SLAVE TO DRAGOMAN:

CONVERSION, SEXUALITY AND SELF-FASHIONING IN THE MEMOIR OF TIMIŞVARLI OSMAN AĞA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the memoir of Osman Ağa of Tımışvar, enslaved on the Ottoman and Habsburg borders in the seventeenth century (1688-1700). The memoir reveals Osman's consistent concern to demonstrate his “correct” views on religious fidelity and sexual propriety. By examining it with the writings of Osman's contemporaries, such as Hasan Esiri, Süleyman the Janissary of Egypt, and earlier actors such as Konstantin Mihailović, Georgius of Hungary, and more, it is possible to see how similar "boundary-drawing" discourses were prevalent throughout the early modern Ottoman and broader European worlds. These early modern writers also sought to fashion themselves by articulating an “orthodox” understanding of sexual and religious issues. Osman defended himself against the suspicions that might have been directed at him because of his time spent in the land of the "infidels." This thesis takes Osman's memoirs as an exceptional source written by a self-made elite of humble origins, noting that he simultaneously addressed many social issues that were controversial both within the empire and between empires. Recognizing that Osman wrote his memoirs in Istanbul 24 years after the end of his captivity, an attempt has been made to contextualize his discourses within the climate of early modern Ottoman social and religious life. In asserting that Osman wrote in an attempt to re-establish social and religious belonging. In doing so, I build on Tijana Krstić's argument that life writing was a matter of reintegration into religious community. This thesis reveals how early modern writers fashioned their identities through discussions of sexuality and religion, and how these narratives shed light on the broader social issues of the early Ottoman world and beyond.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

0 INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman frontiers were dangerous but full of opportunities. Some of those who struggled to make a living in the empire's hinterlands, especially the young, flocked to the borderlands to earn a living through the plundering that prevailed there. When those who chose this path proved to have the courage required to be a soldier, they had the opportunity to enlist as a *sipāhi* in one of the vacant posts, or in other words, to become a frontier soldier of the Ottoman sultan.[1] Aside from the *sipāhi* salary and other advantages, border service partially guaranteed the welfare of the next generation of the family. The job was often passed down from father to son, with opportunities for rank advancement through established networks in the border regions. One such fortune-seeker, Ahmet Ağa, relocated to Tımışvar[2] for this very purpose in the mid-seventeenth century, at a time when the Ottoman Empire was nearly at its territorial zenith in continental Europe.[3] However, it is known that during the subsequent decades, especially the period between the Second Siege of Vienna and the Treaty of Karlowitz, soldiers serving on the Ottoman European borders often fell victim to the dangers of the border rather than enjoying its benefits, with many falling into enemy captivity, including one Osman Ağa, captured for 14 years and held in Belgrade.[4] Around the same time as this Osman was in captivity, Ahmet Ağa's son, a much more famous Osman Ağa fell into the hands of Habsburg forces. Osman Ağa son of Ahmet Ağa was not unique in terms of his captivity but is instead

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[1]<سرحد قلع > or *serhad kulu*: The general name of the military forces serving at the border and fortresses in the Ottoman Empire.

[2] < طمشوار > Abdulhadi Uysal, ""Tımışvar" İsmi Üzerine Bazı Notlar," *Archivum Ottomanicum,* no. 40, 35-51. To see more about province of Tımışvar; Murat Serdaroğlu, "XVI. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Hakimiyetinde Tımışvar Sancağı," (PhD diss., Sakarya University, 2019).

[3] Ömer Gezer, "Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa-Esir, Tercüman Ve Yazar," *Türkbilig* 35 (2018): 73-88.

[4] BOA DVNSMHM.D00062 218/492 (*Bosna beylerbeyine: Bosna ocak ağalarından Osman Ağa'nın on dört yıldan beri küffârın elinde esir olduğunun bildirlip...*).

notable for the memoir he wrote narrating his 12-year captivity as an Ottoman Muslim slave caught up in the intricate web of European politics.

Taking this memoir as a focal point of my thesis, I was guided by the following questions: Why did Osman portray himself in every situation as a morally upright individual? For whom did Osman write his memoirs? Was he trying to convince his audience through his captivity memoir that he did not make mistakes in the 'infidel' land? Is it possible that Osman converted to Christianity while he was a slave in Vienna? How does his narrative compare to other narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? To what extent are Osman's descriptions of religion, sexuality, morality, and conversion similar to those of his contemporaries? What do his narrations on sexual and religious subjects reveal about Ottoman society in general, the navigation of tensions between “orthodox” religious and sexual practice and “heterodox” realities, and the ways in which he positioned himself in relation to the Habsburg world? What do these questions say about the social fabric of Osman’s world and how he wanted to present it for his audience? Does it offer clues about who his audience may have been?

I argue that Osman's rhetoric is comparable to that of other captives and travelers from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Similarly to his contemporaries, Osman engaged in self-fashioning through the articulation of an “orthodox” understanding of sexual and religious topics. In doing so, I argue, Osman defends himself against suspicions that may have been cast against him based on his cross-border experiences. The intended audience of Osman's memoirs remains unclear, and although the answer cannot be deduced through these comparisons, the question of the intended recipient has always been considered during the analysis.

Osman was a rather ordinary frontier figure, having spent most of his life as a soldier and then as a slave. This was not a unique situation; as can be seen from *mühimme defter*s

(books containing Ottoman edicts), many Ottoman subjects were enslaved in the lands of the 'infidel' in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and many Europeans were likewise enslaved by the Ottomans.[5] The *defter*s contain many entries for the return of captives or entries for ransom money.[6]

What, then, distinguishes Osman as an exceptional individual? For one, despite suffering the tragic experience of having to leave his home city after it was taken by Habsburg forces in 1716, after his return from captivity, he made a career for himself as a dragoman, thereby raising his social status. Osman is extraordinary because unlike others of his class, he wrote a memoir. The memoir is written in a fluent Ottoman bureaucratic hand called *divani*, which can be translated as court style.[7] Despite the lack of information about Osman's education and reading habits prior to his captivity, Osman himself acknowledged that he was not a born into an elite family.[8] One of the central questions of this thesis is examine how Osman used his memoir to become a self-made elite.

With all this in mind, I argue that the microhistorical concept of the "exceptional normal," first proposed by Edoardo Grendi and further articulated by Carlo Ginzburg and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, can be applied to Osman Ağa's context.[9] I seek to explore

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[5] Hacı Osman Yıldırım, Vahdettin Atik, Murat Cebecioğlu, Hasan Çağlar, Mustafa Serin, Osman Uslu, and Numan Yekeler, *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (975-976/1567-1569): Özet-Transkripsiyon-İndeks* [Numbered Mühimme Register (975-976/1567-1569): Summary-Transcription-Index] (Ankara: Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 1998), 7; Abbas Gök and Mehmet İnbaşı, "62 Numaralı Mühimme Defterine Göre 1587-1588 Yıllarında Osmanlı Devleti'nde Suhte ve Eşkıyalık Hareketleri" [Suhte and Banditry Movements in the Ottoman Empire in 1587-1588 According to the 62nd Mühimme Register], *Erciyes Akademi* 35, no. 4: 1356-1376.

[6] İrvin Cemil Schick, *Avrupalı esireler ve Müslüman efendileri: "Türk" illerinde esaret anlatıları* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayinevi Ltd., 2005); Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth - Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[7] Selim S. Kuru, "In the Realm of Darkness: Memoirs of a Muslim Ottoman Captive in Habsburg Lands." (ongoing work)

[8] Giancarlo Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels: The Memoir of an Ottoman Muslim in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 15.

[9] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace," in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch, 1-10 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory: A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century* (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2020).

Ginzburg's claim that "a truly exceptional […] document can be much more revealing than a thousand stereotypical documents."[10] Although these historians have used the concept for a different geographical region and social setting, I find their concept useful because Osman Ağa, who came from a "common" social background, was exceptional in that he rose from this background to a higher level of education and prominence and wrote a memoir. I believe that the features found within numerous archival documents, self-narratives, and literary sources collected by authors such as Dror Ze'evi, Tijana Krstic, Walter Andrews, and Mehmet Kalpaklı can also be found within Osman's memoirs as a single source. Osman was also exceptional in that he addressed many social issues of his day that were a topic of discussion both within and across empires. He articulates his views on morality, faith, conversion, gender, sexuality, sodomy, smuggling, bandits, language, clothing, and numerous other matters. Osman's memoirs are an anomaly in that they are the personal account of a common soldier of the borderland that discusses all these issues together in a single narrative, providing a window to the usually hidden lives, perspectives, and preoccupations of other men of his social class, the common soldiery who populated the borderland.

