ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER DERGİSİ
ANKARA UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi | 15(2) | 2024 | 258 - 265

10.33537/sobild.2024.15.2.12

Makale Bilgisi
Gönderildiği tarih: 03.04.2024
Kabul edildiği tarih: 02.07.2024

Article Info
Date submitted: 03.04.2024
Date accepted: 02.07.2024

TAŞLICALI YAHYA BEY'İN MERSİYESİ EKSENİNDE ŞAİR VE PATRONAJ İLİŞKİSİ

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE POET AND PATRONAGE THROUGH THE LENS OF TAŞLICALI YAHYA BEY'S ELEGY

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Anahtar sözcükler
Divan şiiri; edebi patronaj; mersiye; Taşlıcalı Yahya

Keywords
Divan poetry; literary patronage; elegy; Taşlıcalı Yahya

Öz

Bu makalede edebiyatta farklı patronaj formları incelenmektedir ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda edebiyatın patrimonyal esaslarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Osmanlı şairlerinin edebi eser üretirken ne ölçüde bağımsız oldukları sorusunu ele almaktır. Örnek çalışma olarak ise Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey'in mersiyesi, padişah ve bürokratların etrafındaki edebiyat çevrelerine erişim sağlamak ve patronajın rolünü anlamak için incelenmektedir. Aynı zamanda edebi himayenin bir parçası olmanın edebi eserlerde özgünlük açısından bir dezavantajı olup olmadığı sorusuna da değinilmektedir.

Abstract

This article discusses the various forms of literary patronage and focuses on the patrimonial foundation of literature in the Ottoman Empire. The main aim of this study is to address the question of to what extent the Ottoman poets were independent in producing their literary pieces. As a case study, Taşlıcalı Yahya' Bey's elegy is the focal point to understand the role of patronage to gain access to the literary circles around the sultan and bureaucrats. It will also address the question of whether there was a disadvantage, in terms of the quality of work, to being a part of literary patronage.

Every culture showcases various forms of patronage, with the literary world witnessing the age-old tradition of rewarding creators for their contributions. In contemporary times, the financial viability of literary pursuits often hinges on the author's ability to stand out with their originality to earn these rewards.

In the context of literary patronage in the United States, the late 1930s marked the emergence of the "writer in residence" program within higher education institutions, offering financial sustenance to authors. This well-known program requires writers to engage with the academic community by possibly conducting workshops or teaching, in exchange for support. One of the important requirements of this new patronage form is the authors should reside on the campus. During their stay, they are expected to share their knowledge of their academic interests and their literary experiences. However, any form of patronage may seem restrictive and dissatisfying for a writer as questions arise regarding the uniqueness of art: Who is going to decide which works are of true originality and which not? Also, there is a danger that, to please patrons, writers might be caught in a monotonous repetition of subject matter.[1] While this arrangement offers financial benefits, it introduces concerns over artistic freedom and the potential homogeneity in content to appease patrons. Historically, from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, poets were confined to themes of chivalry, limited by their environmental and cultural contexts, possibly without genuine belief in the subjects they wrote about.[2]

A parallel can be drawn with the court poets of the Ottoman Empire, who, under the patronage of the Sultan, produced *kasidas* to praise their rulers, confined by the expectations and tastes of their era.[3] To appreciate these patrons as they expected to be appreciated, the poets wrote to suit a particular occasion and a known taste.[4] Often their poetry did serve a cause, but their principal service was to give pleasure to the dedicatees. This situation, however, might also have led poets to be more creative within very limited subject matter in to gain the attention of their patrons. Such constraints, however, may have spurred poets to explore creative avenues within these narrow themes to curry favor with their patrons.

Literary patronage goes beyond merely flattering or seeking advantages through dedicated works; it encompasses the essence of court literature itself. Therefore, this term should not be limited to complimentary works or to works provided with complimentary dedications in order to receive financial and social support.[5] Within the Ottoman Empire, the most crucial support system for the arts was the *hâmi'* حامئ, a role signifying a protector or patron, pivotal in allowing artists to showcase their work within elite circles.[6] The participation of Ottoman sultans and bureaucrats in literature by producing their own works elevated the realm of poetry, with the imperial palace and residences of high officials serving as centers for artistic and literary patronage. The Ottoman Empire was a patrimonial state, and the imperial palace was the outmost place for arts and patronage. Also, the mansions of grand vizier, *sheikh ul-Islam*, chief judge, and *şehzade sanjaks* were also famous places for the literary gatherings. Notably, many poets emerged from the Ottoman capitals of Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne, with the Edirne palace during Çelebi Sultan Mehmed's reign (1413-1421) standing as an early example of such patronage.[7]

