

SAYI 39 • 2012

OSMANLI ARAŐTIRMALARI
THE JOURNAL OF OTTOMAN STUDIES

*Other Places:
Ottomans traveling, seeing, writing, drawing the world*

A special double issue [39-40] of the
Journal of Ottoman Studies / Osmanlı Arařtırmaları

Essays in honor of
Thomas D. Goodrich

Part I

Misafir Editörler / Guest Editors
Gottfried Hagen & Baki Tezcan

İSAM 

Relocating the Center of the Universe: China and the Ottoman Imperial Project in the Sixteenth Century*

Pınar Emiralioğlu**

Evrenin Merkezini Yeniden Yerleştirmek: Çin ve Onaltıncı Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluk Projesi

Özet ■ Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, onaltıncı yüzyılda, Doğu'da Safavi Devleti ve Batı'da Habsburg İmparatorluğu ile yoğun askeri çatışma içinde idi. Bu çatışmaların yaşandığı dönemde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda dünyanın diğer bölgelerine dair coğrafi ve tarihi bilgilere olan ilgi artmıştır. Dünya coğrafyası ve tarihine artan bu ilgi, Osmanlı'nın evrensel imparatorluk hakimiyeti iddiasının hem Doğu hem de Batı'daki politik ve dini rakiplere karşı belirgin bir şekilde açıklanması zorunluluğu ile yakından alakalıdır. Bu makale, Ali Ekber Hitayi ve Seyfi Çelebi'nin Çin hakkındaki eserlerinden yola çıkarak, onaltıncı yüzyılda Osmanlı sarayı için hazırlanan coğrafi ve tarihi eserlerde, Çin'in evrensel imparatorluk modeli olarak sunulduğunu göstermektedir. Bu model, Osmanlı sarayı için hem kopya edilecek bir örnek, hem de Osmanlı'nın evrensel imparatorluk iddiasının yansıtıldığı bir aynadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ali Ekber Hitayi, Seyfi Çelebi, Çin, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, Murad III, coğrafi bilgi, emperyal teşebbüs, evrensel hakimiyet.

In 1516, Ali Ekber Khitayi, a merchant from Transoxiana, composed a travel account on China called the *or the* in Persian.¹ To a student of early modern

* I would like to thank Gottfried Hagen, Baki Tezcan, Kaveh Louis Hemmat, Rob Ruck, and Evelyn Rawski for their valuable suggestions and comments.

** University of Pittsburgh.

1 On Khitay-nameh and Ali Ekber Khitayi see: Kaveh Louis Hemmat, "Children of Cain in the Land of Error: A Central Asian Merchant's Treatise on Government and Society in Ming China," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30/3 (2010): 434–48; Lin Yih-Min, *Ali Ekber'in Hitayname Adlı Eserinin Çin Kaynakları ile Mukayese ve Tenkid* (Taipei, 1967); Idem, "A Comparative and Critical Study of Ali Ekber's Khitay-nama with Reference to Chinese Sources," *Central Asiatic Journal* 27 (1983): 58–78; P. Kahle, "Eine Islamische Quelle über China um 1500 (Das Khitayname des Ali Ekber)," in *Reprint of Text and Studies on the*

European history, this account sounds ordinary enough: narratives on the exotic far-east circulated widely in early modern Europe.² From the standpoint of Ottoman history, however, Khitayi's book is an unusual source. It is the earliest and most comprehensive account on China written for the Ottoman court discovered so far.³ Khitayi opens his account with a description of the topography of the Arabian Peninsula, Anatolia, Iran, and Transoxiana. These places, he maintains, are the hub of the world because they are inhabited by Muslims.⁴ Thereafter in twenty detailed chapters, the author covers Chinese geography, describes three major caravan routes leading to China from the Ottoman lands, and discusses the Chinese government, administration, military, society and customs.

What did Khitayi hope to achieve by composing a detailed account of a far away land in 1516? What was the message of his work and who was its audience? As I hope to show in this article, the has to be viewed and interpreted in the context of Ottoman claims to universal sovereignty and the simultaneous rise of geographical consciousness among the sixteenth-century Ottoman literati, politicians, and image-makers. In this essay, I will base my analysis on the as well as Seyfi Çelebi's account titled the from 1582. A close reading of

Historical Geography and Topography of East Asia, ed. Fuat Sezgin, et al. (Frankfurt: IGAIW, 1993), 379–98; Charles Schefer, "Trois Chapitres du Khitay Nameh: Texte Persan et Traduction Française," in *ibid.*, 159–214; J. Th. Zenker, "Das chinesische Reich, nach dem türkischen Khatainame," in *ibid.*, 109–129; H. L. Fleischer, "Über das türkische Chatai-name," in *ibid.*, 96–107; Ildiko Beller-Hann, "Ottoman Perception of China," in *Comité International D'Études Pre-Ottomanes et Ottomanes, VIth Symposium, Cambridge, 1st–4th July 1984: Proceedings*, eds. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and E. J. van Donzel (Istanbul: Divit Press, 1987): 55–64; Fuat Sezgin and Neubauer eds., *The Book on China: Khitaynama* (Frankfurt: IGAIW, 1994). Iraj Afshar prepared the first critical edition of the Persian text. Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh: Sharh-i Mushahidat-i Sayyid Ali Ekber Khitai: Mu'asir-i Shah Isma'il Safavid dar Chin*, ed. Iraj Afshar, second edition (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnad-i Farhang-i Asya, 1993), The present article benefits from Iraj Afshar's edition for the references to the original text. The translations are mine.

- 2 Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1: *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965); for the influence of European travel accounts on the European conceptions of Asia see: Cyriac K. Pullapilly and Edwin J. Van Kley, eds., *Asia and the West: Encounters and Exchanges from the Age of Explorations: Essays in Honor of Donald F. Lach* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Cross Cultural Publications, Cross Roads Books, 1986); Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock, *Cultural Encounters between East and West, 1453–1699* (London: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005).
- 3 Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu et al., eds., *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: ISIS, 2000), 14–17. The Ottoman Turkish translation of the account of Shah-rukh's embassy to China from 1494–1495 appears to be the earliest account in Ottoman Turkish on China; Ildiko Beller-Hann, "Ottoman Perception of China," 58.
- 4 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 30–31.

these two accounts, one from the early and the other from the late sixteenth century, will reveal how the historical and geographical accounts prepared for the Ottoman court created China as a model to emulate and as a mirror to reflect Ottoman imperial ambitions. It would be a mistake to view these texts as perhaps insignificant diversion for curious elites. Rather these works pointedly reflect the imperial politics, policy and aspirations of the Ottoman Empire of the period.

Ottoman Geographical Consciousness

Geographical works redefined the boundaries of the inhabited world in the early modern period.⁵ Travel accounts together with itineraries and maps enabled the audience to see and imagine places that were not otherwise visible, and they created the desire to travel and explore these places. At the same time, the knowledge conveyed was selective, and projected the ideological and political considerations of their author and patron. Although it is well known that rulers in medieval and early modern Europe commissioned geographical works to project their royal or imperial aspirations,⁶ the rich collection of surviving Ottoman geographical accounts has never before received the same analytical treatment, presumably because the Ottomans did not participate in the so-called “Age of Exploration.” While recent studies demonstrate that Ottomans not only participated in, but also helped to define a variety of early modern diplomatic, economic, and religio-political trends, including to some extent European activities in the Indian Ocean,⁷ Ottoman travel and geographical literature has been

- 5 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 737.
- 6 J. B. Harley, “Silences and Secrecy, the Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe,” *Imago Mundi* 40 (1988): 57–76; David Buisseret, ed., *Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps: The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 7 For Ottoman activities in the Indian Ocean and its effects on the world politics in the early modern period, see Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For the Ottoman’s place in the early modern world in general, see Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories,” 735–762; Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Gerald MacLean, *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Birchwood and Dimmock, *Cultural Encounters*; Gabor Agoston, “Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry,” *Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, eds. Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75–103.

analyzed only on rare occasions by historians for their value within the sixteenth century Ottoman imperial enterprise.⁸

According to the historical literature, the initial Ottoman intellectual interest in geographical accounts can be traced back to Ottoman translations of some Arabic cosmographical works.⁹ Fourteenth and fifteenth-century translations of Zakariya al-Qazwini (d. 1283)'s (*Wonders of Creation*) and Ibn al-Wardi (d. 1349)'s (*Pearls of Marvels and Unique Curiosities*) were among the first works on geography in the Ottoman language.¹⁰ Most well known was Yazıcıoğlu Ahmet Bican (d. 1456)'s abridged translation of al-Qazwini's. Yazıcıoğlu also wrote the (*Well-preserved Pearl*), which was an example of a small cosmography and geography in the style of – a treatment of the wonders of Creation.¹¹