Of course, Osman was not the only Ottoman, let alone the first historical actor to write a narrative of captivity; there were many similar works in Christian Europe. Although Osman's contemporaries, such as Hasan Esiri and Janissary Süleyman, provide useful points of comparison, their accounts are much less focused on social and interpersonal issues: Hasan's account of captivity is full of military and geographical information, while Süleyman's is generally full of praise and descriptions of France.[11] At the same time as Osman's narrative

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[10] Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game," 8. The term was originally created by Edoardo Grendi, "Ripensare La Microstoria?" [Rethinking Microhistory?] *Quaderni Storici* 29, no. 86 (2) (1994): 539–49. (translated via DeepL).

[11] For other examples: Michael Heberer, *Ægyptiaca Servitus* (Heidelberg, Gotthard Vögelin, 1610) [a Slave in Egypt (1585-1588)]; Edward Webbe, *The Rare and most wonderful things which Edward Webbe an Englishman borne, hath seen and passed in his troublesome travailes*. (London, 1590); Giovan Maria Angiolello and Pierre A. MacKayA, Fifteenth-century Venetian's adventures in Ottoman lands: the memoir of Gian-Maria Angiolello

may suggest some generalizations into the unspoken experiences of his fellow slaves and soldiers, his continuous efforts at self-fashioning also provide an exceptional window into the pressures that Osman encountered upon his return, especially upon his entry into higher social circle. His discourses on sexuality and religion show his anxiety to show his "correct" views on matters of religious fidelity and sexuality, seemingly in tension with parts of his story which may have reflected more complex feelings.

0.1 The Discovery of the Memoir and the first Translated Editions

The memoir, presumed to have been completed by Osman Ağa in the Tophane district of Istanbul in 1724 was discovered in the nineteenth century by the Orientalist and diplomat Baron von Kremer, an Austrian Orientalist. Subsequently, it was sold to the British Museum Central Library, eventually becoming part of the British Library.[12] There are no known further copies of this work. In 1950, Heinz Griesbach transcribed it in his doctoral thesis, upon which Richard F. Kreutel and Otto Spies based the first translation of the text to German in 1954, bringing Osman Ağa of Tımışvar into the forefront of academic and popular historiography.[13] Kreutel and Spies's studies have notably increased the popularity of the work, and they are still widely referenced, especially regarding the inconsistent chronology in the memoir and information about Osman's diplomatic career.

(Seattle, UWP, 1989); Ahmet Karataş,"Bir İnebahtı Gazisinin Esaret Hatıraları:Sergüzeştname-i Hindi Mahmud". *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 37, n 37 (June 2011): 17-48; Madeleine C. Zilfi, "The Diary of a Müderris: A New Source for Ottoman Biography", *JTS*, I (1977) 157-173.

[12] British Library, Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts, OR 3213.

[13] Richard Franz Kreutel und Otto Spies, *Leben und Abenteuer des Dolmetschers Osman Ağa: eine türkische Autobiographie aus der Zeit der großen Kriege gegen Österreich* (Bonn: Des Orientalischen Seminars der Universitat Bonn, 1954).

The first translation to modern Turkish was done by Şevki Yazman in 1962, based on Kreutel and Spies's German translation.[14] Following this translation, the second German edition by Kreutel and Spies in 1962 was translated into modern Turkish by Esat Nermi Erendol and published in 1971.[15] Harun Tolasa later corrected the errors in the Turkish translations by Yazman and Erendol and partially simplified and published the text by correcting Osman Ağa's spelling mistakes.[16] However, Kreutel's 1980 publication of the text in printed Ottoman Turkish is still considered a standard reference in academic studies. Orhan Sakin's 2008 version,[17] based on Tolasa's transcription and translated into modern Turkish, has gained significant popularity in non-academic circles. However, inconsistencies exist between Sakin's version and Kreutel's transcription. The first English translation of the work was done by Giancarlo Casale,[18] utilizing versions by Kreutel, Tolasa, and Frédéric Hitzel. Curiously, few scholars have dealt with the original manuscript itself.

0.2 Literature Review on Osman Ağa's Captivity Memoir

The historical and linguistic aspects of Osman Ağa's memoirs have been studied by scholars drawing inferences about the text's linguistic diversity and understanding of Osman Ağa's education, linguistic skills. Turkologist Ekrem Čaušević revealed the linguistic characteristics of the text, identifying patterns of usage for words in different languages such as Turkish and

[14] Şevki M. Yazman, *Viyana Muhasarasından Sonra Avusturyalılara Esir Düşen Osman Ağa'nın Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Tanyeri Yayınları, 1961).
[15] Esat Nermi Erendor, *Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa'nın Anıları* (İstanbul, Aksoy Yayıncılık, 1971).
[16] Harun Tolasa, *Kendi Kalemiyle Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa: Bir Osmanlı Türk Sipâhisinin Hayatı ve Esirlik Hatıraları* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 2004).
[17] Orhan Sakin, *Bir Osmanlı Askerinin Sıradışı Anıları 1688-1700* (İstanbul: Ekim Yayınları, 2007); also see the Hungarian translation: Pál Fodor, ed., *Osman Aga, A gyaurok rabságában-Pasák és generálisok között* [In the Captivity of the Giaour: Between Pashas and Generals], trans. László Jólesz (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1996).
[18] Giancarlo Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels: The Memoir of an Ottoman Muslim in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2021).

Serbo-Croatian.[19] His analysis of the sentence structure shows that Osman Ağa tended to construct sentences in Turkish with the non-finite verb form, and structural and semantic patterns borrowed from a South Slavic language. Čaušević argues that Bosnian/Croatian formed the foundation of Osman Ağa's Turkish, perhaps indicating this was his mother tongue. This analysis is quite useful to understand the linguistic features in Osman Ağa's works and also to speculate about his education, language abilities and his childhood. In another linguistic study, Ottomanist Selim Kuru uses Kreutel's Ottoman Turkish printed edition to examine Osman's handwriting and word choices. Kuru does so to assess if Osman received training in the German language during his period of captivity. Moreover, he suggests that this exploration is just the beginning, indicating the potential for broader projects using similar resources. Osman Aga's account of slavery, with its composition intertwining traditional anecdotal narrative with a temporally and spatially well-framed linear narrative, presents a liminal text at the frontiers of literary inquiry into premodern textualities.[20] Unlike these works, this thesis will not be a literary and linguistic textual analysis, but will utilize Kuru's and Čaušević's analyses to understand Osman's education and his career as a diplomat.

Aslıhan Aksoy-Sheridan thoroughly examines various aspects of Osman Ağa's memoir, including his social and personal conditions. This analysis illuminates the memoir's historical background, such as the Ottoman Empire's loss of Central European territories and the subsequent period known as the "Tulip Era," a relatively peaceful time. Sheridan briefly emphasizes the emotional foundations of Osman Ağa's need to retrospectively record his experiences, especially after losing family members and prosperity in the Ottoman-Habsburg border regions. Considering possible chronological and factual inconsistencies in Osman Ağa's

[19] Ekrem Čaušević, "Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa'nın Esaret Hatıraları Adlı Eserinde Kullandığı Türkçe ve Etnik Kökeni Hakkında Dilbilimsel bir İnceleme," *Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies (JOLS)* 5, no. 11 (2018): 23-31.
[20] Kuru, "In the Realm of Darkness."

memoirs, the analysis points to both unintentional errors and deliberate choices contributing to self-fashioning. She also explores the societal and personal functions of Osman Ağa's self-narrative, touching upon its role as a resume to secure potential patrons in Istanbul. Her discussion looks into the dilemma between reality and fiction in captivity narratives and brings out the need for a nuanced understanding of historical sources. Overall, the article provides an examination of Osman Ağa's memoirs, simultaneously addressing issues such as individual experience, socio-political context, and the complexities of self-representation in historical narratives, pointing in promising directions for future research.[21]

In Furkan Öztürk's article, he likewise focuses on the cultural and historical context of the period by examining the narrative in relation to historical events such as the Ottoman Empire's siege of Vienna and the Ottoman-Russian wars. He emphasizes Osman Ağa's personal development during the seven years he spent in Vienna. Language acquisition, professional growth, learning from various events, and the overall process of maturation emerge as significant themes in the text. The narrative centers on Osman Ağa's ability to communicate with his surroundings and his efforts to become a likable slave during his days in Vienna, highlighting the theme of social relationships. Öztürk evaluates folkloric elements specific to Rumelian Turks, the narrative significance of the Danube River, and the dramatic elements of life in Vienna found in Osman's memoirs. [22]

Hajanalka Tóth's article emphasizes the complexity of diplomatic relations on the Habsburg-Ottoman border in the early eighteenth century and the importance of Osman Ağa's collection of letters for the resolution of border issues. Although not originally Osman's memoirs, it is a work based on correspondence during his diplomatic career after his captivity.