Ottoman art flourished under the sponsorship of its rulers, conforming to the aesthetic and cultural dictates of the court. Tanpınar's insights into the poet-patron relationship underscore the Sultan's role as the focal point of artistic and cultural vitality, with everything within the palace reflecting his will and perceived as an extension of divine will. The Sultan's portrayal as a godly figure emphasizes the centralized power and influence in shaping cultural and artistic expressions:

Everything revolves around him [Ottoman ruler] and flows to him. [Everything] is bountiful and fortunate as long as it is close to him. Because everything in the palace is fancy in respect of the ruler's will,and is a good deed itself with the will of the divine [ruler]. The Sultan organizes life in the way he represents himself as the shadow of God and spiritual world.[8]

[1] Heiney, Donald. "The Poet and His New Patron." *College English* 22, no. 6 (1961), 396.

[2] Ibid., 396.

[3] [3] *Kasida* means 'intention,' and the genre is used as a petition to a patron. A *kasida* has a single presiding subject, logically developed and concluded. Often it is a panegyric, written in praise of a king or a nobleman, a sub-genre known as *madīḥ*, meaning "praise."

[4] Lytle, Guy Fitch, and Stephen Orgel. *Patronage in the Renaissance*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981, 192.

[5] Ibid., 207

[6] The single most significant institution for the support of all kinds of art in the Ottoman Court was *hâmi'* حامئ . *Hâmi'* can be translated as defender, protector, or patron. In this article, I use exclusively patron to refer to this term.

[7] Durmuş, Tuğba Işınsu. *Tutsan Elini Ben Fakirin: Osmanlı Edebiyatında Hamilik Geleneği*. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009, 29.

[8] All translations from Ottoman Turkish and Modern Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted.

"Her şey onun etrafında döner. Ona doğru koşar. Ona yakınlığı nisbetinde feyizli ve mesuttur. Çünkü bir sarayda olan her şey hükümdarın irâdesi itibariyle keyfî, az çok ilâhî Allahlaştırılmış özü itibariyle de isabetli, yani hayrın kendisidir. Hükümdar, gölgesi telakki edildiği mânevî âlemi, Allah'ı nasıl yeryüzünde temsil ediyorsa hayatı da öyle düzenler."

Tanpınar, Ahmet Hamdi. *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*. İstanbul: Bürhaneddin Matbaası, 1942, 5-6.

Starting from the 15th century, Ottoman sultans proactively nurtured the realm of poetry, offering both financial stipends and prestigious recognitions. Achieving the status of a sultan's musâhib (chatmate, close friend), or intimate companion, represented the pinnacle of acknowledgment a poet could aspire to.[9]

The reign of Süleyman the Magnificent epitomizes this era of fervent poetic engagement among the intellectual elite, with the friendship between Süleyman and the poet Bâkî serving as a prime illustration of this dynamic.[10] The prolific literary output under Süleyman's patronage attests to his inherent support for the arts.[11] Political motivations also played a role in this encouragement, with Süleyman, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Bayezid II, recognizing the dual political and cultural advantages of supporting literary endeavors, as highlighted by Christine Woodhead. According to Woodhead, Süleyman, like his grandfather Bayezid II, was aware of the political and cultural benefits of historiography and therefore continued to support artists:

One of the commonplaces adduced by 16th century Ottoman historians for the value of the written word is its role in maintaining the fame and reputation of a ruler. Like his grandfather Bayezid II, Süleyman was especially appreciative of the merits, both political and cultural, immediate and long-term, of historiography. His reign not only offered ample material to record and celebrate, he himself offered ample encouragement and reward to diligent writers.[12]

