Some remarks on the textual history
of a famous late sixteenth-century world history:
the case of Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī's *Künhü 'l-aḫbār*

by Jan Schmidt

This paper intends to discuss some of the complications connected with the textual history of the *Künhü 'l-aḫbār* ('The Essence of Histories') of the Ottoman polyhistor Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī Efendi. They doubtlessly have a bearing on the problems encountered in the wider field of Ottoman and perhaps also Persian philology which is the subject of this symposium.

To Ottomanists I should hardly have to introduce the author and his famous, if not notorious, history, famous, but as yet unedited[1]. To sum up the most important facts: Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, the son of a merchant of Gallipoli, lived from 1541 to 1600, was a *ʿālim* by education, a bureaucrat by profession and a poet by vocation. He wrote some fifty works of prose and poetry — a sound bibliography is still lacking — of which the 'Essence of Histories' in four volumes, called 'pillars', is regarded as his magnum opus. It is, anyway, his most voluminous work, comprising 1,647 pages in the incomplete printed version published by the *Takvīmḫāne-i ʿāmire* in Istanbul in the last century[2] as well as some 500 to 600 large manuscript folios for the unprinted parts. The History roughly treats the development of the world from its creation until 1596. It also is the first full-fledged universal history in the grand 'classical' style that was written in ornate Ottoman-Turkish rhymed prose. The book has always been and still is regarded as one of the most important Ottoman histories, and, in particular, as an invaluable source for the period contemporary with the author.

Although the book, or rather books, have been much copied and used by historians, both Ottoman and modern, systematic research on the question of its role in Ottoman intellectual history, its sources and influence on later Ottoman historiographers has not been undertaken as yet. This last point is of course of particular importance for our study of the textual history. We know for example that Peçevī, a historian of the next generation, knew the work, wrote a marginal comment in a copy of the fourth pillar and used the work as a source[3]. His contemporary Kātib Çelebi, on the other hand does not seem to have used the work[4], but Naʿīma who lived in the late 17th, early 18th century mentioned it as a source for his history

and seems to have used a manuscript of the work copied by the calligrapher Çevrī Çelebī which was in the possesion of his informant Ḥüseyn Maʿanoğlı[5]. This is about all I could find in secondary literature. With regard to future study, I am also thinking in this respect of the frequent ownership markings in the individual manuscripts, and especially critical editions of later texts might be helpful on this point. I cannot go further into this matter here.

The subject I particularly wish to discuss now, is the textual history of the work itself from the moment Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī put his pen to the first sheet of paper until the 1860s when the work began to be printed.

What do we know, firstly, of the history of the text during the author's lifetime? This aspect has lately been touched upon by Cornell Fleischer in his dissertation of ʿĀlī which is largely dedicated to the author's biography. From data provided by the author himself in various parts of the *Künh* and some of his other works we arrive at the following picture: ʿĀlī began to write his History 'on a Friday' in the early winter of the year 1000 (1591/92) as Fleischer recapitulates ʿĀlī's own somewhat cliché́d explanation in the Introduction to the first 'pillar' of the work 'as a long wished for labour of love (the work, indeed, was never in the end dedicated to a patron as most of his others were)... to atone for his misdeeds, and as a...memorial to his name'[6]. ʿĀlī, as appears from commentaries scattered throughout the book, kept working on it 'in a piecemeal fashion'[7] and not in the logical (mainly chronological) order as we know it, up to the year 1007 (1598/99) when he left Istanbul for his last posting from which he was not to return, that of *emīr* and *emīn* (district-governor and 'trustee') of the harbour of Jidda. During the last two years of his life, ʿĀlī also wrote three other not too small prose works and we get the strong impression that the *Künh* was never finished in the end: in the text as we have it we notice a clear loosening of the chronological and structural framework at the end of the Ottoman volume in the part which deals with the contempory period — we miss for instance the biographical chapters of the reign of Sultan Murād III to which the author nevertheless

refers in the text as we have it — and chapters also in earlier volumes seem incomplete or only schematically executed (such as those which treat the later Abbasid Caliphs).