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[21] R. Aslıhan Aksoy-Sheridan, "Nostalgia of a Frustrated Ottoman Subject: Reading Osman Agha of Timişoara's Memoirs as Self-Narrative," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): 323-330.
[22] Furkan Öztürk, "Osmanlı Edebiyatında Birinci Ağızdan Anlatılar Çerçevesinde Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa'nın Otobiyografisi," *Cedrus* 3 (2015): 329-336.

It deals in detail with the problems arising from the Peace Treaty of Karlovy Vary and emphasizes Osman Ağa's role in the border disputes with the Habsburg empire. It reveals the complexity of this period, focusing on the construction of military installations in the border regions and the security of the border. The details of Osman Ağa's letters provide an analysis of the tensions between border officials, actions contrary to the Karlovy Vary Peace Treaty, and how they were resolved.[23]

In a more recent work, Ömer Gezer has brought previously undiscovered details to light through research in Austrian archives (HHStA and Kriegsarchiv) on Osman's life after his captivity. Gezer has provided useful clues to understand the social and economic environments in which Osman found himself. This information allows for a closer examination of the purpose behind the writing of the memoirs. Gezer notes that Osman Ağa worked as an interpreter in Vienna and later took on the role of a border interpreter in Vidin. Gezer traces questions about why the book was written, emphasizing the impact of Osman's role as a border interpreter, which began after his return from Vienna, on the development of his career. Osman Ağa's role as an interpreter in Vienna and his relationship with Habsburg envoys highlight his significance as diplomat in the borderlands of the Ottoman Empire. Gezer's article presents a fresh analysis by bringing together Osman Ağa's works with Ottoman and Austrian archival sources. [24]

The most comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of Osman Ağa's memoirs is found in Giancarlo Casale's introductory essay to his book *Prisoner of the Infidels*.[25] Casale draws attention to the mystery surrounding Osman's age and underlines the inconsistencies in his claims about his youth. By emphasizing the complex nature of self-representation and identity, Casale suggests that Osman's portrayal of himself as a very young man could serve a literary

[23] Hajnalka Tóth, "Temesvári Oszmán Aga levélgyűjteménye. Habsburg–oszmán–kuruc határvidéki konfliktusok a 18. század elején," *Certamen* 3 (2016): 283-94. (Translated via DeepL)
[24] Ömer Gezer, "Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa-Esir, Tercüman Ve Yazar," *Türkbilig* 35 (2018): 73-88.
[25] Giancarlo Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 1-24.

purpose. Osman's memoir is considered a groundbreaking work representing the first Ottoman Turkish autobiography. Casale compares Osman's narrative style with other contemporary "ego documents," highlighting its depth, introspection, and rich storytelling. The introduction brings out the innovative nature of Osman's work within the broader literary landscape of his time. However, Casale refrains from making comparisons with similar works in Europe. Additionally, he addresses Osman's moral ambiguity, particularly his later collaboration with Habsburg diplomats.

Moreover, in a short blog post, Casale emphasizes the rarity of detailed accounts of intimate life in seventeenth-century Europe, especially of women. Osman's memoir stands out not only as a pioneering literary work, but also for its intimate and empathetic portrayal of complex female characters.[26] Casale emphasizes Osman's decision to populate his memoirs with different female characters representing various social positions and detail his relationships with them. Unlike other articles written about Osman, Casale briefly names the female characters who were instrumental in Osman's self-construction. Osman's descriptions of these women challenge the conventions of Ottoman and European literature by providing a unique window into intimate life in early modern Europe. Casale draws attention to the introspective and emotional tone Osman uses to describe his romantic relationships. Osman's descriptions of his romantic encounters, including those with a female lover and a young boy, show his efforts to portray himself as always desirable. Countess Charlotte Ursula von Limburg-Styrum, Osman's legal owner during his captivity, is portrayed as a strong but benevolent figure. He explores Osman's conflicted feelings about his decision to escape without asking the countess for his release papers, and his complex relationships with various women, from the tragic story of a young Muslim captive to his encounters with the likes of

[26] Giancarlo Casale, "The Intimate Lives of 17th-Century Women, Told Through the Eyes of a Muslim Slave," *University of California Press Blog Spot*, Sept. 7th, 2021.

"Fatima of Belgrade." Casale asks fascinating questions about the lives of the women whose stories intersect with Osman's, emphasizing the importance of Osman's memoir in allowing readers to imagine the many possible lives these women could have lived. By raising questions about the untold stories of the different women in Osman's narrative and the impact of their encounters on Osman's unique journey, Casale was the first to address many of the key issues that I plan to pursue in my thesis.

Influential in the development of a methodological approach to early Ottoman personal narratives is Cemal Kafadar's article “Self and Others,” in which he shares his discovery of an Ottoman dervish's diary (*Sohbetname*), challenging the assumption that personal writings such as diaries, memoirs or letters were absent in Ottoman literature before the Tanzimat period in the nineteenth century. By referring to Osman Ağa's memoirs, Kafadar's article emphasizes their potential to redefine the traditional boundaries of Ottoman society and culture. Osman Ağa's memoirs could contribute to developing a new approach to the history of the mentalities of early modern Ottoman society and the sense of self within it. Although Kafadar’s overall focus is not on Osman's captivity narrative, his article had a major impact on the memoir’s popularity.[27]

There is one thesis written on the memoirs of Osman Ağa, completed at McGill University by Jacob Westermann, focuses on the role of autobiography within Ottoman society and explores how such writings were utilized among different social classes. Methodologically, the research emphasizes the significance of autobiography, which creates a kind of agreement between the author and the reader, using the concept called the autobiographical pact coined by Philippe Lejeune. Using Osman's personal experiences, Westermann argues that the autobiography unfolds an emotional and identity journey detailing the challenges faced during

[27] Cemal Kafadar, "Self and others: The diary of a dervish in seventeenth century Istanbul and first-person narratives in Ottoman literature," *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 121-150.

captivity and his return to Ottoman society. His use of the translated version of Osman's memoirs as a primary source raises various questions, as the source is based on Orhan Sakin's translation with transcription by Harun Tolasa, which does not precisely match Kreutel's original transcribed Ottoman Turkish version. Westermann's thesis employs the concept of social death to understand Osman's experience of captivity and its effects on his identity.[28] Overall, the text discusses how the genre of autobiography operates in the Ottoman context, however, my thesis focuses not on the overall life story of Osman Ağa, but aims to analyze his memoir itself, including Osman's representations of his personal networks, identity practices, and his perspectives on women, religion, and sexuality.

In conclusion, this literature review has traced the spread of Osman's autobiography, navigating its delayed discovery and translation into multiple languages, creating a connection between Osman's story and the socio-political developments of his era. Scholars have contributed to our understanding of Osman's memoir by examining linguistic features, social conditions, and paratextual elements, thereby highlighting the memoirs' multifaceted nature. The significance of Osman's work within the literary landscape is elevated by Casale's meticulous analysis and emphasis on intimate aspects. Kafadar's methodological views and Gezer's archival research give us useful background information. Kuru and Čaušević's theses help us understand the autobiographical aspect and the subtleties of language use.

0.3 Sources & Methodology

[28] Jacob Westermann, "The self in captivity: Slavery and autobiographical rebirth in the memoirs of Osman Ağa (1670-1725)" (MA thesis, McGill University, 2021); Özgür Gürlek, "Temeşvarlı Osman B. Ahmed Ağa'nın Nemçe Tarihi Tercümesi," (PhD diss., Marmara University, 2018).

