Sultan Mahmud II.⁴² Therefore, it could be argued that the manuscript was presented as a chronicle because of the people who were depicted within its pages.

All the same, *tevârih* or *târih* were common terms used to identify a particular genre. For instance, while Evliya Çelebi referred to his work as a travelogue, one copyist described it as a chronicle-like book (*târih misilli*) and it was titled *The Chronicle of the Traveler Evliya Efendi (târih-i seyyâh Evliya Efendi)* in the oldest copies of the work. The Viennese orientalist Hammer-Purgstall, who played an

36 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 42^b.

37 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 68^a.

38 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 7^a, p. 20^b, p. 71^b.

39 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 9^a, p. 16^b, p. 34^a.

40 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 108^b.

41 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 28^a.

42 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 71^b.

important role in making Evliya Çelebi known in the West, also titled the work “the history of a traveler.”⁴³ Similarly, a certain Cabi Ömer Efendi, who was a tax collector, kept a journal of sorts in which he made notes, not unlike a diary, from 1789 to 1814 in Istanbul and that work became famous, bearing the chronicle title *Cabi Tarih-i Sultan Selim-i Sâlis ve Mahmud-ı Sâni*.⁴⁴ In the Ottoman context, *târih* and *tevârih* were utilized as a general description for different genres in broader Islamic history as well, which may have led the work of Kabudlu to be deemed a chronicle. In brief, although Kabudlu’s work does not follow the format of the classical chronicle genre, it can be considered as a *tevârih* as the term is used in the general sense, and therefore it is understandable why Kabudlu referred to his work as such.

The Work as an Autobiography

The writing of autobiographies in the Ottoman Empire increased in the nineteenth century as a result of the rise of print culture and an increase in literacy. Many individuals found opportunities to pen autobiographical accounts and publish them in the form of books or newspaper columns.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, autobiographical writing existed in the early modern Ottoman era as well, and these were penned in works such as *vekayiname*, *sefâretnâme*, *tedkire* and *serguzeştname*. On the other hand, it is possible to find autobiographical details in *tabâqat* books that focus on specific groups such as ulema, and even in the marginal notes written on manuscripts.

Kabudlu completed his work on the eve of the Tanzimat period, at a time when the printing boom had not yet occurred in the Ottoman Empire. Jan

43 Nuran Tezcan, *Seyyahın Kitabı: Evliya Çelebi Üzerine Makaleler* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2019), pp. 9-17.

44 Cabi Ömer Efendi, *Cabi Tarihi: (Tarih-i Sultan Selim-i Salis ve Mahmud-ı Sani) Tablil ve Tenkidli Metin*, ed. Mehmed Ali Beyhan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003); Mehmet Ali Beyhan, “Ömer Efendi, Cabi”, *DİA*, 2007, XXXIV, pp. 57-59.

45 For detailed information on the impact of print technology in the Ottoman Empire and the prominent actors in the transition to this era, see Ayşe Başaran, “Reconsidering the Role of Ulema and Scribal Actors in the Ottoman Transition from Manuscript to the Printed Medium,” *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 28/54 (2023), pp. 73-121. Also see Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and Hatice Aynur, “Yazmadan Basmaya Geçiş: Osmanlı Basma Kitap Geleneğinin Doğuşu (1729-1848)” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 22 (2003), pp. 219-255; Filiz Dıgıroğlu, *Osmanlı’da Dinî Matbuat: Sultan Abdülhamit ve II. Meşrutiyet Devrinde Kurumlar Aktörler Denetim ve Sansür Politikaları* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2022).

Schmidt, who analysed the work of Kabudlu and translated it into English, introduces the manuscript as an autobiography, or more precisely as an autobiography of a low-ranking Ottoman soldier. He approaches the adventures of Kabudlu as an autobiographical account, pointing out that the subject of the most sentences in the narration is “I” and “we.” By doing so, he points to the work’s importance as the memoirs of a low-ranking Ottoman who narrated his story in an autobiography, which is a rare genre in the Ottoman context. For that reason, he describes the passages in which Kabudlu narrates his memories as having a distinctive autobiographical character.⁴⁶ The memories conveyed by an individual, hence the use of the term “memoirs” in the title of this article, can be considered as one of the most general descriptive expressions of a life story, often associated with autobiography. For instance, Şakul defines Kabudlu’s narrative of “the usual *gazi*-warrior ethos” as his memoirs.⁴⁷ Esmer also referred to the characteristics of this ego-document as being autobiographical in nature,⁴⁸ and Laiou and Sariyannis described the memoirs of Kabudlu as an attempt to write an autobiography.⁴⁹

