THE OTTOMAN ULEMA

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The term alim, which is widely used in Islamic world and means community-based scholars, is cited two times in Holy Koran and many times in varying forms in hadith. In early periods of Islam for scholars in hadis, fiqh, and hada fiel, the terms nafi, nabi, fakih, and nashshubn were used respectively instead of the term alim. Afterwards alim has gained the priority and a widespread usage.

Though alim is a plural word for alim (scholar) deriving from Arabic root ila (knowledge), the term has gained a special meaning and became a common name for that section of community who are considered to be intellectual and partly aristocratic. Ulama was perceived as the primary element among the constituents of the community in almost every period of the Ottomans, and thus put under various evaluations as a group arouses high expectations.

Ulama was applied as a common term for those scholars who completed their madras training and gained an ijaaz (graduation degree), and took responsibilities in law, education, primary religious services and occasionally in bureaucracy or devoted themselves personally to community services in the Ottoman policy. The ulama, protecting its traditions and privileges, had been an influential group upon every section of the community due to its status emanating from its legal and religious formation.

The Ulama has increasingly gained and consolidated its power until XVII century, then entered into a period of decadence due to reasons most of which were external developments, and found itself within the harsh milieu of daily policies. In this period starting with Ahmet I and continuing with successive reigns of children sultans, power has been transferred into the hands of military commanders, influential palace circles including Mother Küçüksultan, and naturally to the ulama. Each group tried to get the support of the ulama in order to strengthen its own power and influence. Political focus (religious decrees) and the internal division of the ulama across various political factions, on the one hand, prevented it from scholarly works, and on the other hand, deteriorated its status within political fights.

Mobilized by the advices coming from intellectuals who have observed rapid deterioration of the alima due to this environment, official organizations spent great energy in order to reform and improve the ulama professions. In the XVII century starting with reform attempts, the ulama has been a supporter for reform initiatives and even a reform pioneer, assuming heavy responsibilities in the restructuring of the state. Furthermore, Grand viziers such as Damad Ali Pasha, Nureddin İbrahim Pasha and Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha, practiced the ulama and tried to improve its conditions this century. However, starting by the XIX century the ulama has undergone a big loss in its material-spiritual influence and power as a result of partial transfer of first education, then legal responsibilities of alima to other groups, as well as by the establishment of the Ministry of Imperial Foundations (Erkân-ı Hümayun Nezaret) which delegated foundation administration and income from the alima to the treasury.

The Ottoman state which emerged on the historical scene as a border principality was a heir to the previous Turkish-Islamic tradition in the fields of iha and education similar to many other fields. Though it is hard to show the elements of the imminent influence co-
Reciprocal voyages for academic purposes was one of the more important elements in enriching and vitalizing ʿibād life during the formative period. There is a strong and well established tradition of such voyages for learning and teaching in the Islamic world. In hadīth collections this practice has been promoted. In the middle ages when Islamic renaissance was taking place it is observed that madrasah teachers and students visited all great ʿibād centres periodically, and an high degree of mobility was created under very difficult transportation conditions, challenging formidable transportation possibilities. Students reaching a certain level in their training during the Ottoman Principality were guided by their teachers to visit famous ʿibād centres such as Cairo, Semerkent, Buhara, Merv, Samarkand, Bukhara and Damascus in order to complete their education, returning back as a mature ʿālim in the fields of Islamic religious, culture and civilization a couple of years later. Through previous student voyages and visits of guest teachers from other centres it was possible to gain a knowledge about relative superiory in different fields and ʿibād circles of each centre, which was used to advise students preparing for each new academic voyage. Ottoman teachers’ invitation of and good treatment towards ʿālim contributed to ʿibād life by attracting guest scholars from other Anatolian principalities and famous centres. Among those visiting scholars there were some remaining as permanent residents, and others who settled for a short or long-term. That quality can be clearly observed by epithets like Arabī, Acmī, ʿOttāmī, Semerkandi used for the ʿālim in the formative period of the Ottoman madrasah.