In an early stage of the writing, in 1002 (1593/94) 'Alī conceived the fourfold division of the work which he described in his general introduction to the first pillar: the first volume was to treat the history of the world from the creation until the time of the Prophet, the second the history of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, the third the history of the Turkish and Tatar dynasties and the fourth the history of the Ottomans[8]. This last volume finally comprised at least as many pages as the three preceding pillars. We also find this division in four (unequal) pillars in the printed version, but there it probably is a reconstruction by the editor based on the introduction just mentioned. None of the manuscripts I saw so far follow 'Alī's original plan: in all the respective manuscripts the first pillar is split into a (new) first and second pillar and the third pillar describes roughly speaking the Muslim (not only Turkish-Tatar) dynasties after the death of the Prophet including the Umayyads and Abbasids for which it exclusively had been reserved in the Introduction. This produces a more balanced division in size of the first three pillars. It is possible that 'Alī changed his mind on this point during the writing of his book, forgot or did not have time to adapt the Introduction afterwards but it could also be a later conception which resulted from the practical considerations of later copyists or binders (we have proof for a comparable intervention by a copyist to which I will return later). In order not to complicate matters, I will follow the division found in the manuscripts.

What do we know, secondly, about what we might call the material remains (or witnesses) of the text? They are many: about eighty-five manuscripts, none of them including the whole work, but individual pillars or combinations of them or parts of them, have survived in the libraries of Cairo, Istanbul and Europe, some of them regrettably not easily, if at all, accessible. The fourth pillar or parts of it occur most frequently. A practical complication is that the number of manuscripts, already large, will doubtlessly swell in proportion to the ongoing labours of cataloguing. Well known are the words of Franz Babinger in this respect who said he never contemplated a second edition of his famous *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig 1927) because inevitably in the end someone would find that 'in irgendeinem Kräwinkel gebe es noch eine in Privatbesitz befindliche Hand-schrift des *Künh-ül-achbâr*'[9]. This was of course a very rash and perhaps not really serious statement: no scholarly work will and, for that matter, should strive to be final.

In the following, I will base myself mainly on the manuscripts I have studied so far: three European codices of the fourth pillar, kept in Leiden, Berlin and Paris and in particular the sixty-two copies kept in the Dāru 'l-kutub in Cairo and in various libraries in Istanbul. Not all of these manuscripts have been de-scribed in catalogues. For the Cairo manuscripts we still have only the old catalogue of Ed-Dāġistānī of 1888/89 (one dated copy from among the five manu-scripts of the fourth pillar described there[10] seems to have disappeared since then, but we are so to speak compensated with five others I discovered in 1985). For Istanbul the situation is much better. In 1968 Atsız first published lists of the Istanbul manuscripts of 'Alī's works including a number of *Künh*s not described in earlier, often, unfortunately, untrustworthy and incomplete, catalogues[11]. I found, though, that Atsız had overlooked thirteen manuscripts of various pillars and combinations of them kept in the Istanbul Univer-sity Library.

What can we say about these manuscripts from a text-historical point of view?