Even with its widespread appeal, some aspects of Osman's memoir are still unexplored and call for more research, gaps that I aim to help fill in this thesis. For instance, while Osman's memoirs are undoubtedly intriguing, it is a fact that they are not entirely unique; similar examples can be found in both the Ottoman and European contexts. His fluid personality, shaped by the fears of religious conversion and enslavement in the seventeenth century, can be considered ordinary within the struggles for survival in the unfamiliar territories of the "infidels." Moreover, Osman's memoir has not yet been placed in the context of other works of his time, including other self-narratives, having so far been considered separately.

Besides Osman's memoir itself, I will use a number of other early modern primary sources. *Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk* (Treatise on the advantages of kings), another early modern captivity narrative, purports to be the memoirs of a captured Ottoman Janissary, who explains that he had to return from his beloved France due to religious concerns (*din muhabbeti*).[29] Yet to be thoroughly examined, this manuscript resembles Osman Ağa's memoirs in its writing style. The author's anonymity and possibility that it was written by a Frenchman proficient in Ottoman Turkish may have hindered the work from being used more widely by historians.[30] Nevertheless, given that its direct contribution to the discourse on woman, freedom and religious conversion and its status as an early Ottoman Turkish source, I believe that it is a useful source regardless of its authorship. The manuscript describes a dialog (*sohbetname*) between an Ottoman officer named Ahmed Ağa and an Egyptian janissary named Süleyman who was captured by the French. Süleyman describes Paris and its surroundings, as well as the customs, social life, and political and military systems of France. After a prologue in which Süleyman is introduced by Mustafa Ağa, another former captive of the Europeans, the narration

[29] Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS. Tur Suppl. 221.
[30] "Un Janissaire à Paris ou un Français au Caire? Le Risâlatu Fawâ'idi l-Mulûk, BNF Suppl. Turc 221," in *Déchiffrer le passé d'un empire: Hommage à Nicolas Vatin et aux humanités ottomanes*, eds. Elisabetta Borromeo, Frederic Hitzel, and Benjamin Lellouch, 581-600 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022). (I translated the article via DeepL and the author shared his unpublished transcription with me, so I used those.)

switches to the perspective of Janissary Süleyman.[31] Hasan Esiri's *Risâle-i Hediyyetü'l-Muslimîn* (1714) is a work written by another former slave who was captured by Habsburg forces after the siege of Vienna, long after his captivity.[32] Its subject is the importance of marriage in Islam and the 'ugliness of bad acts' such as *oğlancılık* (sodomy) and *livata* (homosexuality).[33] I will also make use of Evliya Çelebi's travel memories of Vienna,[34] as well as Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq's *Turkish Letters*.[35] I will also refer to the autobiography of Konstantin Mihailović, an Orthodox Christian captured and enlisted in the janissary corps during the Ottoman siege of NovoBrdo (near modern-day Kosovo) in 1455. He wrote a memoir about his experiences in Ottoman service after he regained his freedom and returned to his Christian community in the early 1460s.[36] The *Tractatus* by Georgius of Hungary (ca. 1480) recounts the enduring ordeal of a Christian slave in Ottoman Empire, who reflects on his experiences, following his eventual escape. Georgius's Tractatus can be categorized as a form of life-writing that falls somewhere between an autobiography and a scholarly treatise, a religious pamphlet, and a travel journal.[37]

[31] There are only 4 sources I have seen so far that mention this manuscript: Kafadar, "Self and Others," 132-133; Marinos Sariyannis, "Un Janissaire à Paris ou un Français au Caire?," 581-600; Belkıs Altuniş Gürsoy, "Siyasetname hüviyetinde bir esaretname," *Erdem* 60 (2011): 77-142; Gündüz Akıncı, *Türk-Fransız Kültür İlişkileri (1071-1859): Başlangıç Dönemi* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1973).
[32] Hediyyetü'l-Müslimîn, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Yazma Bağışlar Koleksiyonu, Nr: 3474,
[33] Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Yazma Bağışlar Koleksiyonu, Nr: 3474.
[34] Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı, Zekeriya Kurşun, and İbrahim Sezgin, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 304 numaralı yazmanın transkripsiyonu, dizini* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003).
[35] Edward Seymour Forster, trans., *The Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbeq* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).
[36] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 51-59: Mihailovic, in his work "Memoirs of a Janissary," recounts his involvement in the Ottoman siege of Constantinople in 1453, where he served as part of the Serbian contingent led by despot Djuradj Brankovic. Subsequently captured by the Ottomans during the siege of Novo Brdo in 1455, he was enlisted in the janissary corps, although the specific nature of his duties during his service remains undisclosed. In 1463, he was stationed in Bosnia with a janissary garrison, but following the conquest of the fortress of Zvecaj by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, Mihailovic switched allegiance and joined the Christian army; Konstantin Mihailovic, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. by B. Stolz and S. Soucek (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975).
[37] Georgius of Hungary, *Tractatus de Moribus, Condictionibus Et Nequicia Turcorum/Traktat Über Die Sitten, Die Lebensverhältnisse Und Die Arglist Der Türken*, trans. Reinhard Klockow (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993).

Although the sources I examine have been used before on similar topics, they have not been analyzed together until now. In particular, the works of Süleyman the Janissary of Egypt and Hasan Esiri are also known to have been produced in the eighteenth century and have been used much less by historians. By using them in conjunction with Osman's memoir, I hope to gain a comparative perspective.

As Kafadar points out, defining the traditional boundaries of Ottoman social and cultural history awaits the collective examination and evaluation of contributions towards formulating new approaches to the history of mentalities and self-perceptions within society.[38] By engaging with Osman's memoir as a process of self-fashioning in which he consistently defends himself and attempts to persuade the reader to find him justified, I aim to examine the memoirs of Osman Ağa as part of this broader turn in the cultural history of the Ottoman Empire and the early modern world.

0.4 Structure

In the first chapter, I analyze Osman's discourses on sexuality and his perception of women and compare his discourses with those of early modern writers writing about sexuality and gender roles in transimperial contexts, such as Hasan Esiri's *Hediyyetü'l-Müslimîna*, the anonymous dialogue of Janissaries Süleyman Ağa (*Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk*), Evliya Çelebi's *seyahatname*, Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq's *Turkish Letters*, and more. In doing so, I discuss issues common to the sources, such as moral superiority and the need to draw attention to their religiosity as it related to sexual matters. I argue that, as someone from a common background who went on to write a self-narrative of his experiences crossing the

[38] Kafadar, "Self and Others," 132.

cultural and physical barriers separating Ottoman and Habsburg Europe, Osman Ağa exemplifies the microhistorical concept of the "exceptional normal." His extraordinary narrative reveals both the experiences and concerns of the class of border soldiers and slaves from which he came, as well as the pressures he faced upon his return and upon his elevation to a higher social class.

In my second chapter, I continue to explore many of similar themes and concepts, contending that Osman's chosen words reveal an effort to restore a sense of social and religious belonging. Through this discussion, I am expanding on Tijana Krstić's argument that life writing is a pragmatic process of reintegrating oneself into society. Osman's account echoes Krstić's interpretation. Later in the same chapter, I again use several sources to argue that Osman Ağa's discourses on conversion are part of a trend in the seventeenth-century Mediterranean world. These sources include Paolo di Pietro's confession to the Inquisitorial Court, and the conversations of Janissaries Süleyman Ağa. Additionally, I reference the captivity memoirs of Christian convert Konstantin Mihailović, and the life story of Georgius of Hungary, who was captured by the Ottomans.

Unlike the structure of my thesis, Osman's memoirs address women, sexuality, faith and conversion together. This is also the case in the works of other writers of his time. For the reader's understanding, I have divided these topics into parts, but it is important to make it clear that for Osman, all of these topics were a whole. I argue, first, that they all represent exceptional examples of the concerns common to Osman's time and his social milieu and, second, that served as key features in the self-fashioning process which was key to his reintegration into his society as he sought to prove his moral and religious fidelity.