Murāj ʿibād has a particular importance in that respect. This period was somewhat a cultural preparation for the great conquest witnessing the establishment of the institution of Şifāʾīna in ʿibād and appointment of Murāj Fessari to this post (1425), foundation of madrasah in Edirne, Bursa and other big cities parallel to the developments of scholarly and ʿibād movements. Many scholars came to the Ottoman polity at that period. Those scholars trained by great masters like Sadekīn Tafta- zani (d. 791/1389) and Seyyid ʿEbrāhīm Cāranci (d. 816/1413) transferred scholarly, intellectual and philosophical debates to the Ottoman lands and initiated a clear progress. Such academic voyages decreased after the conquest of Istanbul and became rare by the XVI century. Though it would be hard to pass a final judgement without a comprehensive research, this development has been one of the main factors behind the inertia in the Ottoman ʿibād life.

Faith period is not only a turning point in terms of organization but also in terms of perspective or approach. In the famous law regarding organization and protocol (tibābī or ʿifālāt kanūnāmā) there were provisions about ʿālim for the first time. In addition, a clear-cut differentiation was made between ʿālim, ʿifāf and ʿalimayn occupations, with some preferences with regard to origins, educational backgrounds and formations of the youth that would serve in those fields.

Faith’s personality, attitude and reign has a crucial importance in terms of ʿibād life like many other domains. It is known that Fath had learnt Arabic and Persian as well as some Balkan languages to some degree when he lived in the liberal atmosphere of Manisa palace location. His relationships with his teachers, his debates with them and his humble respect for Molla Girmi, gave a moral relationship between a student and his teacher. Fathi had a great interest in religious-philosophical debates and initiated discussions among scholars concerning such subjects. The best example for this is a lengthy debate between two group of scholars on ʿibās of Gazi and Ibn Rūj on his demand, and writing of a third ʿibās, as a result, demonstrating that Gazi’s ideals were more coherent. 26 It is known that in the same period there were similar developments in madrasahs which included philosophical courses in their curricula, though such courses gradually disappeared. That gave rise to a deterioration in the intellectual climate of the madrasah and criticized by Kārişī ʿErebī. In Fath period there was not only a development quality-wise but also in quantity-wise, opening ʿālim and culture institutions being a fashion in that period.

Bayezid II gathered a group of ʿālim and poets around him even when he was a prince in Amasya and later that elite group came to Istanbul with Bayezid II. Bayezid II expressed his respect for ʿibād in concrete actions by building Amasya, Edirne and finally Istanbul Bayezid
complexes. After Selim I's short period witnessing many conquests the Ottoman life reached its apex particularly in terms of organization and physical facilities in Kaanuni period.¹³

Privileges provided for the șeâna: The șeâna as a part of military (administrative) class was rewarded by providing broad privileges. These privileges can be classified into two categories as special treatment in taxes and plunderings, and privileges given to their children. Although there was some tax exemptions for all military class those of the șeâna was defined in a broader way. On the other hand, the "ahli-i êer" section of military class could be inflicted to any punishment including capital punishment, the șeâna, who were described as "ahli-i êer," confronted firing or exile as the most heavy punishments.²² Though there were three yahbišlamis (Abi-zade Hüseyn Efendi (d. 1634), Hüseyn Mevâr' Efendi (d. 1656), and Seyyid Firsâvî Efendi (d. 1654)), in the XVII century and some judges being inflicted a capital punishment, those are individual events. On the other hand, rights and privileges provided fine to the Molla Feni family by "mañâlid and kawam" during the reign of Murat II, extended to other șeâna families and even șeâna children in later periods had eventually harmed rather than benefited the șeâna. In addition to such privileges in practice may be the most important thing was the high esteem of this group in the eyes of the community. Alot of such privileges provided for șeâna by scholars shall be touched upon later.