Firstly: there does not seem to have survived an autograph or an authorized version of the work or parts of it. If we try to date the manuscripts, we find that only a limited number of manuscripts have a colophon with the date or the year in which the copy in question was completed: somewhat over a third, twenty-four, of our manuscripts have such a colophon (not always for the whole of the manuscript, though): seventeen date from the 17th century — the earliest explicitly dated manuscript, *Fatih* 4225, now kept in the Süleymaniye Library[12], was completed in October/November 1620, twenty years after the author's death — five date from the 18th and one from the 19th century, remarkably from the very year, 1860, in which the printed version began to be published by the *Takvīmhāne-i 'āmire* in Istanbul. Sometimes the manuscripts, in the case that they are not explicitly dated, offer other clues that may lead to a, sometimes only approximate, dating. These are: knowledge of the history of the individual manuscript from sources outside of the manuscript itself, watermarks in the paper, the identification of the copyists, owners, or patrons who commissioned the copying, datable marginal notes, calli-graphy and/or other art-historical aspects, or a combination of them. All of these possibilities occur in relation to our manuscripts. If we include the data obtained from these clues, we see that of the twenty-one manuscripts covering the first three 'pillars', two were produced in the first half of the 17th century, six in the second half, and thirteen in the 18th century. Of the forty manuscripts of the fourth 'pillar' or parts of it, three were produced in the first half of the 17th century, sixteen in the second half, thirteen in the 18th and two in the 19th century; six manuscripts could not be further dated. Following this method, the oldest existent copies appear to be three copies of the fourth pillar: the Leiden manuscript, Or. 288[13], the MS *Türkçe* 2377 kept in the University Library in Istan-bul[14] and the MS *Tārīḫ Turkī* 332 kept in Cairo[15], all

of which have anchor-type watermarks occurring in paper produced in Venice in 1609[16]. This still leaves us with a gap of at least ten years between the moment when the author put down his pen after having written his last 'additions' to the work and the year in which the oldest manuscript was copied.

A second characteristic which the *Künh* ·probably shares with many other later Ottoman texts is that nearly all manuscript copies offer a seemingly uncorrupted text in a clear handwriting. We get the impression that the text in all its subdivisions has really changed very little in the relatively short period between, say, 1609 (the earliest date found on the basis of watermarks) and 1860. Very few texts seem to offer serious corruptions which could have been the result of a long series of accumulated scribal errors, although omissions of parts of the text seem to have occurred more frequently. This is perhaps not surprising if we consider the linguistic and orthographical aspect of our work which it shared, again, with many other Ottoman texts. It was generally written in a highly artificial language, the orthography of which moreover would only leave room for variance in the very restricted Turkish parts of the sentences and verse. The purport and style of our text, moreover, would have left little room for personal improvisation and deliberate alteration as was often the case with western medieval texts written in the vernacular and for direct use, for instance the Bible[17].

The contrary seems to be the case here: very few manuscripts have any marginal or other notes which would point to personal use, nor for that matter do we find any traces of the copyist's personal intervention. (We have, though, a curious justificatory remark by an anonymous copyist, on the binding together in one volume of the (incomplete) second and third 'pillars' of the History in what is now MS *Hazine* 1358 of the Topkapı Sarayı Library[18], 'so that the two (pre-Ottoman) volumes were alike in size' (*iki cilduñ hacmları berāber olmak içün*, fol. 3b). The majority of our manuscripts seem to have been commissioned for the court in Istanbul, or personalities closely connected with it — as far as I can see now, of the thirty-nine manuscripts which were commissioned by or in the possession of private persons only twenty-one did not at one time or another become part of a dynastic *vakf* which might not have increased their accessibility or at least limited their possible mutation by readers. Especially after the middle of the 17th century the *Künh* seems to have become popular, but perhaps more as a collectors' item or present than as a work to read and study. In this respect we should notice that only one manuscript, *Tārīh Turkī Mustafā Fādil* 27[19] kept in Cairo, has a dozen magnificently executed miniatures but most manuscripts have precious paper which is set in gilt frames, are beautifully written and are decorated with elaborate frontispieces. Although three Istanbul manuscripts have rather simple pictures of the world

disc and globe both in the traditional and modern European fashion, these were on the other hand probably commissioned more for the sake of learning than to please the eye; remarkably only one of these manuscripts, MS *Revan* 1117, became part of a dynastic *vakf*. In general, nevertheless, it is difficult to arrive at conclusions as regards the book's function from the features of the manuscripts alone and many questions remain.