-
- 8 For a general treatment of the Ottoman cartographic tradition see: Ahmet Karamustafa, "Introduction to Ottoman Cartography," in *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 205-208; Svat Soucek, "Islamic Charting in the Mediterranean," in *ibid.*, 263-287. On Ottoman travel literature, see: Nicolas Vatin, "Pourquoi un Turc Ottoman Racontait-il son Voyage? Note sur Les Ottomans des Vaki'at-i Sultan Cem au Seyahatname d'Evliya Çelebi," in *Les Ottomans et L'Occident (XVe – XVIe siècles)* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2001), 179-193. On the relationship between Ottoman imperial politics and geographical works see Brotton, *Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kathryn Ebel, "City Views, Imperial Visions: Cartography and the Visual Culture of Urban Space in the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1603" (PhD diss., the University of Texas at Austin, 2002); Karen C. Pinto, "Ways of Seeing: Scenarios of the World in the Medieval Islamic Cartographic Imagination" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001); Pinar Emiralioğlu, "Cognizance of the Ottoman World: Visual and Textual Representations in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire (1514-1596)" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2006); Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*. For a comprehensive analysis of Ottoman geographical studies and influences of Arab geographical traditions on the Ottoman intellectuals see: Gottfried Hagen, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Katib Celebis Cihan-nüma*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 79-119.
- 9 İhsanoğlu, et al., eds., *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi*, vol. 1, xxxvi; Fr. Taeschner, "Die Geographische Literatur der Osmanen," *ZDMG* 2, no. 77 (1923): 31–80. Fr. Taeschner, "Osmanlılarda Coğrafya," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 2 (1926): 271–314; Günay Kut, *Acaibü'l-Mahlukat: Eski Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları II*, ed. Fatma Büyükkarcı Yılmaz (İstanbul: Simurg Kitapçılık, 2010), I–II.
- 10 'Ali b. Abdurrahman's *'Aca'ib al-Mahlukat* is considered to be the oldest Ottoman work on cosmography, even though the earliest and incomplete manuscript is from the seventeenth century. Gottfried Hagen, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit*, 85.
- 11 Taeschner, "Djughrafiya: The Ottoman Geographers," *EP²*; Cevdet Türkay, *Osmanlı Türklerinde Coğrafya* (İstanbul: Maarif Basımevi, 1959), 14. For *Dürr-i Meknun*'s Turkish translation see: Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican, *Dürr-i Meknun: Saklı İnciler*, ed. Necdet Sakaçoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999).

The influence of Islamic traditions was not, however, limited to these translations. Compilations integrating various Islamic geographical works, such as Siphazade (d. 1589)'s historical geography in Arabic, (Explanation of the Routes about the Knowledge of Cities and Countries), and Aşık Mehmed b. Ömer (d. 1555)'s cosmography (View of the World), were common endeavors among the Ottoman intellectuals in the early modern period.¹² Further, in imitation of the literature, which consisted of works describing town and places of religious significance or places of pilgrimage, Ottoman intellectuals also prepared similar accounts. In these works, one finds descriptions of the length of the road, either in time or in mileage, from Istanbul, Cairo or Damascus to Mecca, together with notices of important places along the way. Shams al-Din Muhammad's (Stations of the Two Holy Places) in Arabic from the sixteenth century is the oldest example of this genre within the Ottoman lands.¹³ Ottomans likewise produced their own examples of travel literature, such as campaign diaries with description of important cities and towns along the campaign routes. Matrakçı Nasuh's is the most studied and appreciated work of this genre.¹⁴

In addition to the narrative accounts of geography and cosmography, Ottoman ruling elites and intellectuals were also interested in the cartographic productions. For example, Mehmed II (r. 1451-1481) ordered George Amirutzes of

12 Between 1974 and 1977, *Menazirü'l Avalim*'s manuscript copy at the Süleymaniye Library, Halet Efendi, no. 616 has been translated and edited as part of five graduation projects at the Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters: Metin Aydoğan, "Menazirü'l-Avalim'in (Mehmed b. Ömer'in, Halet Ef. Küt. Nr. 616) vr. 1b-25a Arası Metin ve İndeksi," senior thesis (Istanbul University, 1974); Ahmet Erbaş, "Menazirü'l-Avalim'in vr. 23b-53a Arası Metni," senior thesis (Istanbul University, 1975); Emine Kuş, "Menazirü'l-Avalim'in vr. 53b-90a Arası Metni," senior thesis (Istanbul University, 1976); Bayram Tekin, "Menazirü'l-Avalim'in (36a-42b Arası Metni)," senior thesis (Istanbul University, 1977); Muharrem Aybar, "Menazirü'l-Avalim'in (53b-90a Arası Metni)," senior thesis (Istanbul University, 1977). In 1990, Mahmut Ak prepared the critical edition of the Halet Efendi manuscript of *Menazirü'l Avalim* as his master's thesis: Mahmut Ak, "Aşık Mehmed ve Menazirü'l-avalim'i," M.A. thesis (Istanbul University, 1990). In 2007, Mahmut Ak published the critical edition of the same copy: Aşık Mehmed, *Menazirü'l-Avalim*, ed. Mahmut Ak, 3 vols. (Ankara: TTK, 2007). On Mehmed b. Ömer and *Menazirü'l-Avalim* see: Fr. Taeschner, "Die geographische Literatur der Osmanen," 48-56; Idem, "Ashik," *Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition* (hereafter *EF*); Idem, "Mehmed Aschyq's Bericht über die Tchepnis," *Zeitschrift Gesellschaft* 77 (1923): 282-284; İhsanoğlu, et al., eds., *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi*, vol. 1, xxxvii.

13 Ibid., xxxviii.

14 Ibid. Only one manuscript copy of this work has survived; it is located in the Istanbul University Library: Matrakçı Nasuh, *Beyan-ı Menazil-i Sefer-i İrakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, Istanbul University Library, TY. 5964. Hüseyin Yurdaydın published the transliteration and the facsimile edition of the work: Matrakçı Nasuh, *Beyan-ı Menazil-i Sefer-i İrakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, ed. Hüseyin Yurdaydın (Ankara: TTK, 1976). On Nasuh, see Davut Erkan, "Matrakçı Nasuh'un Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerine Notlar", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 37 (2011): 181-97.

Trebizond to compile all the regional maps of Ptolemy's *Geographia* into a single world map and encouraged him and his sons to prepare a new translation of it into Arabic. Mehmed, who actively collected and drew maps, was also known to commission European geographers to prepare atlases for him.¹⁵ It was during the reign of Selim I, however, that Ottoman intellectuals started to organize and refine Ottoman involvement in geography and geographical understanding, and made the Ottoman Empire an active player in the transmission of geographical knowledge across the Mediterranean. They collectively engaged in collating recent geographic knowledge with traditional accounts and they created a more accessible body of knowledge for their audience. In their work, they integrated what they learned from the travel accounts and maps circulating in the Mediterranean into what was already available to them from traditional Muslim accounts of geography.

One of these geographers, perhaps the most influential one, was Piri Reis (d.1554).¹⁶ Piri Reis finished his world map in 1513 and presented it to Selim I when the Ottoman sultan was in Cairo in 1517.¹⁷ The sultan rewarded Piri Reis by assigning him to the imperial sea captains corps in Alexandria.¹⁸ Sadly,

15 F. Babinger, "An Italian Map of the Balkans, Presumably Owned by Mehmed II, The Conqueror (1452-53)," *Imago Mundi* 8 (1951): 8-15; F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, ed. W.C. Hickman, trans. R. Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 81; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Military, Administrative, and Scholarly Maps and Plans," in *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, eds. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 210; Brotton, *Trading Territories*, 90; Pinto, "Ways of Seeing," 5.

16 In 1495, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II summoned Kemal Reis, a former pirate, to join the Ottoman fleet in its struggle against the Venetians in the eastern Mediterranean. Subsequently, Kemal Reis and his nephew Piri Reis (d.1554) joined forces with the Ottoman captains. Around 1510, Piri Reis withdrew to Gallipoli, where he completed both a world map and assembled the notes for an *isolario* (island book). For more information on Piri Reis' life and works see: Paul Kahle, "Piri Reis, the Turkish Sailor and Cartographer," *The Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 4 (1956): 99-108; Klaus Kreiser, "Piri Reis," in *Lexicon zur Geschichte der Kartographie*, eds. I. Kretschmer, J. Dörflinger and R. Wawrik (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1986), 2: 607-609; Svat Soucek, "Piri Re'is," *EF*.