țeâna families: Due to the great importance given to șeâna and șeâna in Islamic religion and community, inheritance of țeâna occupation from father to sons and grandsons became customary and gave rise to emergence of well-established families. There are numerous examples for this both in Muslim-Arab states like Emirvans, Abhaisallar and Farsimel and in Muslim-Turk states like Karabasli, Persians and Anatolian Seljukus and principalities. With the special privileges provided by the Ottomans such families developed a distinct identity and through inter-marriages created an țeâna network and an aristocratic class. The first privilege provided for șeâna families started by Murat I's granting certain rights to the descendants of Mulla Feni (d.1431). According to that privilege Molla Feni's sons and grandsons were to be appointed to the position of instructor with an initial salary amounting forty âlde.²⁴ Later those privileges were extended and granted to other șeâna families.

In an overall evaluation one may argue that there are advantages and disadvantages of the transfer of the posts from father to son and of the formation of families. Positive aspects are: raising the child in the șeâna atmosphere, his acquisition of knowledge on many subjects conveniently from his father and father's friends, and particularly his access to books and libraries in an age in which it was difficult to own such means due to material-social reasons. However, providing privileges on the basis of being a progeny to șeâna does not have any justification. Normally a son selecting his father's occupation with all its natural advantages should have reached to a higher level in the field, whereas with all those privileges and rights giving them an opportunity to promote without this effort, this practice gave rise to a rapid deterioration and internal corruption. Around twenty șeâna families who rise to their most powerful status in different periods could easily on the decision of Union and Progress Party (İzburâ ve Terâkkî Cemiyeti).

Decay in the șeâna and reform efforts: From its formation up until the times of Kamâni șeâna occupation has progressed on a continuous way and a system peculiar to the Ottoman state has emerged; developing degrees for madders in time and degrees for Kadi organizations of Rumeli, Anadolia and Muzur, as well as procedures in subjects like rules of transfer from one to the other. However, all those developments also brought some unbearable weaknesses.

Historians are in agreement that the decay in the Ottomans institutions and basic order started by the second half of the XVI century. That negative process was immediately observed and, on the one hand, through state ordinances this decay was pointed out in a police way, urging for a return back to the established traditions. On the other hand writers, intellectuals and historians of the times touched upon this negative developments in a harsh and open manner, stating their anxiety for the posterity. Actually one may relate those two channels of early warnings and accept them as a contemporary observation of the situation, because the justifications stated in the ordinances were derived from observations and complaints coming from different sources, turning their advice into orders. After presenting common observations of the writers, it shall be possible to point out where they agree and where they differ regarding relevant issue.

Lifikasi Pasha in his Afsaâname, which is one of the earliest reports on the Ottoman bureaucracy, gives relatively little reference to șeâna and uses some negative statements about their activities.²⁸ Taşkoprulüezâde Ahmed Efendi (d.1561), who came from among șeâna ranks and served to this vocation by his books, states in pain as early as by the 1540s that the old interest for theology and mathematic branches has disappeared among madâres șeâna and a scholarly level has decreased, as evident in the assumption among the șeâna that they have been mature enough by reading simple hand-books without going through basic theoretical books.²⁹

The strongest criticism raised against the șeâna in the second half of the XVI century came from Gelibolu Mustafa Ali. Ali made an overall evaluation about and raised his criticisms against țeâna vocation in his history Kânedin'î'âlî and in his books about bureaucracy Nafla'î'âlî and Nezâerî'âlî. Ali argues that șeâna transformed into a civilisic group from being a vital part of the state and the society, how they left many beneficial meetings due to this change, that they were very unsuccessful in writing original books, that there was no scholar producing an important piece of work with the exception of Ebussud Efendi, how widespread patron-client relationships was among the șeâna, that kawams turned towards corruption in the application of maddâmes procedure, that madders and kadi posts were being purchased, and particularly the harmful effects of the rights and privileges given to the șeâna. He states that regular courses were not performed, that many teachers were paid but did not teach, and that when teachers intended to teach they did not find students to teach.³¹

In the same years Mustafa Selimci (d. approx. 1600), after referring to the key role of the șeâna within the community, urges that this group representing religion and law should not go away from truth and integ...
Karpı Celebi, while examining "ilm-i 'ilm-i İmam" subject in his book Kığı'ri-zânest, touches upon this problem and criticizes elimination of wisdom and philosophy courses.

