

# **OSMANLI ARAŐTIRMALARI VII-VIII**

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OTTOMAN İNŞA AND THE ART OF LETTER-WRITING ·  
INFLUENCES UPON THE CAREER OF THE NİŞANCI  
AND PROSE STYLIST OKÇUZADE (d. 1630)

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Numerous skilful poets capable of originality in rare and beautiful expressions may always be found in every country, if not in every major city. But true prose stylists, those with natural talent, appear perhaps once in every generation. Hence there is a dearth of eloquent writers.

Okçuzade Mehmed Şah Beg, 1620s'

The use of rhetorical prose for the enunciation of a great theme is a feature of all major cultural traditions, serving such varied ends as the civic pride of ancient Greece, the rivalries of medieval Italian city-states, the humanism of Erasmus, or the patriotism of Churchill. In the Islamic tradition, demonstrative rhetoric, in Arabic, Persian or Turkish, played a significant part in creating through the written word those images most appropriate to sovereignty. For the status-conscious Ottoman ruler, promotion of *ilmü'l-inşa* - the science of epistolography and, by extension, of elegant prose composition - was a necessary adjunct to political power, symbolizing attainment of the high level of intellectual and aesthetic refinement expected in a successful empire. In this sense, the theory and practice of Ottoman *inşa* was developed not merely as a requisite vehicle for portraying the power and magnificence of the state *per se* : it was designed also as a conscious expression of Islamic cultural synthesis, and by implication of Muslim political leadership under the Ottoman banner. Whilst both

1 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, Istanbul University Library TY 3105, 5b.

historiography and epistolography were equally important vehicles for its use, the term *inşa* in an Ottoman context was often taken as synonymous with the latter, and will be so used, for the most part, in this essay.

An amalgam of lexical and syntactical elements from the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages, embellished with a daunting range of allusions and word-play, and with the distinctive cadences of rhymed phrasing, Ottoman *inşa* was neither an easy nor a spontaneous style of composition, and could not be learnt without effort. From this stems the main reason for its close identification with epistolography: that its study was systematically pursued as part of the professional training of a chancery scribe, for whose use various *inşa* handbooks were produced. The aspiring *münşi* had access to manuals of style which adapted and expounded the principles of Arabic and Persian epistolography for Ottoman use, and to complementary *münşeat* collections of exemplary compositions<sup>2</sup>. Together, these two types of *inşa* handbook (with or without the admonitions of a teacher) provided the basic epistolary training of a divan scribe, establishing the fundamental principles of protocol, format and expression appropriate to the theme and to recipient.

For much of the 16th century, the Ottoman *inşa* tradition was dominated by the imperial letters and other compilations of leading chancery officials. Tacizade Cafer Çelebi (d. 921/1515), *nişancı* in the reigns of Bayezid II and Selim I, was of early Ottoman stylists the one most revered by both contemporaries and later generations. His *names* and *fethnames* served for at least a century as the critical standard against which scribal successors would be judged<sup>3</sup>. The professional reputation of such as Cafer

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Menâhicü'l-inşâ: the earliest Ottoman chancery manual, by Yahya bin Mehmed el-Kâtib from the 15th century*, ed. Şinasi Tekin, Roxburg, Mass., 1971.

For a general discussion of *inşa* epistolography, see J. Matuz, 'Über die Epistolographie und İnşa-Literatur der Osmanen' in *Deutscher Orientalistentag 1968* (ZDMG Supplement, Wiesbaden 1970), 574-94.

<sup>3</sup> İsmail E. Erünsal, *The life and works of Tâci-zâde Cafer Çelebi, with a critical edition of his divan* (Istanbul 1983), esp. lxvii-lxix, for assessment as a prose stylist.

Çelebi and Süleyman's long-serving *nişancı* Celalzade (d. 975/1567), together with the monumental compilation of imperial letters, *Münşe'atü 's-selâin*, of the *reisülküttab* (later also *nişancı*) Feridun Beg (d. 991/1583), serve to indicate the predominance of chancery, or public, *inşa* during this period.