However, it should be highlighted that these characteristics can also be attributed to other genres. All travelogues, memoirs and diaries can be approached as autobiographical texts. Of course, Kabudlu’s work has autobiographical characteristics in terms of how it looks at the life story of the author from particular moments in his life. He depicted his adventures through his emotions, experiences, moments of learning, victories and losses, and in doing so he presents the world of an Ottoman soldier, the world of himself, in a particular perspective in the advancing periods of his life as he got older. For instance, he narrates what he experienced in Morea Pass as follows:

46 Schmidt, “The Adventures of an Ottoman Horseman”, pp. 165-286.

47 Kahraman Şakul, “The Ottoman Peloponnese before the Greek Revolution: ‘A Republic of Ayan, Hakim, and Kocabaşı’ in ‘the Sea of Humans and Valley of Castles’”, *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 18 (Insularity in the Ottoman World) (2017), pp. 136-137.

48 Tolga U. Esmer, “The Confessions of an Ottoman ‘Irregular’: Self-Representation and Ottoman Interpretive Communities in the Nineteenth Century”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları - The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 44 (2014), pp. 313-340.

49 Sofia Laiou and Marinos Sariyannis, “Kişisel Bir Anlatı Olarak Hatırat: Moralı Yusuf Bey ve Kabudlu Vasfi Efendi’nin Metinleri”, 1821 *Yunan Devrimi: Yunan Tarihyazımında Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Konstantina Andrianopoulou and Anna Vakali (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2021), pp. 241-256.

“My father was injured in Morea Pass, which I did not know about. Three days later I found him on the Corinth Plain. I saw that my father was wounded in seven places. Before that, when we went to Morea Pass, my father would put a flag on the peak of that pass and recite the adhan. The infidels had fired a bullet into my father’s chest and struck his head with many sword blows, wounding him in seven places. At that time, my father had killed an unbeliever and fell into the trench of the infidels and lost his mind. And the infidels dealt many sword blows and shot many bullets, but did not cut off his head. The soldiers came at that time and took the aforementioned pass. Delibaşı Deli Ahmed came and found my father and saw that my father was wounded in seven places; and my father’s horse, weapon and everything else had had been plundered. That delibaşı had put my father on a horse and went to Corinth Plain. After three days, I found my father at the foot of a mulberry tree. My father was naked and wounded, and still not sane. When I saw my father in this state, by the water and at the foot of a tree, I lost my mind too. I left my horse and came to my father, who had been bleeding for three days, and all his clothes were stuck to his body with blood. When I saw my father in that situation, I began to wail and cry...”⁵⁰

Although such autobiographical narratives are common, *Tevārîh* is not a work written to give a general outline of Kabudlu’s life story. It solely focuses on the military adventures of Kabudlu. Even though Kabudlu wrote about specific parts of his life story chronologically, and as such can be followed in the correct order year by year and sometimes monthly by archival documents from March of 1815 until the summer of 1824, it should be emphasized that some gaps appear in the self-narrative. For instance, he does not indicate his year of birth—he only says he left his home village in 1801 when he was eight years old. Also, while Kabudlu says he writes about events from 1801 onwards, the first event that he describes occurred in 1815, as mentioned above. The years up until 1815 are shrouded in mystery in Kabudlu’s narration. This suggests that he did not pen his work with the intention of providing an entire autobiographical narration, as he focused on his travels in the structure of the story.

The Work as a Travelogue

In the old Latin catalogue of the oriental manuscripts housed at Leiden University, De Goeje provided a brief introduction to Kabudlu’s work in 1873. In it, he notes some examples of the cities that Kabudlu visited, and he describes

50 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 58^b-59^a. Translated into English by the author.

the manuscript as a travel account of scant value.⁵¹ Witkam also introduces this manuscript as a travelogue.⁵² Indeed, just by looking at the structure of the narration, it could be argued that the work is, of all the genres, most like a travelogue.

There are ninety-nine drawings in the manuscript, all of which are depictions of cities except for three, which show the severed heads of people who were executed. Most of the drawings are in the first section of the work about the eastern campaigns, as Kabudlu travelled through a lot of cities in Anatolia at the time. For the most part, he simply depicted the cities, mountains, rivers, lakes and buildings he saw during his travels. It could be argued that his main intention was to depict places from his perspective. The fact that some of the drawings, which cover a wide geography, are similar to the original narrative raises the question of whether Kabudlu took notes during his travels. However, there is no sign of this, and there are no anecdotes about his literary endeavors during his journeys. On the contrary, he states in some parts of the narrative that he could not remember certain events completely because time had passed, so he narrates them in a succinct manner.⁵³

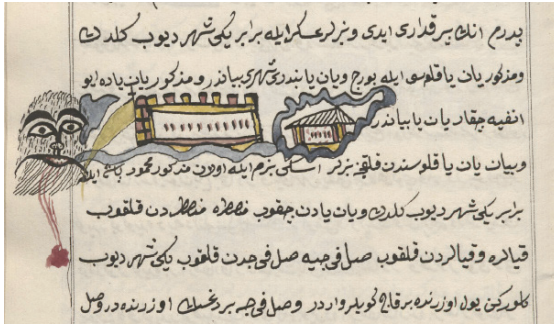


Fig. 2: Depictions in *Tevârih*: The Severed Head of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha and the City of Ioannina. (MS, p. 34^b).