CHAPTER 1: OSMAN AĞA AND TRANSIMPERIAL DISCOURSES OF SEX AND GENDER

"Come! Take off your clothes and get in!"[39]

The narration of sexual 'deviance' plays an important role in many early modern captivity narratives. In his memoir, Osman Ağa repeatedly describes encounters with women and sexually charged encounters with both male and female individuals. This chapter seeks to understand the role of Osman's inclusion of such details about sexual matters, same-sex relationships, and the characters that emerge in gender-based incidents, with particular attention to his moral understanding of these topics and accompanying self-fashioning. Although his articulations of ideas of sexual propriety and European conceptions of the Ottomans seem exceptional, especially for someone of his social standing, I use writings from contemporary Ottoman authors to suggest that these ideas, and their open discussion, were less unusual than they might seem in the context of early modern travelogues and captivity narratives. In this chapter, I place Osman's work in conversation with Hasan Esiri's treatise about the importance of marriage in Islam and criticism of sodomy (*Hediyyetü'l-Müslimîna*), the anonymous dialogue of Janissaries Süleyman Ağa about his captivity in France (*Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk*), the famous travelogue of Evliya Çelebi and Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (*Turkish Letters*), and others. As mentioned in the introduction, Osman Ağa's memoir is thus an example of the concept of the "exceptional normal," providing a window into the moral and social concerns that were prevalent in the early modern period from the rare perspective of a self-made elite who traversed the physical and cultural borders

[39] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 107. "«Gel soyun döşeğe gir! »" Uğur Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi: Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa'nın Esaretnâmesi'nin orijinal ve sadeleştirilmemiş Latin harfleriyle Transkripsiyonu* (Berlin: Epubli, 2020), 48.

between Ottoman and Habsburg Europe in an exceptional way.[40] Moreover, like some of his contemporaries, Osman consistently describes sexually charged situations with a mixture of disclosure followed by a clarification of his faithfulness to normative morals, fashioning himself as a religious man.

In the early sixteenth century, predating the birth of Osman Ağa, a transformative period of European-Ottoman relations unfolded marked by the imperial rivalry between the Ottomans and Habsburgs, which was in turn characterized by close contact and exchange. Tijana Kristić has challenged the assertion that profound distinctions existed in "gender regimes, honor codes, and popular culture between early modern Muslim and Christian societies." Her scholarship significantly disrupts the Orientalist understanding of "clear-cut religious and cultural boundaries in the early modern Mediterranean." Instead, she underscores the intricate processes of identity formation in areas of inter-religious and inter-imperial interaction.[41] At this point, it's important to understand Osman as someone who straddles borders but still falls within the margins of societal norms, all while keeping Kristić's viewpoint in mind.

Osman Ağa's narrative is thus an exceptional illustration of the prevalent discourse related to sexuality and gender relations, particularly concerning differences between imperial and religious contexts. This discourse is especially significant within the context of border regions, where members of different social and religious groups came into close contact and identities, genders, cultures, and social practices interacted and blended. As exemplified below, news and rumors circulated swiftly. Osman, harboring certain ideas and prejudices about the Habsburgs and the *gâvur* (infidel), encountered similar assumptions about the Ottomans from the other side.

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[40] Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory*, 27-29.
[41] Tijana Krstić, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no.1 (2009), 37.

1.1 Discourses on *Oğlancılık*

Osman narrates a conversation between himself and a young boy during his stay in Kapfenberg.[42] Owing to the considerable number of servants accompanying his second master, General Stubenberg, Osman found himself without accommodation. Under the directive of the general's wife, arrangements were made for Osman to reside temporarily with the toll clerk. The clerk showed his small room equipped with a mattress and some bedding for Osman's use during this period. In Osman's words:

> The toll collector was a fleshy, still immature youth, no more than fifteen or sixteen years old…When evening fell, he took off his clothes, jumped trouserless into the bed, and called out to me: "Come! Take off your clothes and get in!" Like it or not, I stripped down to my drawers and undershirt and climbed in, the bed being just barely wide enough for two people... As we lay there, he began the most wide-ranging of conversations, asking me about the unnatural vices of the Turks that he had heard spoken of and wondering aloud what these might be like—all the while lying naked on the mattress![43]

What is most striking in this passage is that Osman, as always, presents himself as a moral man, describing the child in detail as an attractive being, yet stating that he is innocent of attraction. This is reminiscent of a pattern followed by other contemporary sources that falls somewhere between confession and moral affirmation.

The toll collector's question to Osman conveys the implication that same-sex intimacy was already well-known as a subject of discourse, particularly when it came to perceived

[42] Kapfenberg lies 60 kilometers to the north of Graz.

[43] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 107: "Vâmcı ise henüz on beş on altı yaşında bir civân-ı mülahham ve nâpuhte kimesne idi. Mezbûr kendüsü bizden gücenmeyüb tayyib-i hâtır ile bizi kabûl edüb ahşâm oluncak soyunub tumansız döşeğe girüb bizi dahî çağırub, «Gel soyun döşeğe gir! » Biz dahî bi-hasbi'l-iktizâ soyunub tôn gömlek ile döşeğe girüb döşek dahî ancak iki kişi sıkıca yatacak kadar vüs'ati var idi. Yatub ammâ bize göre bir ta'accüb olunacak kaziyye olub eğer bir gayrı lûtî kimesnelerden bizim yerimizde olsa bînihâye murâdı hâsıl olurdu. Zîrâ mezbûr tâze oğlan ve her şeye kā'il olmağla dürlü dürlü musâhabetler açub Türklerin fi'l-i şenî'lerini istimâ' eyledüğü üzre bizden su'âl edüb, «Ol gûne işler nice olur?» deyü döşekde çıplak müzâkere ederdi. Ve'l-hâsıl kendümüzü her vechle hıfz edüb gâhîce mükeyyif iken dahî şaşırmayub bir dürlü kabâhatimiz zuhûr etmedi." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi*, *48*.

differences between imperial and religious contexts. Although Osman describes it as an incident that shocked him, there is evidence that same sex activity was a topic of common gossip in the early modern Ottoman Empire.[44] For instance, Noel Malcolm's article "Forbidden Love in Istanbul" analyzes the interrogation reports of the Venetian embassy in Galata, Istanbul in 1588 to uncover a sexual scandal between two men. It is clear from the interrogations that same-sex intercourse was forbidden and disapproved of, but Malcolm's analysis suggests that moral outrage was not the dominant tone in the reports, even if some actually disapproved. As Malcolm writes, "to have the population outside the bailate — Christian or Muslim — gossiping about a sodomitical affair within it would be to undermine a significant assumption of superiority." It is highly like that there was a perception that Christian attitudes towards sodomy came from a sense of superiority. Embedded in the cultural and moral self-perception of Western Christians was the notion that sodomy was uniquely widespread in Muslim, and especially Ottoman, societies.[45] As the sources clearly show, beliefs and practices of same-sex intimacy differed in various social and economic classes and communities in the Ottoman Empire. In any case, trans-imperial agents such as Malcolm's embassy officials, travelers, or slaves such as Hasan Esiri, and Osman himself were key to the dissemination and exaggeration of these conceptions.

In Hasan Esiri's *Risâle-i Hediyyetü'l-Muslimîn* (1714), the author recounts an evening when he was in the company of his friends and they were praising boys, denigrating women and saying that they sexually preferred boys to women. He confesses that he sometimes couldn't help but laugh during these conversations, mostly staying silent and listening. He writes that on the same night, he dreamt of a gathering of ulema and shaykhs, including his

[44] At the end of his memoir, Osman states that he lives in Tophane, Istanbul. Today, it is a 10-minute walk from Galata, where the events mentioned by Noel Malcolm took place.
[45] Noel Malcolm, "Forbidden Love in Istanbul: Patterns of Male–Male Sexual Relations in the Early-Modern Mediterranean World," *Past & Present* 257, no. 1 (2022), 61.

father. His father is crying, telling him that he is unhappy about what happened in the gathering that night and that the scholars and sheikhs condemned him. Hasan states that when he woke up, he found himself crying and started writing the treatise.[46] It is a remarkable example of the same kind of disclosure followed by moral clarification which we see in Osman's writing. For Osman, this disclosure is being in bed with a young and beautiful boy, while for Hasan it is being in an 'inappropriate' social circle and laughing. The conception of the prevalence and 'wrongness' of sodomy in the Ottoman Empire was part of a tradition that had been followed long before Hasan and Osman.