17 This paragraph is based on Adnan A. Adivar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim*, 4th ed. (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1991), 74-78; A. Afetinan, *Piri Reis'in Hayatı ve Eserleri: Amerika'nın En Eski Haritaları*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: TTK, 1987); Paul Kahle, "Piri Reis, the Turkish Sailor and Cartographer," *The Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 4 (1956), 99-108; Klaus Kreiser, "Piri Reis;" Soucek, "Piri Reis," *EF*²; idem, "Islamic Charting in the Mediterranean," 267; Franz Babinger, "Piri Muhyîd-Din Re'is," *EF*¹; Fuad Ezgü, "Piri Reis," *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (hereafter *İA*).

18 Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 36; Cengiz Orhonlu, "Hint Kaptanlığı ve Piri Reis," *Bellekten* 34, no. 234 (1967): 35-45.

the eastern two-thirds of the map have been lost. The extant section depicts the Atlantic Ocean, the western coast of Europe, Africa, and the eastern coast of the New World. On this segment, there is a long legend where Piri Reis lists his sources: twenty *portolans* (sea charts), a world map, eight Arab and four Portuguese sailing charts, and a map by Columbus.¹⁹ In his own words, Piri Reis “took into consideration the maps that have recently appeared of the seas of India and China that up to now nobody knew in the lands of Rum.”²⁰

Piri Reis’s career as an Ottoman sea captain and his cartographic works epitomized the experimental nature of early Ottoman map making. But his rapid promotion in the Ottoman military hierarchy stands as a testimony to rising awareness of geography among members of Ottoman literati and ruling elites. While his works enhanced the collections of geographical works in the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman court also welcomed maps prepared in European centers. In the middle of the sixteenth century, on the eve of the great naval battles in the Mediterranean, there were a flurry of world maps, navigational charts, and atlases circulating in the Ottoman court in Constantinople. Each of these cartographical works appears to have been commissioned for the Ottoman sultan or one of his courtiers, or presented to them so as to curry political or financial favor. One fine example is (ca 1560) which features seven charts and a world map that are reminiscent of those produced for the European courts. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the atlas was probably prepared in Italy for an Ottoman patron. Although we cannot identify either the cartographer or the client, the elaborate illustrations on the charts suggest that the atlas was prepared for artistic purposes and for a wealthy and prestigious customer, possibly a member of Ottoman dynasty.²¹ But whoever commissioned it is less important than what its contents say about the growing awareness of a wider world and the role that geography played in enhancing a deepening appreciation of the world.

It is within this intellectual context that Ali Ekber Khitayi’s should be studied. I argue that the development of a heightened sensitivity to geographical knowledge in this period was intimately related to the articulation of Ottoman claims to universal imperial sovereignty. Ottoman ruling elites labored to broadcast these claims to the Habsburg house in the West and the Safavids in the

19 Piri Reis, *Mappamundi* (1513), Topkapı Palace Library, Revan Köşkü 1633 mük.

20 Piri Reis, *Kitab-ı Bahriye*, 2nd ed. Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 2612, 1:3a. See also Piri Reis, *Kitab-ı Bahriye*, eds. E. Zekai Ökte, et al. (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Turkish Republic, 1988), vol. 1, 43.

21 Thomas Goodrich, “The Earliest Ottoman Maritime Atlas – The Walters Deniz Atlası,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 11 (1986): 25–50.

East. An examination of Ali Ekber Khitayi and Seyfi Çelebi's accounts on China will offer insights into the logic and evolving aspirations of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period.

Ottoman Imperial Project: A New Center of the Universe

Although canonical literature dates the establishment of the Ottoman Empire to Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople in 1453,²² it was really only in the sixteenth century that a distinct imperial Ottoman enterprise began to develop.²³ The advocates of this new imperial vision repositioned their empire in relation to both East and West. They portrayed the Ottoman Empire as the universal empire and its rulers as the universal rulers. Among the supporters of this enterprise were a group of travelers, historians, sea captains, cartographers, and astrologers who created a distinct body of geographical literature in the sixteenth century. Most of these intellectuals were products of the Ottoman administration and worked under the patronage of the Ottoman court and its elites. They frequently traveled within and beyond the Ottoman realm and read each other's accounts. As a result, they created a large body of geographical works on the known world in the sixteenth century. By narrating and depicting the geographical features of the Ottoman realm and different parts of the world, these Ottoman geographers sought to portray the Ottoman Empire as ruling the whole world. They recast the available geographical knowledge and promoted the imperial magnificence of the Ottoman sultans. They projected the Ottoman Empire as the center of the universe over which they ruled.

How and when did this development start? What historical circumstances triggered the Ottoman claims to universal sovereignty? And what do these claims tell us about the early modern world? It should be noted that Ottoman portrayals of their empire as the center of the universe was not a phenomenon without precedent. Throughout the ages, Chinese, European, Indian, and Islamic civiliza-

22 Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (New York: Orpheus Publishing, Inc., 1973).

23 Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991); Idem, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Ebru Turan "The Sultan's Favorite: Ibrahim Pasha and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516-1526)" (PhD diss., the University of Chicago, 2007).

tions attempted to place themselves in the middle of the history and world maps.²⁴ The Ottoman Empire was no exception. Nevertheless the manner in which the Ottoman geographers recast the imperial claims to centrality made it a unique enterprise. By creating an Ottoman tradition, they challenged the medieval and early modern Muslim as well as Christian traditions.

The beginnings of the Ottoman claims to universality coincided with the reign of Selim I. Following his military success in Iran against the Safavid ruler Shah Isma'il, Sultan Selim embarked on his conquest of the Arab lands of Egypt and Syria in 1516-17. The Islamic Holy lands of Mecca and Medina fell under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman sovereign following his defeat of the Mamluk Sultan. The conquests had important implications for the evolution of Ottoman imperial ideology.²⁵ For the first time in its history, the Ottoman sultan was in command of a predominantly Muslim population and the trade routes connecting the eastern Mediterranean to Anatolia and Central Asia. But, Selim I's rivalry with the Safavid Shah over the control of the Mediterranean and Anatolia had to be legitimized to this new audience. Two Muslim rulers simultaneously claimed the epithet , the Expected One, who would emerge from concealment and reform the world drastically. Inspired by the Sultan's campaigns and his rivalry with the Safavid Shah, the Ottoman literati began to produce new narratives of a historical and geographical nature that emphasized the Sultan's role as the conqueror of the world and sovereign of an ever-increasing empire. Chronicles, (accounts of military campaigns), (royal histories), and travel accounts portrayed Sultan Selim not only as the servant of the two Holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina, but also as the (Master of the auspicious conjunction), a Turco-Muslim and Alexandrine world conqueror, and the , the Renewer.²⁶ These titles were direct answers to Shah Isma'il's claims to be Alexander, God, and Ali.²⁷

When Süleyman the Magnificent ascended the throne in 1520, he inherited his father's titles. In the first decades of his reign, the policy makers at the Ottoman court represented Sultan Süleyman as the new world conqueror,

24 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

25 Agoston, "Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy," 94.

26 Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleyman," in Gilles Veinstein ed., *Soliman le magnifique et son temp* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 160-163; Subrahmanyam, 751-752

27 V. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shah Isma'il I," *BSOAS* 10 (1940-42): 1006-1053; Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 753

the expected Last Emperor who would revive the unified Mediterranean, the Roman , as the universal ruler who would unite all mankind under a single rule and a single religion before the Day of Judgment.²⁸ Around the same time, Charles V of the Habsburg Dynasty sought to fulfill both Spanish and the Austrian/Germanic aspirations to universal monarchy, and was viewed and presented as the messianic ‘Last World Emperor.’²⁹ In 1519, Charles V was in fact elected Holy Roman Emperor. It is not a coincidence but rather a struggle by two ‘world emperors’ that early on in his reign young Süleyman successfully seized Belgrade, key to Hungary, and the Mediterranean island Rhodes and thereby strengthened his role as the defender of Islam and the ‘World Conqueror.’ As the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry focused on the control of Hungary, Sultan Süleyman targeted Vienna in 1529, the royal capital of Habsburgs in Central Europe, but without any success. During this period, as a response to the universal claims of Charles V of the Habsburg House, the Ottoman literati depicted the sultan more and more as the Roman Emperor in his seat in Constantinople. At the same time, Ottoman ruling elites redesigned the Ottoman imperial capital city and highlighted it as the center of this new universal empire.³⁰ Sultan Süleyman genuinely endorsed the Byzantine legacy and believed that he was the legitimate heir to the Roman Empire, because he was the emperor of Constantinople, the New Rome.³¹ Ottoman geographical accounts actively articulated these efforts by reformulating the geographical knowledge to serve the Ottoman imperial claims and relocating the center of the world to Constantinople. In doing so, they responded to the eastern and western conceptions of universal rule. Ali Ekber Khitayî’s together with other geographical accounts from the sixteenth century addressed the ideological concerns of the Ottoman court and represented the critical passage to universal empire in Ottoman political and ideological claims.