Contrasting this norm of praising patrons through poetry, the 16th century witnessed a notable deviation with Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey's critical elegy following the execution of Şehzade Mustafa by Sultan Süleyman. Yahya Bey, Taşlıcalı Yahya or Yahya Bey of Duḳāḳīn was one of the most significant literary characters in Ottoman court poetry circles. He wrote a *mersiye* (elegy) after the death of Şehzade Mustafa, where he makes daring allegations against Rüstem, the *vizierate*, and Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Süleyman. His couplets reflect his grief towards this devastating incident by implicitly accusing Süleyman I. As a prominent figure in the literary courts, Yahya Bey, originally from present-day Albania, began his Ottoman journey as an *acemi oğlan* (novice boy) before ascending to a janissary role. This term applies not only to youths who had been conscripted into the *devşirme* (slave soldier) levy, but collectively to all youths who had been accepted as candidates for training for various services to the state.[13] His literary prowess, particularly demonstrated through his *kasida*s to notable figures like Ibrahim Paşa and İskender Çelebi, raises questions about his educational background, suggesting his participation in madrasahs outside the usual janissary training. There is not much data regarding when he was promoted and how long he remained in this office. *Tezkire* writers were mostly interested in Yahya's literary career rather than his military accomplishments. Yahya's body of work, including his divan and five unique mesnevīs, reflects a blend of cultural, linguistic, and religious integration into the Ottoman sphere, distinguishing him in the annals of Ottoman divan poetry. His efforts to secure a powerful patron in Istanbul, amidst the competitive literary landscape and personal rivalries, notably with the poet Hayâli, underline the complexities of courtly patronage and the aspirations of poets to gain favor and recognition. Considering that Yahya was presenting splendid *kasidas*[14] to Ibrahim Paşa, the vizierate of the time, and to İskender Çelebi, the chief treasurer, as his patrons, the first question that comes to mind is how Yahya gained the knowledge to enable him to match wits with learned men in literary gatherings. An answer to this question could be that although *janissaries* were not usually educated in the palace, they could attend *madrasah*. He studied with the famed legal scholar, poet, and historian Kemalpaşazade and presented his verses to Ibrahim Paşa and Selim I. Although a solider and an Ottomanized convert, his subsequent career and unusual characteristics as a poet make him unique in Ottoman divan poetry. In addition to his *dīvān*, he was the writer of five quite original, and hence unusual, narrative poems: a *hamse* of five *mesnevīs,* namely Kitab-ı Uṣūl, Gencīne-i Rāz, Şāh u Gedā, Yūsuf u Zelīḫā, and Gülşen-i Envār. His success as a poet made him a paragon of culturally, linguistically, and religiously Ottomanized *jannisary* recruits who passed from Eastern Europe into the capital and life of the Ottoman Empire. His custodian, Şihābüddīn, was a well-trained official who taught him until he returned to civilian life.[15] In order to obtain a powerful patron, Yahya tried to establish himself in the capital of Istanbul as did many other young hopefuls who also sought a place under Süleyman's shelter. However, the tensions between these newcomers and the established inhabitants of Istanbul are reflected in their poetry.[16] Yahya was

[9] İnalcık, Halil. *Şâir ve Patron: Patrimonyal Devlet Ve Sanat Üzerinde Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme*. Ankara: Doğu Batı Press, 2003, 24.

[10] Woodhead, Christine. "Perspectives on Süleyman." *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*. London: Longman, 1995.

[11] İnalcık, Halil. *Şâir ve Patron: Patrimonyal Devlet Ve Sanat Üzerinde Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme*, 25.

[12] Woodhead, Christine. "Perspectives on Süleyman", 166.

[13] Jaeckel, Ralph. *Dukaginzade Taslicali Yahya Bey's "King and Beggar," a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Allegorical-Mystical Love Poem (Mesnevi): Introduction, Text*. Los Angeles: UMI, 1980, 22.

[14]

[15] Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1983, 7.

[16] İsen, Mustafa. "Yürü Var Gel Ya Arap'tan Ya Acem'den," *Millî Kültür*, Sayı: 146 (1984), pp. 56–59.

involved in a long-standing envious pique directed at the poet Hayâli. In one of his poems in praise of Süleyman, Yahya complains about the patronage that Hayali receives from the Sultan:

If the respect that Hayali receives was shown to me

God knows, I would create miracles with numerous unique poems.[17]

Upon Süleymān I's ascension to the throne, Yahya started participating in the esteemed gatherings of poets and scholars, which significantly elevated his reputation. He predominantly offered his *kasida*s to Süleyman I, securing the favor and support of both Rüstem, the grand vizier, and Süleyman himself. In the latter part of his life, Yahya turned towards Sufism, becoming a follower of Üryani Mehmet Dede. His literary contributions were marked by the use of everyday language, signaling a shift towards trends that would later dominate the Tulip Era.[18] His straightforward and clear use of language set him apart from the more elaborate styles of his peers.