Publications of the ulama: The Ottoman ulama has been accused particularly by today's intellectuals for not writing basic and scientific publications. If we consider a huge geographical homeland extending from Algeria to Crete and from Bursa to Bursa within a very long duration of six centuries, that criticism might look like justified to some extent. However, two points need to be stressed at that junction. First, the Ottoman state originated as a state geared towards conquest and gaza, preserving this character throughout six centuries. In that context, it would not be a mistake to call the Ottoman state as an expedition lasting for six centuries. That was a uniform expedition effort first directed to the struggle against Byzantium, continued with the conquests in Europe and struggles to disseminate Islam in Europe, and finally culminating in the struggle to maintain the lands conquered. The ulama was next to the Sultan and pioneer warriors, to mobilize them, and to explain the sacredness of this struggle to the military and to the general public. In a sense, the ulama provided the ground for this struggle. That was what the ulama was expected to do. Therefore, time consuming scientific studies remained secondary and required personal devotion and curiosity. That is in fact the historical reality. Secondly, there is not yet a scientific examination regarding publications of the Ottoman İmam-i Hayrī group. The publications are on library shelves waiting for researchers who are serious and open-minded. In order to reach a final judgment about the issue one has to wait the findings of such systematic studies.

After pointing out those two points, if the publications at hand might be classified and evaluated, it is observed that there are many scholars in the field of religion who published books on the curricula of ma'mūd or written explanations for such books, and there are also plenty of scholars who produced high quality original publications in the fields of iftihir, hadis, fiqh, etc. One of the most favorite fields of the Ottoman İmam-i Hayrî class during different ages was hagiography. There are high quality publications in almost all aspects of hagiography like history of Sultan and imperial family, city history, expedition history, etc. The profession of Chronologists, which was instituted in the XVIII century and lasted till the end of the empire, was filled mostly by people from İmam-i Hayrî.

There was a strong relationship between the ulama and poets in the Ottoman. Many ulama members were also average or high ranking poets, having dozens. A significant number of them adorned İmam-i Hayrî membership not because of their scholarly power but because of their mastery in poetry. Remi Kadıömer: Şair Baki is a typical example for that.

In the publications in the field of the history of the Ottoman organization ulama has been depicted as a motivating force and pioneers of the community, enjoying wide opportunities. The ulama members employed by the state were able to visit many parts of the country and get acquainted with the conditions of the people thanks to the müsāfet (rotation) system. Therefore, they were expected to write realistic letters and reports to the responsible persons including the sultan about the people of the region, their needs and problems, and respective ways of solving those problems. These reports were also primary sources of contemporaneous historians.
East Ersfeld were who prominent personalities spent a lot of their efforts in order to legitimize and prove the necessity of Mahmut II's reforms, to form a favorable public opinion, are some significant concrete examples.13

XVIII-XX centuries: Reform studies in the Islamic sciences continued in the centuries with a different approach. There were different imperial orders to the responsible people regarding the implementation of the reforms during the reign of Ahmed III and Mahmut I in the early XVIII century. Those were covering the classical topics which were common in the XVI-XVII centuries. Selim III gave importance and priority to Islamic reform in his comprehensive reform efforts toward the end of the century. In his imperial decrees to Kazakzer Hamidzade and later to Seyyid Hamidzade Mehemir Efendi were references to there being substantial in the judicial system and required measures.14 All such efforts and viewpoints seems to be a continuation of the classical understanding.

However, it is observed that starting with Mahmut II there was a different approach to the slavery class and its effects. Put in a clear way, that was a period in which the slavery class was being marginalized and lose its privileges and widespread influence of field step by step. The strongest attack in that period was the establishment of Esref Tevfik Naci Nasef's (the Ministry of Fundamental) in 1826, which transformed all foundations influences previously to a large extent by the slavery to the treasury via the ministry. That change gave a great damage toث slavery and religious services managed by foundation incomes.15

That was a period in which madrasahs were left without their financial means, no serious reform was initiated to renovate and develop madrasahs, leaving madrasahs on the ir own, and envisaging alternative education institutions of a Western style. That attitude and approach continued in the same direction with some minor modifications during Abdülloc, Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid II's reigns after Mahmut II. Particularly, Abdülhamid II did not enter into a serious effort regarding modern and slavery despite his great efforts to develop education in the Ottoman land.