However, the standards and conventions followed in the *divan-ı hümayun* found from an early date a gradation of echoes in the less formal epistolography of educated men<sup>4</sup>. By c. 1630, writers in this second, largely non-chancery, sphere had become recognized as the major stylists both in epistolography proper and in other genres of rhetorical prose composition. Their reputations superseded and long outlasted those of contemporary professional scribes<sup>5</sup>. Nergisi (d. 1044/1635)<sup>6</sup>, Veysi (d. 1037/1628)<sup>7</sup>, and their correspondents were not chancery officials, but members of the *ulema*; their *münşe'at* collections contain not imperial *names* and *berats*, but mostly private letters exchanged within their own rather restricted circle. Expressing sentiments similar to those in Mesihî's *Gül-i şad-berg* - separation from friends, career frustration, injustice, complaint, hope, recommendation, compliments and congratulations - the collected letters of the 'private' *münşi* focus the skills of refined expression on more personal matters. The official exemplars of an early 16th-century *nişancı* utilized style for the furtherance of a great public theme - a military victory, or the splendour of the sultanate; their significance arises from the importance attached in that period to political and institutional de-

4 As shown in Professor Ménage's essay on Mesihî's *Gül-i şad-berg* elsewhere in this volume, and in his 'An Ottoman manual of provincial correspondence', *WZKM* 68 (1976), 31-45.

5 Seventeenth-century compilations, though (or because of the fact that they are?) numerous, do not have the significance of earlier collections. The *reisülküttab* Sarı 'Abdullah's *Düstüru 'l-inşâ* (mid 17th century) is perhaps the best known of the later collections.

6 Nergis [Nergisizade] Mehmed (*mahlas* Nergisi), d. 1044/1635. For his biography see Ömer Faruk Akün, 'Nergisi', *İA* ix, 194-97; and for an edition of his *münşe'at*, see John R. Walsh, 'The Esalibü 'l-mekâtib (Münşe'ât) of Mehmed Nergisi Efendi', *Archivum Ottomanicum* I (1969), 213-302.

7 Üveys ibn Mehmed (*mahlas* Veysi), d. 1037/1628; Nevzade Ata'i, *Zeyl-i Şekâ'ik-i Nu'mâniye* (Istanbul 1268/1852), II, 713-16; Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* (Istanbul 1267/1851), II, 99.

velopment. In contrast, the pre-eminent epistolographers of the 17th century - no matter how practical or political might be their purpose in corresponding with a particular person - were those who wrote on topics generally more inward-looking; contemporary acknowledgement of this more leisured, philosophic style reflects the confidence and the competence of the mature empire<sup>8</sup>.

The reputations of such men as Nergisi and Veysi by no means rest entirely upon their *münşeât* collections - as neither did those of Cafer Çelebi or Celalzade upon theirs<sup>9</sup>. However, the changing nature of recognized *inşa* models and the differing status of 16th and 17th century *münşiyan* are of considerable significance in the study of Ottoman literary history. Many writers strove for recognition in both public and private spheres of *inşa* composition. Notably successful in this - and a clear link between 16th and 17th century traditions - was Okçuzade Mehmed Şah Beg (d. 1039/1630)<sup>10</sup>. In the course of a chancery career spanning 44 years (1580-1624);

8. There existed in all periods a large intermediate category of 'business' correspondence between lesser officials or from these to the government. Many *mecmuas* (eg. that of Mesîhi) contain examples of both 'private' and 'lesser official' correspondence. This does not, however, invalidate the essential comparison made here between the two exemplary forms of *inşa*.

9. Eg. Nergisi's *hamse* published Bulak 1255/1839, and Istanbul 1285/1868, for which see Akun, 'Nergisi'; and Veysi's *Habname*, published Bulak 1252/1836-37, İstanbul, 1263/1847.

10. The most detailed and reliable account of Okçuzade's career is given by Ata'i, *Zeyl*, II, 730-31, from which all details given below are taken, unless otherwise indicated. Subsequent accounts appear to derive directly or indirectly from Ata'i, including: Katîb Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 127-28; Ahmed Resmi, *Halîfetü 'r-rü'esâ* [*Sefînetü 'r-rü'esâ*] (Istanbul 1269/1853), 23-25; Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicîl-i 'Oşmânî* (Istanbul 1308/1890), IV, 153; Bursalı Mehmed Tahir, '*Oşmânî Mü'ellifleri* (Istanbul 1333/1915), II, 78-79.

Early accounts of Okçuzade as poet under the *mahlas* Şahi are given by Kınalızade, *Tezkîretü 'ş-şu'arâ* (c. 1586, publ. Ankara 1978), I, 514-15; and as poet and *münşi* in Riyazi's *tezkiye*, *Riyâzu 'ş-şu'arâ*, Topkapı Sarayı H. 1276 (c. 1018/1609), 53a-53b.

For Okçuzade's own account, see his *Münşe'âtü 'l-inşâ*, introductory folios 1b-8b (compiled c. 1038/1629). Other copies of this *münşeât* usually include just over half the number of letters in the 1629 collection; eg. British Library, Or. Ms. 1139, 1b-79a (C. Rieu, *Catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1888, 97).