51 De Goeje, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium*, pp. 191-192.

52 Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, II (Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 2007), p. 175.

53 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 7^b; p. 25^b.



Fig. 3: The Cities of Van, Üsküdar and Plovdiv.
(MS, p. 17^a; p. 28^a; p. 30^b).

Besides relating his experiences in villages and cities, Kabudlu sometimes tells anecdotes that he had probably heard during the course of his journeys. These stories have proved to be useful in identifying these places in analyses of the work.⁵⁴ As such, it is possible to trace in detail the route of Kabudlu's travels from his homeland, Kabud, up to the last place noted in the manuscript.

Another aspect of the work that could be used to argue that it is a travelogue is the fact that Kabudlu narrates his adventures on the basis of a structure that is centered on his travels through cities, not events or dates. In his descriptions of cities, he mentions everything he knows about them, even local legends that he probably heard from the inhabitants. Moreover, he does not return to those places in the narration even if an event transpired there at a later date. This leads to contradictions in the chronology of the narrative. For instance, in his discussion of Ioannina, Kabudlu provides certain details about the battles against the forces of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha and he narrates how Tepedelenli was killed. He then goes on to say that he left for Morea, where a Greek rebellion broke out.⁵⁵ However, it is clear that Kabudlu did not stay in Ioannina until Tepedelenli's execution because the siege lasted two years and Tepedelenli was killed in 1822.⁵⁶ During the first months of the siege, the Greek rebellion took place and Kabudlu along with other

54 See Koçyiğit, *Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfî Efendi*, p. 41.

55 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), pp. 28^b-34^b.

56 Kemal Beydilli, "Tepedelenli Ali Paşa", *DİA*, 2011, XXXX, pp. 476-479.

delis were ordered to go to Morea. It appears that Kabudlu, who did not return to Ioannina after this journey, did not want to mention Ioannina in the story again.

As another example, Kabudlu, who passed Kallidromo mountain on his way to Morea, states that Behram Pasha along with 18,000 soldiers had gone to battle before them and that many people were martyred there.⁵⁷ Archival documents indicate that this event took place a year before Kabudlu arrived there.⁵⁸ However, he never mentioned it in the story in the events of a year earlier. These points suggest that he built up his narration on the basis of the chronology of his travels and the cities he visited. The fictional aspects of Kabudlu's work are likely not intended to present historical events chronologically or to introduce people, but rather to describe the places he travelled to in chronological order, relate the urban legends of those cities as he remembered them, and recall memories about when he was there.

Conclusion

Many historians combine fragments of information found in archives or written works to bring historical figures to light. As access to sources has increased, it is undoubtedly clear that fruitful results have emerged from these studies. In the works conducted on self-narratives in the 1990s, ordinary inferences and simple generalizations were observed, and these works often constructed a history of the Middle East/Ottoman/Islamic World through famous individuals who lived in different centuries.⁵⁹ However, in the last two decades, there has been an increase in studies that involve more detailed analyses in the fields of biography and autobiography. With the increasing interest in Ottoman book culture, researchers have conducted self-narrative studies by drawing on various historical sources, ranging from marginal notes in manuscripts to poetry collections or small details found in archival documents.⁶⁰ These studies demonstrate that the examination

57 MS (Cod.Or. 1551), p. 52^a.

58 BOA, HAT, 867/38584-M, 20 Zilhicce 1236 (18 September 1821).

59 Lewis's study, which discusses individuals across a broad timeframe and explains the reasons they wrote about themselves through generalizations, serves as an example in this regard. See Bernard Lewis, "First-Person Narrative in the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Lives: The Practice of Biography and Self-Narrative*, ed. Martin Kramer (New York: Syracuse University, 1991), pp. 20-34.

60 See Hatice Aynur, "Autobiographical Elements in Aşık Çelebi's Dictionary of Poets," *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self: Middle Eastern Ego-Documents in Arabic, Persian, and*

of a narrative with different genre classifications is not unique to the work of Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi.