28 Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite.”

29 Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry,” *Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989): 401–427; Agoston, “Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy,” 96–97.

30 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*; Emirlioğlu, “Cognizance of the Ottoman World;” Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite.” On the Ottoman construction policies in Constantinople after its conquest in 1453 see: Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinople/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

31 Turan “The Sultan’s Favorite.”

The Book of China and its Author

At the end of his account, Ali Ekber Khitayi states that he completed his account in May 1516 in Istanbul,³² which suggests that Khitayi prepared it for Selim I. However, the dedication in the introduction addresses the Ottoman sultans in general and particularly Süleyman the Magnificent.³³ This inconsistency suggests that Khitayi actually prepared the work for Selim I. However, after Selim I died unexpectedly in 1520, the author changed the dedication and decided to present the work to Süleyman I. There are five extant copies of the original work.³⁴ The work apparently did not attract much attention at that time. In 1582, when the Ottoman-Safavid conflict over the control of Shirvan and Daghistan reached its apex with the Battle of Mashale during the reign of Murad III (r. 1574-1595), the Persian text was translated into Ottoman Turkish with a new preface.³⁵

So then, who is the author? There are only two Ottoman references to the *Book of China* and its author. Historian and geographer, Hezarfenn Ahmed Çelebi (d. 1678) quotes parts from the Ottoman Turkish version of the *Book of China* in his *Tenqihu't-tevarikh* (Verified Histories). Hezarfenn here attributes the work to renowned geographer Katip Çelebi (d. 1657).³⁶ Katip Çelebi in turn lists the work under the title *Qanun-nameh-ye Chin va Khita* in his bibliographical dictionary in Arabic, *Kashf al-Zunun 'an Asami al-Kutub wa'l-Funun* (The Removal of Doubt from the Names of Books and the Sciences), and indicates that

32 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 182.

33 Ibid., 2 6–27.

34 Ralph Kauz, “Ketay-Nama: “Book on China,” written by Seyyed ‘Ali Akbar Keta’i (q.v.) in Istanbul,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last accessed via <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ketay-nama>. In addition to the manuscript in the National Library of Egypt in Cairo (Dar al-kotob 17 (Tal’at Persia collections)), there are three extant manuscripts in Istanbul (Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, Süleymaniye Reisülküttab 609, 609 mük, 610), and one in Netherland (Leiden, nr. 919). For a detailed comparison of these copies see: Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, xxxi–xxxiii.

35 Baki Tezcan, “The Multiple Faces of the One: The Invocation Section of Ottoman Literary Introductions as a Locus for the Central Argument of the Text,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12/1 (2009): 35–6. Several copies of this translation have been discovered in different manuscript libraries in Istanbul, Dresden, Paris, and Berlin. For a detailed analysis of these copies see: Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, xxxiii–xxxvi. In his article on Hezarfenn Hüseyin Efendi’s observations on the Ottoman state administration, Robert Anheger refers to a copy of the *Khitay-nameh*’s Ottoman Turkish translation in Paris Bibliothèque National, which was attributed to Hezarfenn Hüseyin Efendi. Robert Anheger, “Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi’nin Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Mülhazaları,” *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 10 (1953): 365–6.

36 Fleischer, “Über das türkische Chatai-name,” 215–16.

a merchant wrote the work for Sultan Selim Khan at the end of 900 AH/1495.³⁷ Given that Khitayi did not compose any other work and that no contemporary biographical dictionaries lists him among the sixteenth century intellectuals, it appears that he was not under the patronage of any member of the Ottoman ruling elite nor was a member of a close circle of Ottoman intellectuals.

So far, several historians have evaluated the and tried to shed light on the identity of its author.³⁸ Iraj Afshar argues that Ali Ekber Khitayi, who was a new comer to West Asia, was probably a Muslim tradesman from Transoxiana.³⁹ In the introduction of the Persian version, Khitayi calls himself a ⁴⁰and claims that he aims to report all the eccentricities and oddities that he observed in China.⁴¹ Nowhere in the text does he mention where he is from originally nor why he traveled to China. This silence about his origins and occupation leads one to hypothesize that he may have wanted to be considered as an Ottoman intellectual in the Ottoman court rather than a tradesman from Transoxiana.⁴²

37 Katip Çelebi, *Kitab Kashf al-Zunun 'an Asami al-Kutub wa'l-Funun* (Istanbul: Der-Saadet Matbaası, 1892-94), vol. 2, 218. In his *Cihannüma*, in describing the number of districts in China, Katip Çelebi mentions that an anonymous merchant wrote a *Qanun-nameh* in Persian and presented the work to Selim II. Here, the geographer adds that this work is not reliable because its anonymous author designates China and Khitay as a single country consisting of twelve districts. Katip Çelebi here maintains that in the globes and geography books, China and Khatay are depicted as two distinct countries each having its own ruler and government. Katip Çelebi, *Kitab-ı Cihannüma li-Katib Çelebi*, vol. 1, facsimile edition (Ankara: TTK, 2009), 154.

38 In the nineteenth century, Scheffer argued that given the mistakes in spelling, syntax errors, and repetitions in the Persian original, Ali Ekber Khitayi was most probably from Central Asia and was more comfortable with Ottoman-Turkish than with Persian. Schefer, "Trois Chapitres du Khitay Nameh," 170-171. It has also been argued that he was a Muslim tradesman from China or Persia who visited Istanbul frequently. Zeki Velidi Togan, "Ali Ekber Hitayi," in *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940-1986): 318-319; C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: a Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London: Luzac & Co., 1927), vol. 1: 431-432. In his article, Yih-Min Lin argues that Khitayi traveled only to Central Asia and not to China. Lin Yih-Min, *Ali Ekber'in Hitayname Adlı Eserinin Çin Kaynakları ile Mukayese ve Tenkidi*, 19; idem, "A Comparative and Critical Study of Ali Ekber's Khitay-nama," 58.

39 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, xvi. See also, Kaveh Louis Hemmat, "Children of Cain in the Land of Error," 436.

40 *Qalandar* means wandering dervish in Ottoman Turkish. It also refers to marginal types of modes and dogmas within sufi orders. For *qalandari* practices in Anatolia, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülbidler (15.-17. Yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı yurt Yayınları, 1998); idem, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Marjinal Sufilik: Kalenderiler* (Ankara: TTK, 1992).

41 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 29

42 On the possible reasons for the Ottoman intellectuals to narrate their travels see: Vatin, "Pourquoi un Turc Ottoman Racontait-Il son Voyage?"

The *Book of China* is contemporaneous with Piri Reis' (d. 1553-4) world map.⁴³ The cartographer finished the map in 1513 and presented it to Selim I just as the sultan emerged victorious in the conquests of Syria and Egypt in 1516-1517. Today only one third of the map, depicting the New World, survives. Scholars have suggested that the map, which presumably depicted the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean in great detail, was very timely.⁴⁴ Similarly, Khitayi might have believed that the Sultan's ambitions were directed further east and thus the timing was right to compile a work on China. However, Selim I died amidst plans of a naval campaign to Rhodes, a strategic island in the Mediterranean.⁴⁵

The opens with the topographical description of the Arabian Peninsula, Anatolia, Iran, and Transoxiana. The author then describes the geographical location of China as well as its neighboring regions and delineates three different itineraries to reach China from the Ottoman domains. He specifically mentions how long it would take for an imperial army to cross the distances between different milestones on the way to China. Likewise, he identifies in great detail the available water and food supplies, and provides detailed descriptions of cities and towns lying along the routes.⁴⁶ These passages suggest that Khitayi was aware of the medieval Muslim accounts of Giyas al-Din Nakkash or Sulaiman al-Tacir (9th century),⁴⁷ and he also relied on his first hand observations and his exchanges with the Muslims in China and other travelers.⁴⁸

It is clear that Khitayi wanted to impress the Ottoman court with his comprehensive travel account, one which combined geographical knowledge with an exposé of customs, traditions, and political culture. Following his introductory description of the communication and transportation routes to China, Khitayi elaborates on the wealth and prosperity of China. He emphasizes Chinese respect for law, order, and ancient customs, and Chinese tolerance for the Muslim communities in the empire. It is through the depiction of these elements that Khitayi

43 Piri Reis, *Mappamundi* (1513), Topkapı Palace Library, Revan Köşkü 1633 mük. Ayşe Afetinan published the facsimile edition of the map in 1987: Ayşe Afetinan, *Piri Reis'in Hayatı ve Eserleri: Amerika'nın En Eski Haritaları* (Ankara: TTK, 1987).