Okçuzade several times attained the office of *nişancı*, and was considered by Ata'i second only to Cafer Çelebi for his skill as an official *münşi*. However, in his *Münşe'atü'l-inşâ*, Collected Letters, (compiled c. 1038/1629) Okçuzade's professional duties are represented by at most 12 official documents (mostly letters to Şah Abbas) among a variety of private correspondence (c. 80 letters). This uneven balance may be accounted for partly by Okçuzade's lengthy periods out of office, when he had both the leisure to write and the need to demonstrate his ability, and partly by the nature of literary patronage and appreciation of the period, particularly that in the circle which came to be dominated by the *şeyhülislam* Yahya Efendi (d. 1058/1644)<sup>11</sup>. A *münşe'at mecmuası* apparently compiled for Yahya, and featuring the work of perhaps the six most prominent stylists of the early 17th century, places Okçuzade's *inşa* on a par with that of the *kazaskers* of Rumili, Azmizade<sup>12</sup> and Ganizade<sup>13</sup>, the *kadi* of Bursa, Abdülkerim<sup>14</sup>, and the provincial *kadis*, Nergisi and Veysi<sup>15</sup>. It is significant that all except Okçuzade were members of the *ulema*, and that their letters are overwhelmingly of the non-chancery, private variety.

The outline of Okçuzade's career given below is used as a focus for discussing certain influences upon the development of the art of letter-writing among the Ottomans. Whilst also containing

11 Zekeriyazade Yahya (*mahlas* Yahya), d. 1053/1644: *şeyhülislam* 1622-23, 1625-32, 1634-44. Cf. Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 231-32; Ali Uğur (ed.), *The Ottoman 'ulemā in the mid-17th century: an analysis of the Vaqā'ü'l-fuzalā of Mehmed Şeyhî Efendi* (Berlin 1986), 70. Yahya's importance as a literary patron remains to be assessed.

12 Azmizade Mustafa (*mahlas* Haleti), d. 1040/1631: Ata'i, *Zeyl*, II, 739-41; Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 135.

13 Ganizade [Abdülganizade] Mehmed (*mahlas* Nadiri), d. 1036/1627: Ata'i, *Zeyl*, II, 702-04; Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 99.

14 Akhisarlı Abdülkerim, d. 1038/1629: Ata'i, *Zeyl*, II, 718-19; Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 113.

15 *Münşe'at mecmuası*, Istanbul University Library TY 1526, undated but probably compiled late 1620s/1630s during second *meşihat* of Yahya. Contents: Azmizade, from fol. 1; Okçuzade from fol. 68; Abdülkerim, from fol. 158; Veysi, from fol. 204; Nergisi, from fol. 264; Nadiri [Ganizade], from fol. 313, to fol. 327. For the other works of each writer represented in this collection, consult the sources given above.

reflections upon the office of *nişancı*, this essay is offered primarily as a contribution to the study of the literary history of the 16th/early 17th century Ottoman state.

Okçuzade was clearly - and perhaps with some justification - disappointed in his career. There is no doubt that he began well, with the advantages of birth, education and natural ability all working in his favour. His father, Okçuzade Mehmed Paşa (d.c. 995/1587) was a senior *katib*, appointed *reisülküttab* in 989/1581, *baş defterdar* the following year, and later *beğlerbeği* of Cyprus and Aleppo<sup>16</sup>. The son, born in 970/1562-63, inclined first to an *ilmiye* career, followed a full *medrese* education, and received his *mülazemet* in 988/May 1580 from the then *şeyhülislam* Malulzade<sup>17</sup>. However, quickly finding that he 'could not endure' the teaching profession he had intended to follow, Okçuzade secured appointment in the central chancery service as a *katib* of the *divan-i hümayun*<sup>18</sup>. His post was supported by the grant of a *zeamet* and the rank of *müteferrika*.

Such a change of career at this juncture was not unusual in the late 16th century. Many *medrese* graduates impatient with the overcrowding of *ilmiye* ranks and the consequent delays before and between often insecure appointments sought the more stable option of a bureaucratic career<sup>19</sup>. Their *medrese* learning gave them an initial advantage over recruits of inferior education - as in Okçuzade's case, where he was appointed directly and without scribal experience, as a full *katib* rather than as an apprentice, and given

16 Resmi, *Halîfetü 'r-rü'esâ*, 18-19; Süreyya, *Sicîl-i 'Osmânî* IV, 125-26; Tahir, *'Osmânî Mü'ellifleri* III, 183. This is not the same *baş defterdar* Mehmed Paşa who wrote a *şeca'atname* under the *mahlas* Asafi (as in F Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und Ihre Werke*, Leipzig 1927, 117).

17 At the same time as the future *şeyhülislam* Zekeriyazade Yahya - which suggests a long, perhaps close, association between the two.