Regrettably, the body of Yahya Bey's work has not been preserved in a manner that allows comprehensive scholarly analysis, leaving many aspects of his life and poetic contributions unexplored. Despite his popularity during his lifetime, his work has not received the same level of academic attention as his contemporaries like Zati, Fuzuli, Hayali Bey, and Baki. Among the 16th-century Ottoman biographical collections, Aşık Çelebi's Meşa'irüş-şuara, completed between 1568-1569, offers the most detailed account of Yahya's life. [19] Another significant source is Kühnü'l-Anbar by Gelibolulu Ali (d. 1599 or 1600) though it does not delve into Yahya's life as deeply as Aşık Çelebi's work. İbrahim Peçevi's *Tarih-i Peçevi* provides a specific examination of an event in Yahya's life. [20] His own writings also serve as a crucial resource, offering glimpses into his personal and professional experiences. [21]

During the 16th century, Yahya had the honor of serving under four emperors, a time during which he took great pride in his military involvement. [22] His literary output, largely produced amidst military engagements, is richly infused with vivid portrayals of battle scenes, as well as detailed descriptions of naval and martial life, attire, cuisine, and the everyday language and sayings of the time, all of which are intricately woven into his divan. His poetry offers dynamic illustrations of combat, and he mentions specifically composing the elegy for Şehzade Mustafa during the military expedition in Nakhcivan in 1553. [23] Yahya Bey, acclaimed for his *kasidas* and *ghazals*, is particularly distinguished for his *masnavi* poetry. His collection includes 34 *kasidas*, 49 musammats, and around 500 ghazals, with many of these works, including the notable *masnavi* "Şah u Geda", being dedicated to Süleyman. [24]

Portraying historical events with precision regarding their timing, location, and causative factors does not necessarily capture the societal response or the complete truth of the incident. Historiography in monarchies, where the king is the chief patron of scholarship, often reflects a perspective more aligned with the monarch's viewpoint than an unbiased account. As an illustration, Celalzâde defends Süleyman's controversial decision to execute his son, suggesting that despite reservations among Süleyman's closest confidantes, the act was deemed necessary for the sake of justice. Celalzâde attempts to justify this by hinting at undisclosed wrongdoings by Mustafa, suggesting that a significant and perilous wrongdoing must have been present for such a dire consequence, as the sultan, who held his son in high esteem and love, would only resort to such an action under grave circumstances:

No one had full details of the matter; everyone had his own line of gossip. Those of wisdom and experience put it down to fate and divine decree. The sultan –pure in thought and belief, obedient to the *şeriat* of God – adhered to the path of correct conduct…; his son was the light of his eye and very dear to him… but had there not been some great fault and potentially dangerous crime

[17] "Bana olaydı Hayâlî'ye olan hörmetler

Hak bilür sihr-i halâl eyler idüm şîr-i teri".

Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1983, 60.

[18] *Tulip Era* started with the Treaty of Passarowitz on 21 July 1718 and ended with Patrona Halil Revolt on 28 September 1730. This period adopts the name *tulip* which symbolizes the nobility.

[19] Jaeckel, Ralph. *Dukaginzade Taslicali Yahya Bey's "King and Beggar", a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Allegorical-Mystical Love Poem (Mesnevi): Introduction, Text,* 11.

[20] Peçevi, İbrahim. *Peçevi Tarihi*. Edited by Murat Uraz. İstanbul: Neşriyat Yurdu, 1968, 162-163.

[21] All the autobiographical remarks I have cited are from secondary sources.

[22] Taşlıcalı Yahya witnessed the thrones of Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, and Murad III.

[23] Yahya composed his poetry during the battles of Chaldiran (1514) and Egypt (1517) at the time of Selim I, and during the siege of Vienna and the battles of Iraqeyn and Szigetvár at the time of Süleyman I. Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1983, pp. 7-21.