44 Adnan Adıvar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1991), 76.

45 Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969), 242-3; Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984), vol. 3, 193.

46 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 2 9-31.

47 Togan, "Ali Ekber Hitayi," 318-319.

48 Hemmat, "Children of Cain in the Land of Error," 436.

portrays China as a worthy model for a universal empire.⁴⁹ In so doing, he uses China as an example by which the new universal rulers, the Ottoman sultans, could magnify their imperial power and bring order to their new imperial possessions. In Khitayi's words, China is an empire where the notions of cultural homogeneity and religious coexistence through imperial patronage are eminent, territorial expansion happens through just wars, and wealth and justice are diffused evenly throughout the empire. Sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire shared these political, cultural, economic and even religious conceptual frameworks with his vision of the Chinese Empire. Ottoman literati described the wealth articulated in the palace ceremonial, the justice spread through the imperial domains, and the sultans as the protector of the Muslims all over the world as evidence for its universality. Khitayi sought to assure the Ottoman sultan the universality of his empire with a mirror image he articulated through China. Wealth and ceremonials, imperial law and customs, and religious coexistence were essential elements of this enterprise.

Wealth and Ceremonials in China

In his descriptions of the wealth of China, Khitayi emphasizes its abundant products ranging from rice, wheat, wood, and ceramics to luxury goods such as gold, silver, and silk. He maintains that the residents of the towns and cities set up very tall warehouses to store these products.⁵⁰ Khitayi also recounts that the wealth of the country is not concentrated in one region, but rather is diffused equally to all parts of the country. He asserts that what has made China rich and prosperous for such a long time is its disciplined army and the just rule of the Chinese emperors. Chinese rulers, he argues, did not initiate a war unless it was justified and unless it was certain that their armies would win.⁵¹ This image of China as a prosperous imperial domain is further accentuated by the descriptions of the Chinese emperor's golden throne ornamented with emeralds,⁵² his full

49 For a discussion on early modern world empires and their claims to the universality see especially Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500 – c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2005); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Tale of Three Empires, Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in Comparative Context," *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 66–92.

50 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 73–74.

51 *Ibid.*, 71

52 *Ibid.*, 76–77..

treasury⁵³ as well as the impressive ceremonials and the grand architecture of the Chinese imperial palace. In Khitayi's account, we no longer have Marco Polo's exotic palace of the Great Khan reminding the reader of the earthly paradise. Khitayi does not refer to exotic animals wandering in the palace parks, nor of its colorful roof and walls adorned with gold, paintings, and marble.⁵⁴

Khitayi recounts that the Chinese imperial palace houses a number of castles as well as smaller palaces within each other. He emphasizes that there are seven levels in the Chinese palace and that on each level there are gardens, orchards, temples, galleries, and council halls.⁵⁵ Each level is inhabited by a certain group, such as the servants and the female slaves of the Emperor, or is reserved for government offices, such as the treasury, and the council of the twelve districts of the Empire.⁵⁶ Khitayi further elaborates on this grandiose image by describing the Chinese imperial ceremonials. The author here asserts that there were approximately seven thousand eunuchs and twelve thousand female servants living in the Chinese palace. Additionally, ten thousand guards protected the walls of the palace, and ten thousand soldiers guarded the golden throne of the Emperor. During the ceremonial performances to welcome the emperor's visitors, the soldiers stood motionless to the left of the emperor. While the men of the pen were to his right, his servants, including the eunuchs and women, stood behind his throne.⁵⁷

Khitayi's description of the Chinese palace and ceremonials allude to the universal rule of the Chinese emperor, and his pages and the grandiose reception ceremonies complement the enormous and convoluted palace divided into seven parts. The first presented to the Ottoman court in 1520, three years before the Ottoman ruling elites in Istanbul, in particular İbrahim Pasha, the grand vizier of Süleyman the Magnificent, began refashioning the physical appearance of Constantinople, the imperial palace and its ceremonies.⁵⁸ Until his execution in 1536, the Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha was the mastermind of the dynastic enterprise and its articulation in arts and aesthetics. Under his supervision, the

53 Ibid., 80.

54 Latham, *Travels of Marco Polo*, 108, 125–29.

55 Here, Khitayi represents the Chinese imperial palace through a familiar topos: the *heft-peyker* (seven portraits), the palace erected for the Sasanian ruler Bahram Gur. In Khitayi's description, the Chinese palace is very similar to the Sasanian palace which had seven pavilions, each marked by a dome.

56 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 77–81.

57 Ibid., 81

58 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 22–23.

Topkapı Palace and imperial ceremonies were redesigned to highlight the military victories and, more importantly, the magnificent persona of the Ottoman sultan and the universality of his empire.⁵⁹ Through large-scale restoration activities, most buildings in the second courtyard of the imperial palace—home to the treasury, the tower of justice, and the council hall—as well as the chamber of petitions of the third courtyard were either rebuilt or remodeled.⁶⁰ The palace expanded and became more and more like a theatrical stage on which the imperial image of the Ottoman sultan was presented.⁶¹ İbrahim Pasha clearly benefited from the fact that the palace was isolated from the crowded center of the city and close to the Hippodrome, which was the center of the city during the Byzantine times.⁶²

The restoration activities of the imperial capital coincided with changes in palace ceremonials. As royal processions became rare occasions, the sultan increasingly appeared as an unreachable idol surrounded by palace dignitaries, eunuchs, and janissaries during his public appearances, especially during the visits of foreign ambassadors.⁶³ A sixteenth century poet Latifi describes the imperial palace in his literary treatise on Constantinople titled the (or) as follows: “It is the center of the revolving universe and the circle marked out by the pole; that it is located above the two seas. Under the bursting of the seas of the genealogies of its Creator, it is an allusion to “there are rivers under it,” or it is a pointer to the inhabited house (heavenly portal type of the Ka’ba) and the waters under the throne of God.”⁶⁴ Latifi’s 1526 account represents how the recent changes in the palace architecture and ceremonials were further perceived and advocated by the Ottoman intellectuals to serve the Ottoman imperial claims and to relocate the center of the world in Istanbul. The appeared in the Ottoman court before İbrahim Pasha had reformulated the imperial image or had begun redesigning the imperial capital. Khatayi’s depictions possibly presented a model for the Ottoman palace ceremonial where the rigid rules of protocol replaced the former ‘informal’ palace ceremonies during which the Sultan mingled with the public on a regular basis.

59 Ibid., 22–30.

60 Ibid., 76–110.

61 Ibid.

62 Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite,” 177–178; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, 53–109.

63 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power*, 22–30.