18 Başbakanlık Arşivi, İstanbul, Kamil Kepeci tasnifi, 238, 125: appointment dated 6 Ramazan 988/15 October 1580.

19 Cornell H Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: the historian Mustafa Ali, 1541-1600* (Princeton 1986), discusses 16th century bureaucratic 'career paths'; see chap. 8, 'Bureaucracy and bureaucratic consciousness', esp. pp. 221-22. On Celalzade's career choice, see R C Repp, *The Mufti of Istanbul* (Oxford 1986), 61.

a relatively high salary and status. His father's position would also have been influential in this appointment. Service in the central chancery in particular possessed a number of attractions in this period. First, the chancery was in a state of continuing expansion, and could always find room for well-educated, well-connected applicants. Second, it offered, for the initial years at least, continuous salaried employment, generally within Istanbul<sup>20</sup>. This gave the ambitious scribe opportunity to cultivate influential patrons at the heart of government. A third, related, attraction was the prospect for senior officials of promotion outside the chancery service into the military/administrative sphere - a goal which long motivated the historian Mustafa Ali and no doubt many others of similar ability and outlook. The example of Okçuzade's father was merely one instance of such a move, and in these circumstances, it was unlikely to have been the teaching as such, but rather the uncertainties of the learned career as compared with the opportunities of an administrative one which the son found unpalatable<sup>21</sup>.

Noted already in the 1580s by the *tezkeres* writer Kınalızade as a poet and wordsmith of considerable promise, Okçuzade determined to maintain active links not merely with literary, cultured society generally but with *ilmiye* learning in particular, and yearned to be something of a scholar. Among his works are an elegant literary version of *kırk hadis*<sup>22</sup>, and the translation of a pious work by Kasıfî<sup>23</sup>. The *nişancı*'s role as 'mufti of *kanun*'<sup>24</sup>, requiring an expert

20 However, little is yet known about the liability of individual scribes for provincial secondment (eg. on campaign duty, as census recorder, in a governor's retinue); for some this may have been a major element in their employment.

21 Okçuzade's own son, Okçuzade Ahmed (d. 1060/1650) persevered in the teaching profession, becoming *müderris* at the Süleymaniye; cf. Uğur, *Ottoman 'ulemâ*, 122-23.

22 *Ahşenü 'l-hadis*, Istanbul 1313/1895-96; cf. Abdülkadir Karahan, *İslam-Türk edebiyatında Kırk Hadis toplama, tercüme ve şerhleri* (Istanbul 1954), 218-22.

23 Dated by chronogram, 1021/1612; unpublished manuscript in several copies, eg. Topkapı Sarayı Library, Revan 97.

24 Cf. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and intellectual*, 93-94.

knowledge of *kanun* legislation, was one which particularly appealed to him in later years<sup>25</sup>.

Okçuzade's regular promotion through the upper chancery ranks came quickly in the 1590s - in 1004/April 1596 as *tezkereci* to the newly appointed grand vezir Ibrahim Paşa, rising after six months to be *reisülküttab*, and in 1006/late 1597 as *defter emini* - culminating in his first appointment as *nişancı* in 1007/May 1599. Having held that post for over two years (with one short break of about a month) summary dismissal came in 1010/August 1601<sup>26</sup>. Okçuzade's comments on his dismissal, written with hindsight in the late 1620s, make it plain that he considered himself a victim of factional injustice, of the combined malice of a ruthless, philistine grand vezir (Ibrahim Paşa's successor, Yemişçi Hasan Paşa, appointed July 1601<sup>27</sup>) and a 'corrupt and callous' *müfti* (Hoca Sadeddinzade Mehmed, appointed *şeyhülislam* for the first time in early August 1601<sup>28</sup>). As grand vezirs came and went with some despatch, it was no great misfortune to be on the wrong side of a man so anti-*ulema* as Hasan Paşa seems to have been. Of much greater significance, in retrospect, was Okçuzade's relationship with the new *şeyhülislam*, which he presents as totally antagonistic. The frustrations and disillusionment expressed in the apologia of his old age culminated in a vehement diatribe on the iniquities of the 'Hasan Canzadeler' - Hoca Sadeddin and his sons Mehmed and Esad - who had 'for 50 years been destroying the Ottoman state, diverting it ever further from the true path, and instigating endless intrigue and injustice to serve their own ends'<sup>29</sup>. The reader is led to the conclusion that the disappointments of Okçuzade's later career were due primarily to the enmity of this powerful family.

25 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 4b, concerning his *nişancılık* 1622-23; several manuscript copies exist of a *kanunname* based on that compiled by Okçuzade for *şeyhülislam* Yahya (eg. Istanbul, Millet Library, AE. Trh. 96, and 100).

26 The dates given in İ. H. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (Istanbul 1971), V, 'Nişancılar', 327-28, are suspect in the light of Ata'i's information.