This situation of an incomplete chronology and a seemingly smooth transmission of the text makes it difficult to establish an immediate textual interdependance between any single pair of manuscripts and to identify or reconstruct a common ancestor or archetype for all of them. Careful study, however, has revealed basic differences which help to outline groups of manuscripts that belong to a particular tradition. From a global comparison between the contents of the Cairo and Istanbul manuscripts and a detailed inventory of contents based on the printed version, the Leiden, Berlin[21] and Paris[22] manuscripts, a restricted number of major variants, or rather: parts of the text that occur in one or more manuscripts while they do not appear in others, are found.

These 'variants' occur in the second, third and fourth pillars. As regards the second pillar: the University Library in Istanbul, MS *Türkçe* 5960, has a version of a part of the prophets' lives which is different from that found in the printed text and the other manuscripts I have seen[23], and only three Istanbul copies, one in the same University Library and two in the Topkapı Sarayı Library, have chapters on the Persian kings and the Ptolemaeans (*Batālise-i Yūnānī*)[24]. The style of these fragments is sober and they might have been later additions to the pillar by another author in order to complete the history. For the third pillar, we see that three out of seven manuscripts as well as the printed version, do not have two major chapters which describe the history of a number of Muslim dynasties ranging from the Samanids to the Rum Seljuks[25]. More important, that is, historiographically more original, variants occur in some copies of the fourth pillar. Four Istanbul manuscripts[26] have an additional chapter on the Egri-campaign of 1596 which ends with a eulogy directed to the presumed hero of the battle of Haçova, Grand-vezir Ciğalazāde Yūsuf Sinān Pāşā, in which ʿAlī also pleads no longer to be 'left in the desert' and to be given a post in the Divan. It is probable that this part of the book was suppressed by ʿAlī himself immediately after the man had been disgracefully dismissed forty days later[27]. A very remarkable and unique variant moreover occurs in the Leiden MS Or. 288 mentioned above, which constitutes the missing chapters of the introduction to the fourth pillar and which seems on internal evidence to be a very late fragment, undoubtely written by ʿAlī himself and perhaps lost in an early stage of the textual tradition, possibly because of an error of binding[28].

We have perhaps a comparable and last case in a variant occurring in the same pillar in the chapter on the 38th event of the reign of Sultan Murād III. Half of the Cairo and Istanbul manuscripts have a fragment of some five sentences which forms the logical narrative 'bridge' between the story on the return of Ḳapudan Ibrāhīm Pāşā from Libya and the circumstances surrounding the third appointment of Koca Sinān Pāşā to the grand-vezirate in 1593. The other manuscripts do not have this fragment but have a gap in the text, either represented as an open space of half a page or in a continuing text, which begins with an incomplete sentence of nine words which does not occur in the 'full' versions. This defective transition exactly coincides with the transition of the text in MS Türkçe 2377[29] of the Istanbul University Library between fols. 418 and 419 where two parts of different manuscripts were erroneously but probably deliberately bound together. This erroneous binding is perhaps the origin of the second 'defective' tradition. The full first part of this manuscript might have contained a fuller second but different 'bridge' in the text which has not survived in other manuscripts.

As said above, both the Leiden and the Istanbul manuscripts, the one a complete version, and the second a defective version probably belong to the oldest manuscripts in existence. From this we might perhaps conclude that the major branches growing from the textual stemma or rather: stemmas, as none of the manuscripts cover the whole work, had already begun to proliferate in the decade between 1599 and 1609 of which we unfortunately know nothing. Departing from the data outlined above, future, more detailed, research may result in a more complete arrangement of textual relations than I have so far bee able to manage and lay the foundation for the much desired critical edition of the book.

(Istanbul/The Hague, August-October 1986)

NOTES

[1] The most up-to-date biography of ʿAlī is contained in C.H. Fleicher's dissertation, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli Efendi, 1541-1600. A Study in Ottoman Historical Consciousness* (Princeton University 1982), chapters I-III. The History, up to the conquest of Constantinople, was printed in Istanbul (1861-1868) in the uncritical fashion of the day. The last chapters of the fourth pillar were translated (the poetical fragments were transcribed) into modern Turkish by Atsız in: *Âlî bibliyografyası (Istanbul 1968)*, 52-112.