[24] A *musammat* is composed of a few rhymed half-lines called stanzaic form and one line with independent rhyme called stanzaic connection or stanzaic line, and this structure is repeated many times with different rhymes.

concealed within his nature he would not have become the victim of such punishment.[25]

Furthermore, to avoid angering the Sultan, renowned poets like Bâkî and Hayâlî chose to overlook this pivotal incident, refraining from commenting on the death. In stark contrast, Taşlıcalı Yahya, deeply affected by the event, boldly addressed the topic in his writing, indifferent to how his patrons might react. His elegy stands out as a daring critique of various elements within the Ottoman administration, with only Rüstem facing direct criticism upon a cursory examination. However, as noted by Mehmet Çavuşoğlu and other academics, the elegy subtly confronts not just Rüstem but implicates Süleyman by critiquing the orchestrators of the death. Mehmet Çavuşoğlu states that "this elegy does not target Süleyman, but instead the poet takes aim at Rüstem and the rest who planned this death."[26] This perspective, while accurate, does not entirely capture the subtext of the elegy, which cleverly satirizes Süleyman under the guise of lamentation.

This elegy also played a crucial role in encouraging other poets to express their critiques openly. Poets like Sâmî and Nisâyî, inspired by Yahya's approach, penned bold verses critiquing the government, thereby sparking a movement of literary dissent.[27]

Gelibolulu Ali, in his work Künhü'l-ahbâr, recounts a conversation with Yahya about the motivation behind his elegy. Yahya revealed that the grief over the prince's death overwhelmed him, compelling him to write. He intended for the poem to remain unpublished during his lifetime, only to be discovered posthumously. However, a close friend, taking advantage of their informal relationship, found the manuscript in Yahya's belongings while he slept, copied it, and left, thus unintentionally spreading Yahya's heartfelt work:

My sorrow at the death of the prince drove me mad and forced me to do it. I wrote down whatever came to my pen, but it was my intention not to have it circulate in my lifetime, that it would become known only after my death. By chance an old friend of mine came to my tent and found me asleep. Because we were good friends and there was no formality between us, he rummaged around in my handbag, saw the rough copy of the poem, at once made a copy of it, and departed.[28]

Nonetheless, there are apparent inconsistencies in the narrative described earlier. One notable issue is the feasibility of an individual entering Yahya's quarters undetected, rummaging through his possessions, and absconding with the poem, all while Yahya remained asleep. Moreover, it raises questions about the nature of a friendship where one would risk the other's life by disseminating a potentially lethal piece of writing. Atilla Şentürk posits that even though Yahya's acquaintance shared the poem, he did so anonymously to protect Yahya, a point that seemingly contradicts Yahya's own assertion in Künhü'l-ahbâr about not employing a pseudonym for the poem. This leads to the puzzle of how the poem was recognized as Yahya's work if it was shared anonymously.[29] Expanding on Gelibolulu Ali's narrative, İbrahim Peçevi, a distinguished 16th-century Ottoman historian, recounts in his Tarih-i Peçevi how the poem quickly spread among the Imperial Army, eliciting tears and sighs from its audience, who viewed it as a means for divine forgiveness for Yahya. Despite Yahya's initial denials of authorship, he eventually acknowledged writing the poem, questioning what Rüstem Paşa could possibly do to him, especially after Rüstem had been removed from power. However, when Rüstem returned to power as the grand vizier, he sought Yahya's execution, arguing that such individuals threatened societal order. Yet, the Sultan, a just and moral ruler who appreciated poetry and wrote under the alias Muhibbi, refused Rüstem's demands, advising him to disregard calls for vengeance against poets:

The next day I went to observe the Imperial Army. The poem was recited here and there by groups of people. Some were weeping and others were sighing, saying that it would be a reason for God to forgive Yahya's sins. No matter how much I denied that I had written the poem, my efforts were to no avail. I started confessing that what can Rüstem Paşa, who has been hostile to me simply because I am a poet, do to me now that he has been deprived of his office? But two years later when he gained the position of a grand vizier, he wanted to kill me. Once or twice he stated to the Sultan that in order to preserve the order of the world, the existence of people like me should be eliminated. But the Sultan, who was of good morals and was obedient to truth and justice, was fond of poets and poems, and was himself a good poet who wrote under the pseudonym of Muhibbi did not grant him permission and said, "Do not pay attention to such people or seek revenge against them.[30]

[25] Woodhead, Christine. "Perspectives on Süleyman." *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*. London: Longman, 1995, 179.

[26] Şentürk, Ahmet Atillâ. *Yahya Beğ'in Mustafa Mersiyesi yahut Kanunî Hicviyesi*. İstanbul: Timaş, 2009, 13.

[27] Ibid., 14.