27 Danişmend, *Kronoloji* V, 27.

28 Hoca Sadeddinzade Mehmed (d. 1024/1615); cf. Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke* I, 372.

29 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 5a.

After three years spent without significant employment, Okçuzade was next sent to Egypt as *defterdar* in 1013/January 1605 - a step which was neither unusual nor demeaning for a former *nişancı*, and one which could have led to permanent promotion outside the central chancery. Okçuzade's account is reticent about his time in Egypt, stressing merely that it was dominated by increasing poverty; either he did not consider it a very prestigious move, or the appointment was not germane to his autobiographical theme of unfulfilled career potential. On the reorganization of the Egyptian treasury in 1016/April 1608, his post and his revenue as a *salyane beği* were both lost, obliging him to return to İstanbul in penury. The text suggests that during this period Okçuzade was so despondent that he made the pilgrimage to Mecca in the hope that it would bring about an improvement in his fortune. As other sources fail to mention this, and he is nowhere called *hacı*, it may be that this journey was made in spirit rather than in fact<sup>31</sup>. Returning from Egypt at the height of the Celali revolts and at the beginning of the second *meşihat* of Hoçazade Mehmed, Okçuzade spent several years in a professional wilderness oppressed by a sense of disorder and corruption<sup>32</sup>.

With one short but significant break, Sadeddin's sons monopolized the office of *şeyhülislam* for 17 years, from 1608 to 1625. As a partisan of the wrong faction, Okçuzade's chances of preferment were slight. Unsuccessful in a bid for the post of *reisülküttab*, he grudgingly accepted, some time around 1620, an offer of the now 'demeaning' post of *defter emini*, which he took to be a calculated insult. It was no doubt a combination of financial difficulty and the

30 On the office of *Mısır defterdarı* and the *salyane beğleri* in Egypt, see Stanford J. Shaw, *The financial and administrative organization and development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798* (Princeton 1962), 184-88, 338-40. For Mustafa Ali's views, see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and intellectual*, 113-14; and Andreas Tietze, *Mustafa Ali's Description of Cairo of 1599* (Vienna 1975), 57.

31 A closer study of the letters in his *münşeât* (perhaps to the Şerif of Mecca?) may, however, disprove this. Alternatively, his 'journey' may have been an intellectual foray, resulting in his *hadis* compilation.

32 Danişmend, *Kronoloji V*, 329, has Okçuzade serving as *nişancı* for some 10 months in 1022/1613-14. Neither Ata'i nor Okçuzade himself mention this appointment; however, if Ata'i is not in error in attributing to Okçuzade five periods as *nişancı*, then this brief tenure must presumably be counted.

desire to re-enter the professional arena which induced his acceptance. A general burst of activity in advance of Osman II's Polish campaign of 1621 led to his brief reinstatement as *nişancı* - 'the post in which I proved myself twenty years previously'<sup>33</sup> - to upheaval and expense in preparation for the march, and in 'unwarranted' dismissal (again attributed to factionalism) after only three months service.

Okçuzade's final professional appointment coincided exactly with the significant break in tenure of the office of *şeyhülislam*. The deposition and death of Osman II brought down temporarily the latter's father-in-law Hocaşade Esad, and some of his followers. Throughout the second sultanate of Mustafa I (May 1622 - September 1623) Okçuzade occupied the post of *nişancı* in the wake of his long-standing friend and patron Yahya succeeding to that of *şeyhülislam*. Although he survived in office long enough to compose an official *cülusname* announcing the accession of Murad IV<sup>34</sup>, Okçuzade was again dismissed shortly after Hocaşade Esad's re-appointment in October 1623. His remaining years were spent in retirement.

For a man of acknowledged epistolary skills, the office of *nişancı* was the official position which ought to have offered greatest scope for exercise of this talent. However, Okçuzade's feelings towards it vacillated between spirited defence of 'the apogee of a skilled profession' against the interference of Sadeddin, and despair at the 'crushing fatigue and complete lack of profit' which it offered<sup>35</sup>. In what were effectively three terms as *nişancı* in the 24 years from 1599 to 1623, he served at most a total of four years in the post. Turnover in the three top chancery posts - *nişancı*, *reisülküttab* and *defter emini* - was brisk. Twenty appointments had been made to the *nişancılık* in the 42 years since the end of Celalzade's atypical 23-year term in 1557, and Okçuzade's own appointment in 1599. Average tenure was about two years, but in some instances considerably less<sup>36</sup>. How far this was a ques-

33 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 4a. Başbakanlık Arşivi, Kamil Kepeci tasnifi 257, 86: appointment dated 4 Cemaziyülahir 1030/26 April 1621.