Dror Ze'evi says of the early modern Ottoman world, "There was never a completely unified view of sexuality, no single coherent internal or external voice to guide people through the socio-sexual maze."[47] Early modern Ottoman literary culture was full of texts related to the theology of love, the rules of sexuality, love literature, sex manuals.[48] Texts like *Al-'iqd almufrad fi manabbat al-amrad* (The Distinct Necklace on Love of Beardless Youth by Al-Dajj'ni) guides to the Sufi path, regarding religious obligations related to sexuality.[49] Additionally, legal treatises and court records can be included in this range of examples.[50] Traces of sensitivity towards sodomy can be found in a polemical work written between 1556-

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[46] Göker İnan, "Hasan Esîrî'nin Mi'yârü'd-düvel ve Misbârü'l-milel İsimli Tarih ve Coğrafya Eseri," (PhD thesis, Marmara University, 2017), 32-33: "bir dost odasına uğrayup ol meclisde cem, olan yârânın ekserî mahbûb-dost olmalarıyla bir-iki sâ'at kadar oğlan medhi ve nisâ zemmiyle evkāt geçirilüp ve bu hakīr dahi estağfirullâh gâh dıhk ve gâh sükût idüp...yatduğumda hâba varup gördüm ki bir âlî meclisde vâfir ulemâ ve meşâyıh ve ba'zı halk dahi cem, olmuş ve pederim merhûm dahi ol meclisde dâhil; lâkin ağlayup mahzûn oturur. Yanına varduğumda bana iltifât itmeyüp "Niçün ağlarsız?" diyü su'âl itdüğümde 'Bakmaz mısın bana senden ötürü ne kadar tan itdiler. Niçün sen anlara tâbi, olursun! Hakk teâlânın ve peygamberinin medh itdüği tāifeyi zemm ve hezl idersin! ... uyandıkda kendümi ağlar ve gözüm yaşı yüz yasduğına te'sîr itmiş buldum. Ve seher vakti işbu muhtasar tercümeye mübaşeret ettim."; Hasan Esîrî had close ties with his father, as he mentions in *Mi'yârü'd-Düvel ve Misbârü'l-Milel* (1731), which includes his captivity, history and geography narratives: Menderes Velioğlu, "Cebeciler Kethüdâsı Esirî Hasan Ağanın Osmanlı askerî teşkilatına dair görüşleri" (MA thesis, İstanbul University, 2013), 36-38.

[47] Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006), 27

[48] Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 29.

[49] Ze'evi, *Producing Desire, 89.*

[50] Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, Chapter 2.

57 by a Hungarian convert named Murad b. Abdullah, where he recounts his personal observations of Ottoman society. According to Murad, some people of the time find it acceptable to indulge in the lustful gaze and lustful thoughts about young boys, claiming they are not forbidden to the eye. Murad asserts that these individuals deny the 30th verse of Surah Nur, which instructs believing men to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and thus, he declares them as unbelievers. As evident from his statements, Murad, like his contemporaries, implicitly acknowledges that young boys are objects of desire. He expresses deep concern that many scholars and Sufis also do not refrain from such evil deeds.[51] By the seventeenth century, there had not been much change in moral concerns regarding this issue, as seen in Osman Ağa's clear clarification to avoid misunderstandings and assure that he wasn't eyeing the young boy.

On the other hand, Osman's contemporary, the famous seventeenth century elite traveler Evliya Çelebi, wrote the following about his observations when visiting Peşpehil/Schwechat in the Habsburg lands:

> One day when I saw a boy named Meykel, the son of the chief inspector, with red apple cheeks and red lips like cherries, I mistakenly fell into raw greed and kissed him on his red cheek at dawn and a salty sweat appeared on his lips and I thought he had sweated a lot. Then I saw that this sunshine boy washed his face and eyes with his own urine. I knew that it was the urine that tasted salty on my lips when I kissed this boy. I gave up kissing other beautiful girls and boys because it was immoral. Because they wash their faces with urine, their bodies become very soft. There was a time when the King of Austria was enjoying himself with five or six hundred distinguished, unique, young tender little boys like the sun and the moon, unshrinking and unashamed German youths, and our hearts were consoled.[52]

[51] Ismail Emre Pamuk, "Bir 16. Yüzyıl Okur yazarının Zihin Dünyası: Tercüman Murad ve Tesviyetü't-Teveccüh İle'lHak Adlı Eseri" (Master's thesis, Istanbul University, 2021).

[52] Dankoff, Kahraman, Dağlı, Kurşun, and Sezgin, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 150: "başkomsar oğlu Meykel nâm gulâmı la'l-gûn tebekânî yanaklar ve kiraz gibi al dudaklar ile görünce hatâ'en tama'-ı hâma düşüp vakt-i seherde la'l-gûn yanağından bûs etdikde hakîrin dudağına bir nemekîn arak gelüp arak-âlûd olmuş zan etdim. Sonra gördüm bu pençe-i âfitâb muğ-pîçe kendü sidiğiyle yüzün ve gözün yaykar. Bildim ki bu gulâmı bûs etdikde leblerime nemekîn lezzeti gelen sidik imiş. Gayri mahbûb u mahbûbelerin âlüfte ve âşüftelik sebebiyle bûs etmeden ferâğat etdim. Anıniçün bu diyâr kefereleri ve mahbûbları saruya mâ'il beyâzsı çehre-i zerdleri vardır, ammâ sidikle yüzlerin yaykadıklarından gâyet vücûdları nerm ü râm olurlar. Bir zamân Nemse çâsârının beş altı yüz aded mümtâz müstesnâ pençe-i âfitâb mehtâb misilli mûğzâde pîçe mahbûb-ı bî-hicâb cüvân Alman-ı bî-îmânlar ile gönül eğleyüp tesellî-i hâtır bulurduk."

These were Evliya's views at the time when Kara Mehmed Pasha traveled to Vienna with an embassy delegation. As can be seen, a slave could have an opinion on these issues, as could an elite traveling with an embassy delegation. Evliya Çelebi's purported stay in Vienna was of course shorter than Osman Ağa's, but it can be argued that similar discourses continued. What Evliya Çelebi, Osman Ağa, Murad b. Abdullah all have in common is that they all knew that a male-male relationship would be stigmatized as immoral and conveyed this in their texts.

However, as mentioned earlier, there are parts in Osman's memoirs which could be read as implying homoerotic or even same-sex encounters. "Ways of talking about and remaining silent about sex and sexuality were developed, more or less consciously, with the intention of avoiding the stimulation of impropriety."[53] Osman neither remains silent on nor legitimizes his encounters; instead, he communicates the explicit content through an opaque veil of secrecy. Despite making clear its prohibited nature, he imparts the narrative with an apparent sense of enjoyment in a form quite similar to the way that Evliya does. In Evliya's travelogue, he even openly admits that he made this "mistake." Although Evliya's claim that the young men that he had fun with "belonged" to the *Nemse Çâsârı* (Habsburg Emperor) may have indeed been an unusual situation for the period, and perhaps one of Evliya's many exaggerations, it is still possible to see these writings as exceptional examples of "normal" tensions between normative discourses and practices of sexuality that were common within the Ottoman world, as has already been discussed by Andrews, Kalpaklı, Ze'evi and Krstic. Moreover, with close geographical proximity and intertwining of the Ottoman Empire and "Christian Europe,", it would be surprising if the discourses found on one side of the border were not found in some

[53] Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds,* 15; For more on sexual discourses, see Selim Kuru, "Male Discourses of Gender and Sexuality: How History Omits the Ottoman Elites' Love of Literature," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, no. 2 (2020): 133-145; Tülay Artan and Irvin Cemil Schick, "Ottomanizing pornotopia: changing visual codes in eighteenth-century Ottoman erotic miniatures," *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art* (2013): 157-207; Stephen O. Murray, "Homosexuality in the Ottoman Empire," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 33, no. 1 (2007): 101-16.

form on the other. As demonstrated in the case of Osman's account of the toll collector and the reports of the Venetian embassy, people who were in social roles in the internal and external borderlands were aware of the existence and significance of differing but intertwined normative discourses and practices. In this sense, the moral, religious, and political concerns of each of these historical actors as actors who lived, were captured, and roamed the borders of present-day Austria, Hungary, and the Balkans may have been similar. I place Osman Ağa in this broader context as one exceptional example of an "ordinary" man of the borderlands, with concerns about sexuality and gender that are comparable with those of his contemporaries.