[2] See above, note 1.

[3] Cf. Fleicher, *Âli*, 80, and especially 126, note 100.

[4] B. Kütükoğlu, *Kātib Çelebi 'Fezleke'sinin kaynakları* (Istanbul 1974), 18.

[5] L.V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima* (New York 1972), 112.

[6] Fleicher, *Âli*, 228.

[7] *Ibidem*, 339-340, note 24.

[8] *Künhü 'l-aḥbār* I, 13-17

[9] H.J. Kissling, Franz Babinger (1891-1967)', in: *Südost-forschungen* XXVI (1967), 375-379, 377.

[10] ʿAlī Ḥilmī ad-Dāġistānī, *Fihristu 'l-kutubi 't-turkiyyati 'l-mawǧūdati fi 'l-kutubḫānati l-hidīviyya* (Cairo 1306), 217-218.

[11] *Bibliyografya*, 24-28.

[12] Atsız, *Bibliyografya*, 24, no. 6.

[13] M.J. de Goeje and P. de Jong, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibliothecae Lugduno-Batavae*, III (Leiden 1865), p. 28, no. 580.

[14] The manuscript, which contains the second half of the fourth pillar, has not been described.

[15] The manuscript, which contains the second half of the fourth pillar, is not mentioned in ad-Dāġistānī, *Fihrist*.

[16] E. Heawood, *Watermarks, mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries. (Monumenta Chartae Papyraceae I)* (Hilversum 1950), 63, no.1, plate 1.

[17] See, e.g., G. Steer, Stand der Methodenreflexion im Bereich der altgermanistischen Editionen', in: *Probleme der Edition mittel- und neulateinischer Texte. Kolloquium der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, Bonn, 26.-28. Februar 1973* (Boppard 1978), 117-129.

[18] Atsız, *Bibliyografya*, 25-26, No. 18; F.E. Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi yazmalar kataloğu* I (Istanbul 1961), 237, no. 715.

[19] Ad-Dāġistānī, *Fihrist*, 218, no. 157/6055.

[20] These manuscripts are: *Türkçe* 5962, fols. 43b and 44a, *Türkçe* 5958, fols. 41a and 44a, and *Revan* 1117, fols. 34a and 35a. The last manuscript is described in: Karatay I, 237-238, no. 717.

[21] *Hs. or. quart.* 1090, B.H. Flemming, *Türkische Handschriften (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* XIII-1) I, 19, No. 26.

[22] *Suppl. Turc* 1028, E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits Turcs* II (Paris 1932), 137.

[23] This concerns the second part, from the life of Yūsuf untill the second coming of ʿĪsā, in the printed version occurring in III, 2-101, in the manuscript fols. 288b-463a.

[24] MSS *Türkçe* 5958, fols. 248b-254b, *Revan* 1119, fol. 625b (incomplete) and *Revan* 1123, fols. 154a-161b, cf. Karatay I, 23, no. 718 and idem I, 239, no. 722.

[25] MSS *Türkçe* 5958, fols. 344b-360a, *Revan* 1123, fols. 282a-292a and *Tārīḫ Turkī* 423 (folios unnumbered). Only the second manuscript has been described, see above note 24.

[26] MSS *Nuruosmaniye* 3409, fols. 448a-458a, *Revan* 1118, fols. 505a-610b, *Halet Efendi* 598, fols. 440a-449a and *III. Ahmed* 3083, fols. 535b-546a. Cf. *Istanbul kütüphaneleri tarih-coğrafya yazmalar katalogları* I, *Türkçe tarih yazmaları (TTY)* 23, no. 9; Karatay I, 236-237; *TTY* 20, no. 3 and Karatay I, 240, no. 728.

[27] Cf. Fleischer, *Âli*, 308-309.

[28] See for more details my *Mustafā ʿAlī's Künhü 'l-aḥbār and its Preface According to the Leiden Manuscript* (Leiden/Istanbul 1987) which also contains the text and the translation of the variant.

[29] See also note 14.