34 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 43b-44a.

35 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 4a.

36 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 2a, for Okçuzade being resigned to short tenure.

tion of satisfying the career aspirations of as many senior scribes as possible, and how far it was a result of wider political pressures is uncertain. In Okçuzade's case, the latter seems a clear determinant, for his periods in and out of office between 1596 and 1601 bear a suspiciously close correspondence to those of İbrahim Paşa as grand vezir<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, appointment in later years coincided for the most part with brief periods when the 'Hasan Canzadeler' were in disfavour. Okçuzade's antipathy to Sadeddin's successors was thus not an objection to the factional system itself, but to its lengthy dominance by a group to which he became increasingly hostile. He accepted as natural the 'well-merited' patronage of İbrahim Paşa or *şeyhülislam* Yahya which worked in his favour.

The three *nişancı*s in office between 1604 and 1621 served reasonably secure appointments of nine, four, and three-and-a-half years respectively. Such relatively stable tenure (whilst that of other offices such as grand vezir and *baş defterdar* remained chaotic by comparison)<sup>38</sup> may be accounted for in part by the influence of the Hasan Canzadeler. Okçuzade's 'deliberate' exclusion from chancery office during this period may suggest that the *nişancılık* was then virtually in the gift of the head of the learned hierarchy; his immediate re-appointment during the *meşihat* of Yahya (1622-23) supports this notion. If so, this points also to the declining prestige of the *nişancılık*.

This loss of prestige is not necessarily to be equated with a decline in the competence or commitment of individuals. Indeed, Okçuzade and his *nişancı* contemporaries Hamza Paşa and Hükmi Hasan each sought with some degree of success to maintain a high level of competence during the period c. 1600-25<sup>39</sup>. Recommending in his autobiography a form of entrance examination to test the

37 Danişmend, *Kronoloji* V, 25-27. Cf. also Mustafa Selaniki, *Ta'rih*, Topkapı Sarayı, Bağdat 202, 176b, 179b for Okçuzade's demotion to *defter emini* in 1597 and his links with İbrahim Paşa.

38 Cf. Danişmend, *Kronoloji* V, for all these posts.

39 M. T. Gökbilgin, 'Nişancı', *İA* 9, 301; for Hamza Çelebi/Paşa, *nişancı* 1581, 1592-96, 1598-99, and 1601-4, see Danişmend, *Kronoloji* V, 324-28; for Hükmi Hasan, see Danişmend, *Kronoloji* V, 329, and Resmi, *Halifetü'r-rü'esâ*, 28.

grammatical and literary knowledge of the aspiring *katib*, Okçuzade showed a clear concern for the maintenance of high scribal standards at all levels<sup>40</sup>. The chief problem was one not of ability but of authority. Although in *kanunname* ceremonial terms, the *nişancı* retained his dignity and privileges into the 18th century, in practical terms, by 1600 his position was being undermined by insecure tenure and his prestige usurped by the rising influence of the *de facto* head of the chancery, the *reisülküttab*. The official priorities of the *reis* were historically of a more routine managerial nature than those of the *nişancı*. As the central chancery became larger and more complex, increased attention would have had to be paid to mere control and efficiency; this in turn raised the standing of the *reis*, and tended towards the greater isolation of the *nişancı* as figurehead. The altered significance between the two posts may be seen in the career of Hükmi Hasan, who was appointed *reis* in 1614, *nişancı* in 1618, and thereafter on two(?) occasions *reis*; and in Okçuzade's willingness to seek the post of *reis* in the late 1610s. Such 'demotion' would have been unthinkable for most 16th century *nişancı*s.

An equally significant element in the declining prestige of the *nişancı* appears to be that of the lesser demands upon him of chancery *inşa*. By 1600, his predecessors' very success in building up a large body of stylistic exemplars had left the official *münşi* a much reduced scope for originality. In epistolography as in other purely literary genres, it was not the competent follower but the creative developer who earned repute. Thus, once the principal elements of chancery *inşa* had been established, there was less opportunity to make a name as a stylist in this sphere. Moreover, an enlarged chancery with more than a century of scribal tradition behind it, and with a number of experienced senior *küttab* in its ranks, had acquired a corporate momentum which disguised the contributions of individuals and made it less important for the *nişancı* himself to be unusually skilled in *inşa*. After Okçuzade's final period of office, few *nişancı*s were appointed for their stylistic, or indeed for their scribal competence. Thus, while not underestimating the importance of changes in the legal and other aspects

40 *Münşe'atü 'l-inşā*, 5a, 5b.

of the *nişancı's* role, it appears significant that the influence and prestige of the *nişancılık* stood highest in the late 15th and early 16th centuries during the development of an imperial chancery idiom to match the state's rising self-esteem, and stood much lower in the early 17th century once the empire's style and confidence were fully established, and the pressure to develop (as distinct from maintain) an appropriate style was lessened.