[28] "Hadd-i zâtında mürâdum ol harâretle bu mersiyeyi nazm itmekdi lâkin zuhûrını zemân-ı mevtime ta'lîk idüp nüshasını kimseye virmemek idi. Çadurumda bir gün hâb-ı kaylûleye vardugum hâlde bî-tekellüf olan yârândan birisi gelmiş, 'Acebâ nev-gûfteleri var mı ki?..' diyü cüz'dânumı karışdurmış, bu mersiyenün müsveddesini bulup 'ale-l-fevr yazmış, yine nüshayı buldugı yire koyup henüz ben hâb-nâk iken çekilmiş gitmiş." Ibid., 88.

[29] Şentürk, Atilla. *Yahya Beğ'in Mustafa Mersiyesi yahut Kanunî Hicviyesi,* 90.

On a certain day, Rüstem Pasa dispatched a sergeant who escorted me to the Imperial Council, where I endured numerous hardships related to my management of Sultan Beyazit's endowment. He then questioned, "Is there a limit to your actions? Our revered monarch expects all his subjects to adhere to a standard of conduct that upholds global harmony." His anger escalated as he accused me, "By crafting verses from baseless rumors, you insult the dignity of our sovereign and his officials, spreading dissent among the populace." Inspired by his fury, I retorted, "Together with the perpetrators, we mourn the departed; we share the grief of the mourners." Yet, rather than attributing any error to our sovereign, I suggested that the malevolence was the work of those bearing grudges against him. Enraged and turning his back, he swiftly concluded the confrontation, and within days, relieved me from my duties as *mütevelli*. Shortly after, Yahya was granted a ziamet, with which he was satisfied for the remainder of his life.[31]

Jaeckel notes that Yahya's ziamet was located in the sancak of Zvornik, in Bosnia, where he lived out his final days. [32] This raises the inquiry as to whether Yahya faced repercussions for his poetry. Some historians speculate that while Yahya's poetic prowess and the competitive nature of the court had elevated him to the role of mütevelli, it was this very poem that precipitated his removal. [33] Yet, despite this setback, he was awarded a significant estate and lived contentedly until his demise. The reason Yahya wasn't punished more severely could stem from the fact that his actions were not deemed criminal. Being a member of the formidable 16th century janissary corps likely afforded Yahya a measure of protection from such repercussions.

Through his elegy lamenting a life taken by the Sultan's command, Yahya openly contested the established patronage practices of the Ottoman Empire. Unlike his peers, esteemed court poets such as Baki and Hayali, who remained silent on the matter, Yahya chose to address the event directly.

His bold critique inspired other poets like Sami and Nisayi to adopt a more critical stance towards the governing class. Sami's work, in particular, shed new light on Mustafa's death, underlining its significance to the populace.

Yahya Bey's poem starts with the death of Mustafa and the reasons behind this incident, showing its author's sincere sorrow, especially in the last lines of the first section, where, deeply grieved, Yahya seems to collapse from exhaustion as the only one bemoaning this death. In the second part, the author explains where and how this incident took place. Yahya uses contrasting elements to affect the reader by dramatically telling how happily Mustafa entered his father's tent and how ignominiously he was killed there. The third section of the poem is a space reserved for the mourning of the people and nature for this death. Very subjectively, Yahya claims that Mustafa has become a martyr by obeying his father's decision that he die. The author basically creates the ground for accusing Rüstem of this death in his upcoming couplets. The fourth section elaborately tells how everyone is crying after the innocent Mustafa and continues to provoke the Sultan by emphasizing that this incident took place because of Rüstem, who therefore should be punished the same way. The following segment contemplates the inevitability of death, setting the stage for the poem's pivotal critiques, transforming its nature from an elegy to a satirical commentary on the Sultan. The penultimate part acknowledges Mustafa's virtues and entreats divine forgiveness and grace for him. The poem culminates in a farewell to Mustafa, incorporating prayers and good wishes, yet, in accordance with poetic tradition, concludes with an ode to Sultan Süleyman, the reigning monarch.