This section has emphasized Osman's efforts at self-fashioning while narrating a potentially homoerotically charged situation that he encountered, and the fact that this construction of identity and reproduction of normative boundaries is a discourse that his contemporaries also followed in their narratives of transimperial encounters. Osman's narrative largely gives an impression of candor. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the fact that the book was never copied raises the question of which circles and individuals the silence was broken for, and for whom were such intimate details were exchanged. The answer to the question of for whom he wrote is unknown, but it is a question that should be kept in mind when analyzing Osman's narratives about women and his own nightlife. One of the main things that make Osman's memoirs an exception to the usual is that Osman Ağa, who had a common background, wrote his experiences down. Another thing that makes this work different than the others I examine here is that it is a work that has not been copied and it is not clear whether it has been read by his contemporaries. Therefore, one of a series of dilemmas is why he did not keep these details of his private life or why he wanted to justify or not justify his morality. This significant (and timeless) dilemma is encapsulated well by Magnússon:

> The essential point here is the correlation between the external conditions that circumscribe the life of the individual in question and their inner life. Individuals in all societies live by rules and laws and are expected to go along with prespecified ideas on behavior that tradition has shaped from generation to generation. But inside every

> individual there are longings and desires that pull in different directions, and each and every one of us perceives his/her possibilities in different ways, often in opposition to received traditions and the precepts of society. In other words, the way society works calls up different responses in each individual, and as a result the paths that people choose for themselves often run directly counter to the paths they are supposed to take.[54]

1.2 Cross-Imperial Perceptions about Woman's Behavior

Nearly every female character whom Osman mentions in his memoirs is described as holding him in high regard and close intimacy, with the exception of some converts to Christianity, whom he presents as villainesses. After the passing of Osman's second master, he entered the service of Countess Isabella von Lamberg, the wife of his third master. In a later part of Osman's memoirs, the same noblewoman plays a pivotal role in facilitating his journey to Vienna. Although it would be an overstatement to infer any romantic implications, as Osman does not explicitly assert such a notion, he expresses surprise about the lady's demeanor towards him.[55] Osman also shares her satisfaction with his service during the six months he spent in Kapfenberg while serving the lady, emphasizing her special favor and intimacy with him. Here again, Evliya Çelebi's description of Viennese women spring instantly to mind. In Evliya's words: "The men and women do not flee from one another. The women sit together with us Ottomans, drinking and chatting, and their husbands do not say a word but rather step outside. And this is not considered shameful."[56] This excerpt sheds light on the fact that if the

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[54] Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory*, 20-21.

[55] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 86-87: "I persuaded the steward to go back once more to my lady and argue my case (being sent to another master). This time, my lady became extremely upset, and immediately afterward she had me brought to her quarters. Speaking to me gently, she said: "Why are you not happy here? I love you well and for this reason keep you at my side. Do you want for something?.. Has someone hurt you? If so, tell me! Your work here is not onerous, so why are you unsatisfied?" She said these and many other things, and as she spoke, tears came to her eyes and she wept."

[56] Robert Dankoff and Sooyong Kim, trans., *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Çelebi* (London: Eland Press, 2010), 255; Dankoff, Kahraman, Dağlı, Kurşun, and Sezgin: *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 154: "Ve âb [u] hevâsı latîf olduğundan mahbûb u mahbûbesi memdûhdur. Hattâ erleri ve avretleri birbirlerinden kaçmayup bizim Osmânlı ile avretleri bir yerde oturup ayş [u] ışret etdükde kocası bir şey demeyüp kapudan taşra gider, ayb değildir, zîrâ bu kâfiristânın cümlesinde hüküm avretindir."

casual attitude and friendliness of Viennese women came as a surprise to someone like Evliya, who had seen many places and lived in big cities, it is certainly possible that Osman Ağa, coming from a provincial place like Tımışvar, could have romanticized the attitudes of such friendly and relaxed women. Intimacy with a noble and married woman like Lady Isabelle could have been intriguing and exotic for an Ottoman slave.[57] What Osman describes as intimacy could be argued to be a perceived, rather than real, intimacy. Osman came from a place with different gender norms. Married women of high social status were generally not very socially active,[58] at least not in the way which Osman described his master, the Countess.

However, it is also important to note that Ottoman women were active in a variety of disciplines, held social, economic, and political power, and occupied specific roles within the family and society, as show by previous scholarship. Moreover, numerous scholars of Ottoman women's history have demonstrated that it would be inaccurate to regard Ottoman women as a singular entity, and that women of varying socio-economic status, residing in varying geographies and during varying periods, had distinct experiences.[59] During the time that Osman and other Ottoman slaves served in the homes of their masters or in the social surroundings that they visited with them, they perhaps encountered people of a higher rank that they would have never encountered in the Ottoman Empire. It may be speculated, especially on the basis of the information about Osman's life after his captivity, that even if he served as a Dragoman, he probably did not meet women of the class he encountered in Vienna until he

[57] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidel,* 69: "Croatian girls would take me by the hand, one on one side and one on the other, and bring me to their private chambers. They would show me every attention, sitting alone with me for an hour or two in the greatest intimacy..."
[58] Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *Ottoman Women in Public Space* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
[59] Betül İpşirli Argit, "Women in the Early Modern Ottoman World: A Bibliographical Essay," *Journal of Academic Studies* 15, no. 60 (2014), 2; Svetlana Ivanova, "Judicial Treatment of the Matrimonial Problems of Christian Women in Rumeli During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History* (New York: IB Tauris, 2007); 153-201: Yvonne J. Seng, "Standing at the Gates of Justice: Women in the Law Courts of Early-Sixteenth Century Üsküdar, İstanbul," in *Contested States: Law, Hegemony and Resistance*, eds. Mindie Lazarus-Black and Susan F. Hirsch, 184-206 (New York: Routledge, 1994).

had to leave for Istanbul. It can be posited, then, that Osman's inferences, and therefore his surprise, may be based on an experience of women which is rooted in rural areas.

Thus, he likely misinterpreted her open social interaction with him across gender lines as an indication of intimacy, when it was, in fact, the norm in an eighteenth-century Habsburg context. In the anonymous *Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk* (Treatise on the Advantages of Kings), Janissary Süleyman is quoted as describing the women he encountered during his captivity (1685–93):

> ...powerful older women used to insist to me every day, "Come to our house." Ahmet Ağa said, "What kind of a saying is that? For a lady to insist you come to our house?" Süleyman replied, "Whatever is against the customs of this country exists in that land. And there are other things too, but this is not the time to talk about those." Ahmet Ağa said, "Say even those things."[60]

It is apparent that the unknown author of the work attempts to criticize the Ottoman Empire indirectly throughout the narrative. In one sense, this quote is not an insistence on a morally correct stance, but rather a demonstration to the average Ottoman of the surprising social life of European elite women. The author also mentions how easily French women are available, praises various aspects of life in France, and criticizes his own society, which lead him to be blamed for his loyalty to 'infidels'.[61]

Observations about the differences between the social situation of women in Ottoman lands and Christian Europe can also be found in Habsburg sources. Over a century before Osman Ağa's autobiography, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the Habsburg ambassador to the Porte from 1554 to 1562, who left behind one of the most detailed descriptions of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, shares his observations of Turkish women. We can see from this description that the bewilderment of Osman Ağa and Evliya Çelebi about European

[60] Unpublished transcription of *Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk,* provided to me by Marinos Sariyannis: "...ve gücle büyük hatunlar elbetde her gün bizim evimize gel deyü ibram ederler idi. *Ahmed Ağa* dedi ki: Bu nasıl sözdür bir karı elbetde siz bizim evimize gel deyü ibram ede. *Süleyman* dedi ki: Bu vilayetin adetine ne kadar muhalif var ise ol diyarda olagelmişdir ve bundan gayri dahi şeyler vardır amma söylemenin zamanı değildir dedi. *Ahmed Ağa* dedi ki: Onları dahi söyle..."

[61] Kafadar, "Self and Others," 121-150, 132.

women, part of a culture that dates back to an earlier period, if not the seventeenth century, is partially reflected in Busbecq's bewilderment about Turkish women:

> I will now… tell you about the high standard of morality which obtains among the Turkish women. The Turks set greater store than any other nation on the chastity of their wives. Hence, they keep them shut up at home, and so hide them that they hardly see the light of day. If they are obliged to go out, they send them forth so covered and wrapped up that they seem to passers-by to be mere ghosts and specters. They themselves can look upon mankind through their linen or silken veils, but no part of their persons is exposed to man's gaze. The Turks are convinced that no woman who possesses the slightest attractions of beauty or youth can be seen by a man without exciting his desires and consequently being contaminated by his thoughts. Hence all women are kept in seclusion.[62]

The master organ builder Thomas Dallam, who was dispatched from England at the beginning of the seventeenth century to install an organ in the royal court, expressed his surprise at the way women dressed in public: "The Turkishe and Morishe women do goo all wayes in the streetes with there facis covered, and the common reporte Goethe thare that they beleve, or thinke that the weomen have no souls. And I do thinke it weare well for them if they had none, for they never go to churche or other prayers, as the men dothe."[63] Towards the end of the seventeenth century, an adventurous French traveler tells of hearing some of his fellow countrymen talk indecently about Turkish ladies while he was disguised as a Turk. Even though he was a stranger from Europe, he felt obliged to respond to their behavior because it was so absurd and incorrect. He continued to pretend to be a native while he spoke to them, saying: "Know gentlemen . . . that by both reason and custom [our women] are much more reserv'd than yours. And though there may be some who perhaps may think bad enough, yet there is such good order taken throughout this empire, that they are deprived thereby of opportunity to act."[64]

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[62] Forster, *The Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbeq*, 117.
[63] J. Theodore Bent, ed., *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1893), 15; see also William Joseph Grelot, *A Late Voyage to Constantinople* (London: Printed by John Playford, 1683), 39.
[64] Grelot, *A Late Voyage to Constantinople*, 9.