The distinction made here between public and private *inşa* is based upon the purpose for which a letter was written, whether it was an official document produced in the service of central government, or whether it was a personal communication between acquaintances; and upon whether it voiced state or individual concerns. It is not a distinction between the *münşiyan* themselves. Indeed, it would be erroneous to compare chancery *inşa* as the product of a bureaucratic training and outlook with private *inşa* as the product of an *ilmiye* background, for both drew upon the same initial *medrese* education. Many 15th-century *nişancıs*, including Cafer Çelebi, were recruited directly from senior teaching posts, and for most of the 16th century, those who rose to senior chancery posts were *medrese* graduates at least; such training was virtually a *sine qua non* for promotion to *nişancı*, the *müfti* of *kanun*. Thus public *inşa* was based as much on an *ilmiye* background as was private epistolography. Okçuzade - with a *medrese* education, a long chancery career, and later comparability as a stylist with *ulema* writers - typifies this link.

Assuming that the demands of state focussed attention on chancery *inşa* in the earlier period, the question remains of how and why the quieter tradition of private letters of Mesîhi and others attained greater prominence in the early 17th century. Okçuzade's success as an *inşa* stylist was the outcome not merely of difficult professional circumstances, but also of new developments in literary taste. However, with the principal exception of Nergisi's letters, few of the later *münşeât* collections have been recently published or studied. The following remarks on the nature of the genre, and of the reasons why it was so much appreciated, will therefore need to be tested against the findings of future research.

The Ottoman love of literature as a form of art and as a contribution to knowledge is here a basic assumption. Similarly taken for granted is the function of literary style as an expression of cultural values, particularly in the case of rhetorical prose. Recognition of this is fundamental to proper appreciation of a literary work. Regrettably, however, few Ottoman texts - including those in the major genre of historiography - have been analysed in a manner likely to elaborate upon these basic truisms. *Münşeat mecmuaları*, which by definition contain the best stylistic examples - ie. the most expressive of certain aesthetic ideals - ought to provide much information on this topic<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, high amongst the practical uses of a *mecmua*, as of any literary composition, was its ability to demonstrate the author's cultural awareness, his identity with the 'Ottoman way', his learning and intelligence - and, by extension, his suitability for official employment. Okçuzade's letters when originally written, and the later *mecmua*, would have been composed with one eye on literary merit and the other firmly on the possibility of furthering his career. The autobiographical introduction was not intended simply as gratuitous information, but as a reminder of his achievements and a plea for compensation for perceived injustice. Whilst the rhetoric of Ottoman letters is not openly persuasive, its cumulative effect must have served the same end.

Research in Ottoman literary history has tended to give priority in virtually all periods to the study of divan poetry. This reflects the importance attached by the Ottomans themselves to an easily memorized and readily quotable genre which, within its relatively limited structural and conceptual parameters, appeared particularly coherent, accessible and permanent, and which could be seen to perpetuate a distinct pre-Ottoman Islamic cultural tradition. This is nowhere clearer than in the extensive *tezkere-i şuara* biographical literature which directed and simplified the work of von Hammer and Gibb, and thus set the course for later research. However, the Ottomans attached considerable importance also to the

41 Cf. Walsh, 'The Esālibü 'l-mekātib of Meḥmed Nergisî Efendi', 213, for the 'fallacy in neglecting one of the most specific and characteristic of the cultural activities of Ottoman civilization'.

development of a literary prose style, for use particularly in historiography. It is assumed that the composite 'Ottoman' as opposed to the simpler Turkish idiom was much influenced by the practices of chancery *inşa*, and that by c. 1600 an appropriate literary language had been fashioned, sometimes said to be symbolized by the style of Hoca Sadeddin's *Tacü't-tevarih*<sup>42</sup>. That there was a close connection between prose and verse composition is indicated by the many instances of authors who wrote as naturally in one as in the other, and in the ease with which in an ostensibly prose work, an author would glide effortlessly into and out of verse as an inherent part of the rhymed prose of the *inşa* style. However, it is perhaps in the use of the term *inşa* in its original meaning of epistolography rather than in its extended usage of literary rhetorical prose that this relationship between Ottoman prose and verse may best be explored. The phrase *nazm-u-inşada kamil*, sometimes found in 16th century *tezkere* literature implying competence in verse and in the epistolographic style, occurs much more frequently for the 17th and later centuries - suggesting an especially close relationship between these two forms of artistic composition, and, by analogy with the poet's *divan*, one reason for the popularity of the stylist's *mecmua*.