64 Latifi, *Evsaf-ı İstanbul*, ed. Nermin Suner (Pekin) (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1977), 16.

Imperial Law and Customs in China

In Ali Ekber Khitayi's account, the wealth and prosperity of the Chinese Empire are closely associated with the Chinese respect for old customs and imperial law. Khitayi frequently reminds his readers that thanks to the strict observance of imperial orders and old customs and traditions, China was a prosperous and rich country. Khitayi was clearly not interested in the Ottoman territorial expansion into China. He was probably endeavoring to seek patronage at the Ottoman court. Therefore, he was creating a model for the Ottoman court to emulate and to articulate its own imperial vision. When he refers to the organization and administration of towns, cities, military service, and daily life, he maintains that both in daily life in the towns and villages and in the army, everybody knew their duties and responsibilities. If they did not follow the law, they were punished in the worst possible way.⁶⁵ He further emphasizes this point by providing specific examples from daily life, such as the occasions of fires and drought.⁶⁶ He maintains that in China members of families did not show forgiveness to each other when one of them committed a crime. A son would even denounce his father, Khitayi asserts, if his father acted against the law. Khitayi concludes that this should be the way in Islamic custom as well.⁶⁷ Khitayi's meticulous description of the organization of the army completes this picture. Khitayi praises the Chinese army for its unbeatable tactics and weapons. He highlights Chinese soldiers' docility and discipline, their respect for their commanders, and their strict observance of the hierarchy of rank.⁶⁸ Khitayi ends his description of the Chinese army by reminding his readers that China has remained a rich and prosperous country because of the emperors' and their subjects' obedience to imperial law and customs.⁶⁹

Khitayi, here, creates an image of the Chinese society, which respects law and justice to an outmost degree, and urges the Ottoman sultan to lead his society to the same path. The message that Khitayi tries to convey becomes even clearer in the Istanbul manuscripts of the . The opening lines of these copies read: "The purpose of this book ... is to convey the history of the conquest of China, to describe how it was saved from treachery and disorder and to show how it came

65 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 116–23.

66 *Ibid.*, 152–153.

67 *Ibid.*, 159.

68 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 63.

69 *Ibid.*, 81.

to follow the path of justice.”⁷⁰ It is not a coincidence that some of the Ottoman Turkish translations were titled the (Law Book of China).⁷¹

Khitayi’s account on the Chinese respect for law and old customs in daily life and in the army and its importance to the country’s prosperity may well have found a receptive audience at the Ottoman court. Ottoman political thought in the sixteenth century gave precedence to just rulers who provided strong armies, who in turn provided the security of the subjects, who in turn provided the wealth and prosperity for the whole imperial domains through the just rulers. This ‘Cycle of Justice’ was based on the eight interconnected principles of sound government. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Muslim philosophers such as Nasr al-Din Tusi and Dawani had elaborated on justice as “an essential requirement for rulership.” The schema was very popular among Ottoman literati of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.⁷² It was not a coincidence that the *Book of China* was, finally, presented to Süleyman the Magnificent. When Sultan Süleyman ascended the throne, in accordance with the apocalyptic expectations of the age, he stated that he would disseminate justice around the world as the messianic ruler. The millenarian expectations were widespread in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century among the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities around the Mediterranean. The Ottoman sultans, the Safavid shahs, the Habsburg emperors, the Venetians, the French Valois kings, and even various popes in Rome articulated their imperial aims to establish a universal monarchy in messianic terms.⁷³ Ottoman literati in this period articulated this image by

70 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, Süleymaniye Library, Reisülküttab 609 mük.,1a.

71 For *Khitay-nameh*’s reception by the Ottoman court as an important sourcebook on the subject of law, see: Hemmat, “Children of the Cain,” 438; Tezcan, “The Multiple Faces of the One,” 37–38.

72 One model provided by an Ottoman philosopher Kınalızade Ali Çelebi (d. 1572) reads: There can be no royal authority without the military; there can be no military without wealth; the subjects produce the wealth; Justice preserves the subject’s loyalty to the sovereign; Justice requires harmony in the world; the world is a garden, its walls are the state; the Holy Law (*shari’a*) orders the state; there is no support for the *shari’a* except through royal authority. Fleischer, “Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclicism, and ‘Ibn Khaldunism’ in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18, no. 4 (1983), 200–201. On influences of Tusi and Dawani on Kınalızade’s analysis on justice, see: Baki Tezcan, “The Definition of Sultanic Legitimacy in the Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The *Ahlak-ı Ala’i* of Kınalızade Ali Çelebi (1510-1572),” M. A. thesis (Princeton University, 1996), 106-111 and 114–115.

73 Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah,” 159-177; idem, “Shadows of Shadows: Prophecy and Politics in 1530s Istanbul,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, no. 1-2 (2007): 51–52. See also, Robert Finlay, “Prophecy and Politics in Istanbul: Charles V, Sultan Süleyman, and the Habsburg Embassy of 1533-34,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2, no. 1 (1998): 1-31; Frances

portraying the Ottoman sultan as the Lawgiver and reminding his subjects of his role in spreading justice to the world. During the 1530s and 40s, concomitant with the rapid expansion of the machinery of central government and the provincial administration, architects of the Ottoman imperial project codified, modified, and implemented the imperial law, which became an essential part of Süleyman's program to centralize his authority, legitimacy, and resources.⁷⁴ As geographical expansion slowed down around the 1540s, the aging Süleyman espoused a somber imperial image and employed a far less personal icon of rulership: the imperial law. During this period, the Şeyhülislam (Grand Mufti) Ebussu'ud Efendi (d. 1574) and the Nişancı (Chancellor) Celalzade Mustafa (d. 1567) systematically codified, compiled, and reconciled the imperial law with the Islamic law.⁷⁵ In other words, the imperial law was reformulated and became the embodiment of impersonal rule and the sign of the sultan's impersonal authority.⁷⁶ The historian, mathematician, and geographer Matrakçı Nasuh (d. 1564) provided an excellent example of the centrality of imperial law for the sultan's universal authority in his work the *Beyan-ı Menazil*, the diary of Süleyman's Iraq campaign between 1533 and 1536.⁷⁷ Matrakçı entered the palace service as a *devshirme* and was a product of the Ottoman schooling and administration. He became a protégé of Rüstem Pasha, the grand vizier to Sultan Süleyman during the second half of his reign.⁷⁸ Matrakçı composed the *Beyan-ı Menazil* during the actual journey and later illustrated it with 130 miniature depictions of the major stations *en route*,

A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1975); Pagden, *Lords of All the World*.

74 Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah."

75 Ibid., 167; and Colin Imber, *Ebussu'ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

76 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 191–252.

77 Only one manuscript copy of this work has survived; it is located in the Istanbul University Library. Matrakci Nasuh, *Beyan-i Menazil-i Sefer-i Irakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, Istanbul University Library, TY. 5964. Hüseyin Yurdaydin published the facsimile edition of the work: Matrakci Nasuh, *Beyan-i Menazil-i Sefer-i Irakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, ed. Hüseyin Yurdaydin (Ankara: TTK, 1976).

78 On Matrakçı Nasuh and his work see: Hamit Hadi Selen, "16. Yüzyılda Yapılmış Anadolu Atlası," in *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi, İstanbul, 20-25 Eylül 1937, Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler* (İstanbul, 1943); Franz Taeschner, "The Itinerary of the First Persian Campaign of Sultan Süleyman, 1534-36, according to Nasuh al-Matraki," *Imago Mundi* 13 (1956): 53-55; Norman J. Johnston, "The Urban World of the Matrakci Manuscript," *Near Eastern Studies Journal* 303/ (1971): 159-166; İffet Orbay, "Istanbul Viewed: The Representation of the City in Ottoman Maps of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" Ph.D. diss. (MIT, 2001); Ebel, "City Views, Imperial Visions," 222-225; Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*.

presents the Ottoman sultan as the dispenser of justice within and beyond the Ottoman realm. When describing the Ottoman entrance to Tabriz, the geographer writes: “After the victorious troops who were in that region [Tabriz] set their aims on reaching eternal success with reverence and honor and respect and consideration, with the appearance of the sultanic and imperial throne and the starlike arrival of the Rumis, they held the court of justice because the celestial-sphere-adorning court of the Sulaiman of the time was necessary for that land.”⁷⁹ Matrakçı Nasuh reminds his readers on several occasions that the sultan brought security and justice to Anatolia and beyond. Whenever he reached an important station along his campaign route, the author recounts, the sultan set up his *divan-ı adalet* (court of justice). In several miniatures, Matrakçı even depicts the sultan’s tent, the physical symbol of his justice, and where the imperial court was held, surrounded by smaller tents of his retinue.⁸⁰ In his depictions and narrative, Matrakçı highlighted the importance of imperial law for the universal claims of the Ottoman sultan. Almost two decades before Matrakçı’s work appeared at the Ottoman court, Khitayi counseled the Sultan that the imperial law and customs were necessary for a wealthy society and a universal empire.