A close examination of the text reveals that the main theme throughout the poem is more likely criticism of Rüstem than lamenting for Mustafa. The phrase "the deceitful trick of Rüstem" (*mekr-i Rüstem*), that cleverly encodes the year 1553, immortalizes the act of betrayal. The poet directly labels Rüstem as deceitful and

[30] Ertesi gün Ordu-yu Hümayun'un seyrine gitmiştim. Orada köşe köşe insanlardan kiminin bu şiiri okuyarak ağladığını ve kiminin de Yahya Bey'in mağfiretine sebebtir diyerek "ah" ettiklerini gördüm. Her ne kadar inkar ettimse de faydalı olmadı. Şair olduğum için Rüstem Paşa'nın bana adâveti vardı, şimdi artık azledildim. Bana ne yapabilir diye itiraf etmeye başladım. Ama iki yıl sonra sadr-ı âzam olunca beni öldürmek istedi: "Bu gibilerin yok edilmesi âlemin nizamı için lâzımdır" diye bir iki defa padişaha arz etmişse de, padişahın hakikat ve adalete taraftar olduğu, şaire ve şiire kıymet verdiği, kendisi de muhibbî mahlaslı iyi bir şâir olduğu için izin vermedi ve "Bu gibi sözlere kulak verme ve intikam besleme" dedi.

Peçevi, İbrahim. *Peçevi Tarihi*. Edited by Murat Uraz. İstanbul: Neşriyat Yurdu, 1968, 163.

[31] Rüstem Paşa bir gün bir çavuş göndererek beni divana çağırttı ve uhdemde bulunan Sultan Beyazıt mütevelliliğine ait beni epeyce sıkıştırdıktan sonra: "Senin ne haddindir. Padişah nizâmı âlem için şer'an ne iktiza ederse onu yaparlar, sen bizzat padişaha ve vükelâsına taan ettin ve kendine göre bulduğun bir takım saçma sapan şeyleri nazm ederek halka verir ve fesata çalışırsın" diyerek hiddetlendiği zaman hemen kalbime şöyle doğdu ve: "Biz merhumu katledenlerle beraber katl ettik, ağlayanlarla dahi beraber ağlarız. Ancak padişahımız hata etti diye âdaba riâyet ederek söylemedim de, garaz besleyen kimselerin fesatıdır. demeyi daha yerinde buldum" dedim. Paşa hemen gazaplanarak yüz çevirdi ve o bahsi kapadı ve bir kaç gün geçmeden de mütevellilikten azletti." Sonra Yahya Bey ziamet alarak ölümüne kadar bununla kanaat etmişti.

[32] Jaeckel, Ralph. *Dukaginzade Taslicali Yahya Bey's "King and Beggar", a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Allegorical-Mystical Love Poem (Mesnevi): Introduction, Text.* Los Angeles: UMI, 1980, 40.

[33] Ibid., 36.

malevolent, attributing to him traits of duplicity and malevolence.

They were maliciously criticizing the hero of the wars;

Fate has taken the sultan of the era.[34]

The sheer calumny of the liar and the secret hatred made us cry,

And this lit the fire of separation.[35]

…

The Zâl of his time returned to the earth,

By a deceitful trick of Rüstem came his harm.[36]

In subsequent verses, Yahya further denounces Rüstem as demonic, inciting hostility against Mustafa and seeking justice for Mustafa's demise from Süleyman. Yahya justifies this bold plea by highlighting Rüstem's dishonor towards the Ottoman lineage through Mustafa's assassination. In other words, Rüstem has humiliated the *'âl-i Osmân* (Ottoman ancestors) with the murder of Mustafa:

The beloved prince has become one with dust.

How is the factious devil still alive?[37]

This prompts the inquiry: Why does the satirical critique target Süleyman in addition to Rüstem? Viewing the poem, one observes satire directed at both figures. However, public disdain for Rüstem was widespread, making any denunciation of him less contentious. Şentürk suggests that the frequent expression of animosity towards Rüstem by the populace and the military meant that mocking him held no novelty. The critique of Rüstem throughout the poem possibly serves to subtly veil the more significant censure aimed at Süleyman.

In the elegy, Yahya skillfully employs allegory to suggest that Süleyman had lost grip over his governance. While Rüstem faces direct rebuke, the criticism of Süleyman is nuanced, hinting at his betrayal of trust, likening him to a lion that preys on its offspring and a scavenger feeding on the dead:

In Erdişir, there is the lion tradition,

A dream impossible to interpret.[38]

Yahya further draws a parallel between Süleyman, hailed as *Kanunî* or the lawgiver, and `Umar ibn Al-Khattāb (579-644), celebrated for his devout and equitable leadership. Woodhead elaborates that Süleyman's epithet, emphasizing justice, underscored his commitment to the principles of law and societal welfare. Yahya boldly challenges Süleyman's actions, contrasting them with the expected conduct of a ruler of Umar's caliber, questioning the unheard-of act of a ruler executing his offspring without just cause:

An emperor who has Umar's nature sacrificed his own son.