However, both Mahmut II and Abdülhamid II made use of slavery members to a great extent, especially of the outstanding slavery, in creating a favorable public opinion and in gaining support for the community for the implementation of their reforms. Though there were great efforts in the early XX century under the leadership of Seyyid Hamidzade Mehemir Efendi to reform the madrasah system, those efforts did not produce any results due to calamities of the First World War and the fall of the Empire afterwards.

All in the Ottoman slavery, who were described above with their main characteristics, had been a basic element of the state and the society, presenting progressive visions particularly during the formative and developing phases, despite all its deficiencies, creating a dynamism in society. That feature of the slavery had been reported in the publications of Western voyagers and voyagers clearly and in comparison to their own societies. The slavery under investigation in that paper, and in others at different levels as well, is the centre slavery, who had usually an education in Istanbul madrasah and taken official responsibilities in different regions of the state. Though this section is the major part there were, on the one hand, slavery getting their education from famous and well established madrasahs in the Arabic provinces of Egypt, Galata, Damascus, Tunisia, and Algeria, representing different traditions which remained out of the system in the Ottoman state; on the other hand, there were slavery in Salavi, Quit, Morocco, Uzbek and Bihir which were outside the Ottoman homeland but retained close ties to it. It is known that those slavery visited the Ottoman homeland with diplomatic missions and from time to time participated in the scholarly debates. Those slavery schools of different backgrounds within the Ottoman world need a separate investigation.
The Great
Ottoman-Turkish
Civilisation
The Great
Ottoman - Turkish Civilisation

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PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE AND INSTITUTIONS

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YENİ TÜRKİYE
The incredible fact that the Ottoman frontier beylik became an Empire over such a short period of time has attracted many Western researchers and scholars to delve into the history of the Ottoman State. It could be argued that there are miscellaneous determinants and dimensions that actually created the possibility for such an incredible feat to be accomplished. This volume has been edited with the aim of focusing on the main factors that gave rise to such a great civilisation. In the first place, the institutional character of the Ottoman State is of utmost importance. In order to understand the basis of Ottoman civilisation, the different patterns of its institutions should be studied, as the comprehensive analysis of the institutional structure of the Ottoman Empire might enable us to conceive how a small beylik was able to turn into one of the greatest Empires in the world. In this volume, the administrative, judiciary and military institutions of the Empire are set out as the main subject titles. In addition, there are various subjects which have been analysed, under such subroutines as bureaucracy, religion and law, shedding light on the main characteristics of Ottoman institutions.

In appreciation of the highly developed institutional structure of the Ottoman Empire, the ideational and philosophical sources cannot be underrated. Unless these sources are taken into consideration, it is impossible to grasp the various dynamics of Ottoman institutions. Therefore, this volume is entitled “Philosophy, Science and Institutions”, due to the close correlation and importance of these subjects to one another.

Contrary to conventional Euro-centric and Orientalist assumptions, which hold “science” as the peculiar praxis of the Renaissance and Enlightenment in
the West, in this volume it is generally argued that the Ottomans had a number of successes in scientific activities (ilm ü fen). The Ottoman State not only promoted the development of science within the borders of the Empire, but also facilitated several interactions with scientific activities outside of its territories. During this interaction, it both benefited from and contributed to the scientific improvements made in Europe.

Additionally, this volume dedicates an important place to the development of philosophy and thought in the Ottoman Empire; although in the Ottoman Empire such major philosophical écoles as developed in Europe were not formed, rather the Ottomans focused mainly on Islamic philosophy. Yet this situation does not arise from the fact that the Ottomans lagged behind in speculative matters. On the contrary, they were not interested in philosophical issues that were outside the realm of Islamic tradition. From their point of view, Islam encompassed all ontological and epistemological matters, making any other philosophical concern dysfunctional.

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