Examining self-narratives within specific patterns is a concern for modern researchers, and it is possible to discuss numerous issues, such as consistency between fiction and reality. Researchers face the challenge of reading the life of an individual, constantly changing, by looking at their elderly period with chronological consistency, risking a teleological interpretation.⁶¹ On the other hand, examining the life stories of ordinary persons like Kabudlu is filled with challenges. The perspective of individuals who have penned their own stories shapes the self-narrative at the moment of writing and influences the analyses of researchers. Therefore, when analyzing an autobiographical writing, a historian essentially writes a new biography. At times, a researcher may interpret a person's self-narrative as a travelogue, constructing the story accordingly, while in other instances, it may be seen as a chronicle, autobiography, or memoirs. It is natural for transitions between genres to occur, demonstrating the richness of the narrative.

In the case of Ottoman literature, the genres of books are generally indicated in terms of how the authors themselves described their works. If an umbrella term were necessary for researchers, "ego-document" could be used for works in which the narration is generally in the first person singular.⁶² The versatility of frameworks contributes to the challenge of clearly defining the genre of a given

Turkish (14th-20th Century), eds. Ralf Elger and Yavuz Köse (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 17-26; Henning Sievert, "Representations of the Self in Ottoman Baghdad: Some Remarks on Abu'l-Barakat Muhammad al-Rahbi's *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi 'ulama' al-Iraq*", *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self*, pp. 117-132; Jan Schmidt, "First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Miscellaneous Manuscripts", *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self*, pp. 159-170; Patrick Franke, "The Ego of the Mullah: Strategies of Self-Representation in the Works of the Meccan scholar 'Ali al-Qari (d. 1606)", *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self*, pp. 185-200; Muhammed Usame Onuş, "Bir Osmanlı Alimi Cârullah Efendi'nin Terceme-i Hâli", *Osmanlı Kitap Kültürü: Carullah Efendi Kütüphanesi ve Derkenar Notları*, ed. Berat Açıl (İstanbul: İLEM Yayınları, 2020), pp. 7-38. Abdulhamit Kırmızı, "Günlükten Sonra Hayat: Bir Asker Günlüğünün Biyografiyle İlişkisi", *Toplumsal Tarih Akademi*, 1 (2022), pp. 40-62.

61 Abdulhamit Kırmızı, "Oto/Biyografik Vebal: Tutarlılık ve Kronoloji Sorunları", *Otur Baştan Yaz Beni: Oto/Biyografiye Taze Bakışlar*, ed. Abdulhamit Kırmızı (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2013), pp. 11-27; Abdulhamit Kırmızı, "Günlükten Sonra Hayat: Bir Asker Günlüğünün Biyografiyle İlişkisi", pp. 53-55.

62 Occasionally, the term "Life Writing" is also used for the broad self-narrative category. See Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 69-71.

work. The *Tevârih* of Kabudlu, who was not a “traveler” per se, and which I most liken to the genre of travelogue due to its narrative structure, suggests that some texts can be examined within the framework of more than one genre because of their context, exceeding the constraints of a single framework. This indicates that narrations may be open to deeper analysis and hence offer up a broad array of insights about a variety of issues, and more importantly, works that have heretofore strictly been classified under one genre do not necessarily focus on one aspect of history. This work, introduced as “chronicle” by its author, is a source that can be used to help us better understand Ottoman travel culture, military practices, the rebellions of provincial notables, national uprisings, senses of identity, city histories, socio-cultural dimensions, linguistic features, and book culture, as well as, above all, the inner world of an Ottoman subject.

Narration Beyond Genres: The Military Memoirs of Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi

Abstract ■ One of the manuscripts in the rich collection at Leiden University Library was written by a cavalry soldier named Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi. He was a *deli* (irregular horseman) in the Ottoman army in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and travelled to many places in the eastern Anatolian and Balkan regions. In 1834 Kabudlu wrote a work called *Tevârih*, in which he discusses his travels and memories. In the manuscript, he states that he composed the *tevârih* (chronicle) as an account of the cities he visited and the wars he witnessed. In this article, I discuss the reasons why a *deli* soldier would pen his memoirs by considering the context of Ottoman book culture in the nineteenth century. The place that chronicles, autobiographies and travelogues occupied in that period is worthy of greater attention, and they shed light on how the narratives of an Ottoman soldier were influenced during the transformation from manuscript culture to the era of the printing press. In that regard, by analysing the manuscript, which was written on the eve of print capitalism in Ottoman territories, I try to answer the question of why Kabudlu Mustafa Vasfi referred to his extraordinary travel notes as a chronicle (*tevârih*). Besides examining two journeys, namely the travels of the author as well as the travels of the manuscript itself, I also discuss other travelogues, chronicles, memoirs and diaries from that period to demonstrate the importance of this ego-document written by an irregular soldier within the context of Ottoman literary traditions.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Military, Manuscript, Travelogue, Autobiography, Ego-Document.

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