The literary *mektub* of the early 17th century has a number of outward similarities with the Ottoman *gazel*, and in some respects may be regarded as its prose equivalent. Ottoman appreciation of the *mektub* as a literary form may have owed much to this relationship. Both *mektub* and *gazel* are short - the *gazel* 14 or 15 couplets at most, the *mektub* a mere 40 - 50 manuscript lines, on average; neither is thus of a length to weary the recipient, but yet is sufficient to impart a clear message. Each is self-contained, and deals with a single theme; each is therefore a controlled exercise in refined expression. The lyric *gazel* conveys emotion, atmosphere, a philosophy of life; the *mektub* deals in courtesies, feelings and private circumstances. Both dwell largely on personal discomfort or inadequacy. In as far as a letter may be occasioned more overtly

<sup>42</sup> This assumption needs to be tested against the fact that the major 17th century prose stylists (from Sadeddin onwards) were, as indicated above, members of the *ulema*; Okçuzade with his scribal training was atypical.

by a specific event - congratulations on appointment to high office, condolences on the death of a relative - the purpose of a *mektub* may correspond more closely with that of a *kaside* than a *gazel*. However, since the *mektub* does not necessarily contain the *kaside*'s 'praise poem' overtones, nor is it always sent from petitioner to patron, it is perhaps with the *gazel* that the literary *mektub* may best be compared.

Obvious contrasts between the two forms lay in their methods of appeal and of appreciation. The divan poet sought to use the many associations and nuances of a rather limited set of vocabulary to create a pyramid of images supporting the central theme in any one *gazel* - be this love, longing, power, or the season of the year<sup>43</sup>. In contrast, the *münşi* sought to use as wide a lexical range for his central theme as his inventiveness and his dictionaries afforded. For Okçuzade, the *ilmü'l-inşa* was 'one of the 12 noble branches of knowledge, of recognized antiquity', and was to be preferred above poetry on the grounds of the greater skill required<sup>44</sup>. His test of the ability of the genuine stylist (*hakiki münşi*) was the composition of ten letters on the same theme, on the understanding that the *fikrat* of one may not be repeated in another; only if he produced ten original versions of equal elegance, fluency and intelligibility, may the writer be judged a true *münşi*<sup>45</sup>. Between poet and stylist there is, then, a marked contrast in the use of linguistic resources; each sought to improve upon the expression of a central idea - but the poet by reworking a limited vocabulary, and the stylist by, apparently, ranging as widely as possible through the lexicon.

In terms of appreciation, the *gazel* was accessible both through the ear by recitation in social gatherings, and through the eye by the compilation of written divans. It needed to have both an orato-

43 For study of vocabulary used in divan poetry, see W.G. Andrews, *Poetry's voice, society's song: Ottoman lyric poetry* (Seattle 1983), *passim*.

44 Münşe'atü 'l-inşâ 5a, quoting Hvace-i Cihan. For Ottoman knowledge of the late 15th century Persian epistolographic treatise, *Menâzirü 'l-inşâ*, of Mahmud b. Şeyh Muhammed Gilani (Hvace-i Cihan), see Christopher Ferrard, 'The development of an Ottoman rhetoric up to 1882: Pt. II, Contributions from outside the *medrese*', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* IV (1984), 19-23.

45 Münşe'atü 'l-inşâ, 5b.

rical and an artistic appeal. The *mektub*, on the other hand, appears to have been purely a written form for individual consumption, either by the original recipient or by later readers of a *mecmua*. It did not require the initial impact of spoken verse, but as a purely literary form was able to develop period and cadence in an altogether different rhetorical manner. The implications of this more complex yet leisured style for an understanding of the mind of the educated Ottoman elite of the 17th century may be one of the more profitable aspects of study of the *münşeat* collections.

In short, *gazel* and *mektub* are both stylistic vignettes. The poet's *divan* and the stylist's *münşeat* was to each his 'collection of jewels'. The promotion and recognition of private epistolography in the 17th century may thus be seen as a prose counterpart to poetic practice. The *mektub* was, like the *gazel*, primarily a form of art, a display of virtuosity to be admired and savoured by the reader; only secondly was it a means of communication. This is not, however, to underestimate the original communicative function of the genuine (as opposed to the 'form') letters found in these collections, nor to ignore the information provided on the practical aspirations and the particular circumstances of their authors. For the early 17th century, the content of Okçuzade's letters and those of his five fellow contributors to *şeyhülislam* Yahya's compilation will provide an insight into the *ulema* network to complement the basic biographical details given by Ata'i and Şeyhi. A study of who wrote to whom, when, why and on what topics, is a line of enquiry which, quite apart from any literary considerations, will contribute to the understanding of cultural patronage and social values.