Religious Coexistence in China

Clearly important to Khitayi was the multi-religious nature of China. He presents the relationship between the Chinese emperor and his Muslim subjects as important and relevant information for the Ottoman Sultan and his claims to universality. Khitayi devotes a large section to the different religions practiced in China during the Ming dynasty, especially in the early sixteenth century, and underlines that Muslims of China had prestige and status in society. In such passages, we find something remarkable, the similarities between Chinese and Islamic religious practices, and more importantly the Chinese ruler’s predilection for Islam. Khitayi maintains that the Chinese emperor, Kin Tay (The Zhengde Emperor) had been very friendly with the Muslims and had Muslim warlords under his service. Khitayi also recounts that the eunuchs of the Chinese palace are all Muslims who can practice their faith without any limitations. He relates a “popular story” that the son of Kin Tay Khan converted to Islam after seeing Muhammad in his dream and finding the *shahada* inscribed on his wall in green letters.⁸¹

79 Matrakçı Nasuh, *Beyan-ı Menazil-i Sefer-i İrakeyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, Istanbul University Library, TY. 5964, 28b-29a

80 See especially: *Ibid.*, 13b-14a; 15b, 20b, 24b, 25a, 26b, 29b, 31a, 72a, 73a, 74a, 74b.

81 Ali Ekber Khitayi, *Khitay-nameh*, 144.

If the *Book of China* was designed as a travel account, which aimed to present and reformulate the knowledge about this far away land according to the needs of the Ottoman palace, then why did Khitayi focus on the Muslims and their conditions in China? By pointing to the fact that there are Muslims in this far away land, Khitayi presented China as a land where people with similar customs and religions live. After Selim I defeated the Mamluks in Egypt and took control of Mecca and Medina, the Ottoman sultans assumed the role of the guardians of the two sanctuaries. After ascending the throne, Sultan Süleyman continued using this title to legitimize his authority within and beyond the Ottoman domains. He also organized an annual pilgrimage to Mecca and engaged in projects in order to increase the Ottoman presence in Mecca and Medina. For instance, he organized separate forces to protect the pilgrimage routes, sent annual aids to Mecca and Medina, built mosques in the region, and restored the Ka'ba. In this way, he sought to strengthen his legitimacy and the Ottoman presence in the Muslim world. From 1540s on, he also adopted the title Caliph.⁸² In this period, this was meant to counterbalance the Safavid Shah Tahmasb's assertions regarding sovereignty over Ottoman subjects living in eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan as well as Charles V's claims to universal Christian rulership.⁸³ Khitayi's descriptions of Muslims and their fair treatment by the Chinese rulers and society fitted well to Khitayi's vision of the Chinese Empire where different religions coexisted just like in the Ottoman Empire.

Seyfi Çelebi's China

In the 1580s, Seyfi Çelebi (d. ca 1590) compiled a work depicting the history, geography, economic life, customs, and rulers of China, India, Transoxiana, and Iran. His account, the ⁸⁴ was detailed and thorough yet markedly less ornamented in comparison to similar works of the period. So far several historians have tried unsuccessfully to shed light on the identity of the author.⁸⁵ In the

82 Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*, 116.

83 Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*, 125; Agoston, "Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy," 97.

84 There are only two extant manuscripts of this work in Leiden and Paris. Seyfi Celebi, *Kitab-i Tevarih-i Padishahan-i Vilayet-i Hindu ve Hitay*. Leiden University Library Cod. 917 (1) Warn.; Paris National Library Suppl. Turc. No. 1136. Joseph Matuz prepared the facsimile edition of the Leiden copy in 1968: Joseph Matuz, ed., *L'Ouverage de Seyfi Çelebi: Historien Ottoman du XVIe Siecle* (Paris: Dépositaire, 1968).

85 Franz Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und Ihre Werke* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1927), 69; Matuz, ed., *L'Ouverage de Seyfi Çelebi*; Christine Woodhead, "Seyfi," *EF*.

opening lines of his work, Seyfi Çelebi describes himself as a provincial treasurer compiling his work on behalf of the reigning sultan, Murad III (r. 1574-1595).⁸⁶ The work contains nine chapters, the first of which concerns China. Why did Seyfi Çelebi choose to write about China in this period? Seyfi Çelebi's work appeared at the Ottoman court at about the same period that Khitayi's account was translated into Ottoman Turkish. Although the Ottoman Turkish translations of the reached a larger audience, there are only two manuscripts of the Seyfi Çelebi's work. Nevertheless, a comparison of Seyfi Çelebi's work to the offers valuable insights to the evolution of Ottoman imperial policies as well as the Ottoman understanding of the world geography during the second half of the sixteenth century when competition with the Safavids in Central Asia became a major preoccupation for the Ottoman policy makers.

Seyfi Çelebi opens his account by explaining why he wrote his book. He asserts that "... history is such a noble learning ... that if the rulers learn about the previous rulers and how they ruled, they would become better rulers. Also, if they learn that all these previous rulers had passed away, they would not be not so attached to worldly affairs and be more concerned with the adulation of God."⁸⁷ He then focuses on China in the first chapter of his work. In this chapter Seyfi Çelebi, just as Khitayi did before him, mainly emphasizes justice, Muslims, and also wealth and prosperity in China.⁸⁸ He reports that there are many Muslims in China and that one of the previous emperors (possibly referring to the Zhengde Emperor) converted to Islam after seeing a vision of Muhammad in a dream. The author asserts that many Muslims had lived in China ever since and that there are around three hundred Friday mosques in one of the provinces.⁸⁹ Next Seyfi Çelebi stresses the prosperity of China by describing the Chinese palace, which, he maintains, consists of the residence of the Chinese emperor, as well as valleys and waterways. He claims that the Chinese emperor travels on these waterways by ship and organizes hunting parties at the gardens of his palace. He highlights the fact that the Chinese palace is so large that the emperor needs seven thousand eunuchs to serve him.⁹⁰ He finalizes his chapter on China with a description of its abundant riches. Seyfi Çelebi asserts, "In China, there are so many gold and silver mines that only fifty of them are working, whereas the others are closed. Had all

86 Matuz, ed., *L'Ouverage de Seyfi Celebi*, 163

87 Ibid.

88 On the similarities between Seyfi Çelebi and Ali Ekber Khitayi's accounts, see: Beller-Hann, "Ottoman Perception of China," 61–63.

89 Matuz, ed., *L'Ouverage de Seyfi Celebi*, 165

90 Ibid., 170

of them been working, there would be no demand for gold and silver any more, and nobody would care about them.”⁹¹

Seyfi Çelebi’s descriptions of China bear striking similarities to Khitayi’s account. Both authors focus on the same aspects of China: Muslims, the palace, and wealth and prosperity. It is possible that Seyfi Çelebi had seen and read Khitayi’s account. Seyfi Çelebi recounts the history, geography, society and rulers of China in only twenty pages. In the rest of the work, he focuses on the history and genealogies of the rulers of India, Transoxiana, and Iran. He pays particular attention to the Sunni Muslim rulers in Central Asia and emphasizes their genealogies going back to Chingiz Khan. Compared to these later chapters, the section on China is much shorter. Why does China receive a marginal treatment in Seyfi Çelebi’s account? Limitations on space might be the reason for the author to deal less extensively with China and more with rulers in Central Asia. Seyfi Çelebi was obviously more concerned with teaching the Ottoman sultan the history of Central Asia, as he claims at the beginning of his account. He clearly aspired to impress the Ottoman sultan with his knowledge of the history of Muslim rule in Central Asia, authoring a work that would gain him the sultan’s patronage.

Why did Seyfi Çelebi prepare a work on Central Asia in this period? Seyfi Çelebi’s work clearly articulates the change in Ottoman imperial policies during the second half of the sixteenth century. By the early 1540s, it became clear that neither Charles V nor Sultan Süleyman could fulfill expectations to establish universal empires.⁹² As the conflict over the Mediterranean and Hungary ended in stalemate, both rulers withdrew from the public eye. Under the reigns of Süleyman’s successors Selim II (r. 1566-74) and Murad III (r. 1574-95), the Ottoman military was only able to add a few islands in the Mediterranean and strongholds at the Safavid and Habsburg frontiers to the domains of the empire. The reign of Murad III, in particular, was a period of acute political and financial crises for the Ottomans as the empire was forced to fight wars on two fronts. The Ottomans were in conflict with the Safavids intermittently from 1579 to 1639 in Iraq while in Hungary a long and costly war with the Habsburgs raged between 1593 and 1606.⁹³ Facing financial crisis, Ottoman state levied new taxes on peasants, borrowed money from internal moneylenders, and debased the silver coinage. Irate

91 Ibid., 171.

92 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 276; Agoston, “Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy,” 100–102.