I wonder who has seen or heard such a thing?[39]

Yahya also levies criticism towards Süleyman by reproaching his wife, Hürrem, accusing her of spreading rumors about Mustafa. The use of plural pronouns in his verses suggests that Rüstem, too, was implicated as part of the gossip circle. A deeper analysis of these lines indicates a shift in Süleyman's allegiances, moving him closer to Hürrem and Rüstem, hinting at betrayal. Şentürk delves deeper, suggesting the term "gossiper" might also refer to Mihrimah, Rüstem's spouse and the daughter of Hürrem and Süleyman, despite the absence of direct evidence linking Mihrimah to the conspiracy.[40]

They were maliciously criticizing the hero of the wars;

Fate has taken the sultan of the era.[41]

Yahya boldly contests the legitimacy of Süleyman's fatal verdict on Mustafa, questioning the evidence of any wrongdoing. This critique boldly challenges the sovereign's decision:

His crime uncertain, his sin unknown!

Such a blessed martyr, such an oppressed king![42]

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[34] "Geçerler idi geçende o merd-i meydânı
Felek o cânibe döndürdi şâh-ı devrânı"
Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. 96.

[35] "Yalancının kuru bühtânı buğz-ı pinhânı
Akıtdı yaşumuzı yakdı nâr-ı hicrânı"
Ibid., 96.

[36] "Getürdi arkasını yire Zâl-i devr ü zemân
Vücûdına sitem-i Rüstem ile irdi ziyân"
Ibid., 100.

[37] "O cân-ı âdemiyân oldı hâk ile yeksân
Diri kala ne revâdur fesâd iden şeytân."
Ibid., 100.

[38] Bu vâkı'a olmaz halka kâbil-i ta'bîr
Ki Erdişîr-i velâyetde ola 'âdet-i şîr
Ibid., 100.

[39] "Bunun gibi işi kim gördi kim işitdi 'aceb
Ki oglına kıya bir server-i 'Ömer-meşreb."
Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey Ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. 102.

[40] Şentürk, Atilla. *Yahya Beğ'in Mustafa Mersiyesi yahut Kanunî Hicviyesi,* 111.

[41] "Geçerler idi geçende o merd-i meydânı
Felek o cânibe döndürdi şâh-ı devrânı"

[42] "Hatâsı gayr-i mu'ayyen günâhı nâ-ma-lûm
Zihî şehîd-i sa'îd ü zihî şeh-i mazlûm"
Çavuşoğlu, Mehmed. *Yahya Bey Ve Dîvânından Örnekler*. 98.

This elegy stands out for delving deeper into the machinations and the public's sentiment following the incident, distinct from other laments for Mustafa. Yahya attributes the assassination to the machinations of a few deceitful individuals bolstered by counterfeit correspondence. He argues for Mustafa's innocence, likening the scenario to a conspiracy among foes, emphasizing that Mustafa approached his father unarmed. Yahya critiques Süleyman for hastily executing such a crucial judgment, depriving his son of any defense. He labels the incident as unprecedented, thus dissociating Mustafa's death from typical acts of filicide and framing it as a unique occurrence borne out of deceit and injustice.

The immediate query that arises is regarding the consequences faced by Yahya for composing this poem. Some scholars suggest that while Yahya's poetic talents and the competitive environment within the royal household had elevated him to a position of *mütevelli*, it was this very poem that precipitated his decline. This decline is often interpreted as his removal from office. Yet, despite this setback, Yahya was granted a substantial landholding, where he lived out his days in satisfaction.

The rationale behind Yahya's lack of punishment could be attributed to the absence of a definable crime within his actions. Being a janissary himself, Yahya likely had the backing of the formidable 16th-century janissary corps, a factor that might have shielded him from severe repercussions.

Moreover, Yahya's elegy, lamenting the execution ordered by the Sultan, signified his dissent towards the established norms of Ottoman patronage. Unlike his peers, such as Baki and Hayali, who remained silent on the matter, Yahya chose to confront it head-on.

This act of defiance not only showcased his bravery but also inspired fellow poets like Sami and Nisayi to adopt a more critical stance towards the governance. Sami's work, in particular, not only shed light on aspects of Mustafa's death previously unexplored but also highlighted the societal impact of the tragedy.

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