93 Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*, 63–72; Colin Imber, “Frozen Legitimacy,” in Hakan Karateke, ed., *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101–102.

over lost wages, the janissary corps revolted in the capital.⁹⁴ Contemporary historians in the Ottoman capital observed these events as a sign of decline.⁹⁵

In this period of crises, the Ottomans continued their grand ambitions and claims to universal sovereignty.⁹⁶ The *realpolitik* in this period prompted urgent and practical solutions from the Ottoman policy makers. The Ottoman literati and ruling elites proposed unconventional and creative answers to address the rising Shi'i power beyond the Ottoman eastern frontier. Safavid economic, military and political achievements under Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629) seriously challenged the Ottoman presence and legitimacy in the East.⁹⁷ The chroniclers of the Safavid court in Isfahan articulated the Safavid supremacy vis-à-vis the two Sunni powers; the Ottomans in Anatolia and Iraq and Uzbeks in Transoxiana. In their works, Safavid literati associated the Safavid dynasty with Tamerlane (d. 1405) in an effort to consolidate their authority in Central Asia.⁹⁸ Istanbul responded to these Safavid claims and attempted to influence the changing conditions in Central Asia. Negotiating political and economic alliances with the Central Asian Muslim rulers against the Safavids were their only option. A decade earlier, in 1568-69, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, the grand vizier to Selim II (r. 1566-1574) had promoted a project to increase the Ottoman presence in the region. The Grand

94 Cemal Kafadar, "When Coins Turned into Drops of Dew and Bankers Became Robbers of Shadows: The Boundaries of Ottoman Economic Imagination at the End of the Sixteenth Century," Ph.D. diss, McGill University, 1986.

95 Cemal Kafadar, "The Myth of Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post Suleymanic Era," in *Suleyman the Second and His Time*, eds. Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993): 37-48; Necipoglu, *The Age of Sinan*, 256-57.

96 On Murad III's imperial claims and how he fashioned an identity and image of himself in his dream and vision narratives see: Özgen Felek, "Re-Creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murad III's Self-Fashioning," Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 2010). Baki Tezcan argues that in fact Murad III sought ways to strengthen the absolutist role of the sultan in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, he took over the appointments to the imperial bureaucratic and administrative structures. Murad even introduced new actors to the political stage and tried to curtail the power of the grand viziers. Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56, 80, and 95-104.

97 For a discussion on the Ottoman-Safavid imperial competition and its effects on the religious-political sensibilities and genre of conversion narratives, see Tijana Krstic, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no.1 (2009): 35-63.

98 On Shah Abbas I and his policies and their articulation by the Safavid historians, see Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 50-73.

Vizier wanted to open a canal between Don and Volga. The project aimed at creating easier connections from the Ottoman lands to Central Asia.⁹⁹ Although the plan failed to gain the sultan's approval, this canal project was one of the earliest attempts to consolidate the Ottoman control over the trade routes and establish better connections with the Muslim rulers in the region.¹⁰⁰

During the peak of the conflict with the Safavids in the 1580's, the Ottomans continued to assume a pious Sunni Muslim image vis-à-vis their Shi'i Muslim neighbors, the Safavids. Contemporary accounts picked up this thread, portraying the Ottoman sultans more and more as pious rulers. In 1582 at the fifty-day imperial circumcision festival, Murad III made a public display of his piety with the circumcision his sons and thousands of orphans and *devshirme* recruits as well as conversions of the members of the Safavid embassy to Sunni Islam.¹⁰¹ Murad III commissioned chroniclers and miniaturists to depict and describe these ceremonies and to articulate his piety.¹⁰² Concomitantly, Ottoman literati began to highlight the prestige and political legitimacy of dynasties of Chingiz Khanid descent in Central Asia. For instance, the renowned historian, Mustafa Ali (d. 1600) compares the universal empires of Tamerlane and Chingiz Khan to that of the Ottomans in his monumental world history, the *Essence of History (Künhü'l-Abbar)* written between 1591 and 99.¹⁰³ Mustafa Ali and several other contemporary historians from the same period prepared works for the Ottoman sultan where they attached great importance to Uzbeks and Crimean Khans due to their Chingiz Khan's descent.¹⁰⁴ Ottomans could never claim being descendants of Chingiz Khan, however, they made use of their only plausible connection to Central Asia extensively in this period. In 1593-94, the court historian Talikizade delineated twenty qualities of the Ottoman dynasty that assured their supremacy in the Islamic world. One of these qualities, Talikizade asserts, is the fact that the Ottoman dynasty descends from the Central Asian Turkic ruler Oghuz Khan.¹⁰⁵

99 Halil İnalçık, "Osmanlı-Rus Rekabetinin Menşei ve Don-Volga Kanalı Teşebbüsü (1569)," *Belleten* 12, no. 46 (1948): 349-402; idem, "The Origins of the Ottoman-Russian Rivalry and the Don-Volga Canal, 1569," *Les Annales de l'Université d'Ankara* I (1950): 47-106.

100 Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 135-136

101 Derin Terzioğlu, "The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 85-86.

102 Ibid.; Christine Woodhead, "Murad III and the Historians of Ottoman Imperial Authority in late 16th-Century Historiography," in *Legitimizing the Order*, 85-98.

103 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 277

104 Ibid.

105 Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 30

Written during the peak of Ottoman – Safavid conflict, Seyfi Çelebi’s work together with the other historical and geographical works from the same period indicates the Ottoman awareness of shifting economic and political networks at the end of the sixteenth century. The Ottoman sultans were no longer the Roman Emperors but rather pious Sunni-Muslims who tried to bolster their connections to Central Asia. In this enterprise, China, still a model for a universal empire, continued to hold an important place in the world histories and geographies.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the active involvement of Ottoman intellectuals in the imperial claims and policies in the sixteenth century. Through an historical analysis of two accounts on China, one from the early and the other from the later part of the sixteenth century, I have argued that Ottoman intellectuals created an image of China for the Ottoman ruling elites to emulate and articulate their universal claims during the sixteenth century. Ali Ekber Khitayi’s *Book of China* from 1516 was not a typical sixteenth-century account of China. Khitayi did not present China as a faraway land inhabited by strange people with bizarre religious practices. Importantly, we can note that the *Book of China* is without the typical description of the different physical appearance of Chinese, their different language or alphabet.¹⁰⁶ In Khitayi’s account, China was a model for a universal empire. The author presented Chinese wealth, its multi-religious society, and its law adhering rulers and subjects as undisputable signs of its universality. By carefully selecting this information for his account, he implicitly urged the Ottoman sultans to follow the Chinese example in articulating their claims to universal sovereignty.

Written in the last decades of the sixteenth century Seyfi Çelebi’s work on China, India, Transoxiana, and Iran clearly enunciates how China still held a marginal, nevertheless, an important place in the formulation of Ottoman imperial vision and policy. This article has argued that the long Ottoman – Safavid conflict played an essential role in the attitudes of the Ottoman ruling elites and the geographers in the second half of the sixteenth century. In his account, Seyfi Çelebi is concerned with establishing the Mongol lineage and legacy in Central Asia, satisfying the growing Ottoman preoccupation with its own Central Asian heritage.

¹⁰⁶ Beller-Hann, “Ottoman Perception of China,” 64.

Clearly, Ottoman intellectuals articulated the concerns of the period in their works. They prepared accounts on the regions of the world, which carried great significance for the Ottoman politics and their search for legitimacy. After placing these texts in their proper global contexts, historical and geographical accounts prepared for the Ottoman court can now be viewed as important parts of the Ottoman imperial consciousness, another vital aspect of intellectual life that shaped and was shaped, by the currents of the empire.

Relocating the Center of the Universe: China and the Ottoman Imperial Project in the Sixteenth Century

Abstract ■ In the sixteenth century, Ottoman encounters with the Habsburg Empire in the West and the Safavids in the East turned violent as they fought these rival empires on the battlefields. This article argues that there was a heightened sensitivity to geographical and historical knowledge about different parts of the world in the sixteenth century Ottoman Empire. It claims that this development was intimately related to the articulation of the Ottoman claims to universal imperial sovereignty that had to be broadcast to the political and religious rivals both in the East and the West in the sixteenth century. Through an examination of Ali Ekber Khitayi's from 1516 and Seyfi Çelebi's from 1582, this paper demonstrates that the historical and geographical accounts prepared for the Ottoman court in the sixteenth century created China as a model to emulate and as a mirror to reflect Ottoman imperial ambitions.

Keywords: Ali Ekber Khitayi, Seyfi Çelebi, China, the Ottoman Empire, Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, Murad III, geographical knowledge, imperial enterprise, universal sovereignty.