Here perhaps one can point again to the confusion that Ze'evi is claming, that no single coherent internal or external voice to guide people through the socio-sexual maze.[65] In matters of morality, and therefore in matters of women, the situation has continued to be chaotic and contradictory.[66] This chaos also consists of the differences in perception of actors in different imperial, social class and economic situations. Osman Ağa's surprise, or rather his romantic implications, can be understood in terms of the context and time he is writing in.

In another example of the sexual suggestiveness mixed with explicit piety and morality that fills Osman's memoir, a maid named Margot,[67] who Osman claims is in love with him, suddenly appears in his bed one day just before dawn, when everyone is still asleep:

> She was fifteen years old, a darling dark-haired beauty with breasts like two oranges and a delightful figure. She climbed right into my bed and lay beside me, embraced me with both arms, and started kissing me! I opened my eyes and could hardly believe the situation in which I found myself. Was I dreaming? Was she an apparition? When I found the words to speak, I said: "Most gentle girl, however could you lower yourself to the level of a miserable wretch such as I? ..." She responded: "Oh my love! My heart is in torment and follows a mind of its own.[68]

Here, as in every romantic encounter that Osman narrates, he is careful to always present himself as the pursued rather than the pursuer. Although not meticulously crafted, one could argue that there is a conscious effort of self-fashioning in Osman's writing. Considering how Osman probably intended to create an impression of himself and how he might have shaped his narrative accordingly, it is possible to identify why he did not refrain from describing these details. This attempt to fashion oneself, which is quite common in ego documents, is rooted in

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[65] Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 27

[66] Although not the subject of this thesis, in terms of understanding the complexity of differences in discourse: In 16th centıry Europe, high moral standards were applied, informing all interaction between people. If someone misbehaved, he or she would be indirectly punished: they or their home might be targeted by a mob; a dead cat might be hung on the door; or the unfortunate individual might be assailed in his/ her home: Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory*, 125; see also Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, eds. Barabara A. Babcock and Victor Turner, 147-90 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

[67] Handmaiden to Countess von Lamberg (Osman's 3rd master), Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 163.

[68] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 87.

an earlier tradition. Osman confesses here succumbing to the passions of his 20s,[69] revealing that he struggled to resist before ultimately regaining control: "So I kept control of myself and did not sin to excess."[70] Despite the inconsistencies, Osman continues without hesitation. Narrating the subsequent days, he once again asserts his strong religious convictions by recounting that the girl attempted to enter his bed in the barn each night until his departure for Vienna, prompting him to eventually lock the door. While acknowledging an initial inclination to be seduced, in every case he claimed to have eventually held back through combination of bashfulness and prudence.[71]

As previously discussed in the case of the toll-keeper, Osman's proclamation of his adherence to normative moral standards in the midst of salacious narrative is similar to a scenario presented in Evliya Çelebi's travelogues. Several lines after describing being "overcome by temptation," Evliya Çelebi declares, "I gave up kissing other beautiful girls and boys because it was immoral.[72]" It is either to represent their opinion against the "sin" committed after the fact, or to follow the common style of textual discourse of their time. Although there are similarities in these parts, Osman's memoirs, taken as a whole, are quite different from Evliya's. As Casale suggests, although Osman does not mention his reading habits, it is known from the later stages of his career that he read and wrote German very well.[73] Therefore, it could be claimed that if Osman was influenced by the central European authors

[69] Osman Ağa gives the date of death of his parents as H. 1077 (M.1666-67) in his captivity and says that he was nine years old at that time. According to this calculation, Osman Ağa must have been born in 1657-58. Therefore, when he was captured, he was thirty-one years old, which contradicts the ages of eighteen and twenty-one that he refers to in many parts of his work, namely the captivity. Kreutel, on the other hand, compares the various possibilities and says that he was born in 1671: Kreutel und Spies, *Leben und Abenteuer des Dolmetschers Osman Aga*; Tolasa, *Kendi kalemiyle Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa*, 30.
[70] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 88.
[71] Casale, "The Intimate Lives of 17th-Century Women," 2.
[72] Dankoff, Kahraman, Dağlı, Kurşun, and Sezgin, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 150: "Gayri mahbûb u mahbûbelerin âlüfte ve âşüftelik sebebiyle bûs etmeden ferâğat etdim".
[73] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 15.

who were his contemporaries, were other abduction narratives in similar genres also influenced by European writers?

Coming back to the matter of discourse and women, there are also similarities in Osman Ağa's and Evliya's word choices about Austrian woman: "The breasts of the women of this land are completely naked and they have breasts as clear as white snow...but by the wisdom of God, the breasts of the women of this land are not as big as the breasts of the women of Rum. They all have breasts as small as orange… a fresh virgin girl with orange breasts…"[74] Similarly to Evliya, Osman constructs a narrative that strikes a balance between moral reassertion and confession by presenting himself as morally upright while indulging in intimate details. It should also be kept in mind that Osman went to Vienna as a slave and Evliya as a traveler/guest. So, while Evliya describes that women, young boys and all sorts of services were presented to him as a gift, Osman's narration emphasizes that his experiences were just what happened to him as he followed his master in one way or another.

Another example shows Osman Ağa's consistent efforts to emphasize his devout religious beliefs while narrating potentially morally compromising situations in which he found himself while in "infidel" lands. The memoir reveals an incident in which he strategically exploits the rape of a young Muslim girl, under the age of thirteen, the daughter of a high-ranking Ottoman official: "One night,..., the steward (Seyfried von Eyrsperg) got drunk and entered the servant girls' room. He went to the bed of the young girl. Caressing her here and there, and telling her who knows what, he managed to get into her bed and to break the seal of her virginity."[75] The presence of 'von' in the steward's name is significant to the power relations involved. In German surnames, 'von' serves as a noble preposition, indicating a

[74] Dankoff, Kahraman, Dağlı, Kurşun, and Sezgin, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 210: "avretlerin cümle sîneleri uryândır kim beyâz kar gibi berrâk sîneleri var…Ammâ hikmet-i Hudâ bu diyâr zenânelerinin memeleri Rûm nisvânı emcekleri gibi tulum kadar memeli değildir. Cümle turunç kadar küçük emcekleri var" and "turunc memeli bir duhter-i pâkîze-ahter".
[75] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 111.

connection to a noble family. It is noteworthy that the incident involving a Muslim slave being subjected to rape by a higher-standing steward is perceived as abnormal. It should also be noted that this was a punishable offense in the Ottoman context with which Osman would have been most familiar. In cases of rape or abduction, where serious violence is involved, the perpetrator was to be punished by castration.[76] According to Osman's words, the steward is clearly committing a 'moral crime' and is not hiding it. In Osman's own words, "When the deed was done, he then tried to hide the evidence by wiping away the blood with his handkerchief, but to no avail."[77]

According to Osman, the incident could have even led to the dismissal of the steward. Osman seizes upon this tragedy as a means to liberate himself from captivity, manipulating the steward by threatening to reveal his crime. Through a calculated strategy, Osman compels Seyfried von Eyrsperg to forge documents, facilitating his return to Tımışvar. The remarkable aspect lies in Osman's exploitation of the rape. Notably, he audaciously attempts to rationalize his actions, asserting the necessity of his own escape. The narrative underscores Osman's grappling with the complexities of morality, striving to convince readers that his actions were not only justified but morally righteous.

In conclusion, by claiming the repetition and widespread use of discourses of sexuality and gender in Osman's narrative in early modern sources, I pointed out that similar cultural and social norms are followed by the sources. It has been pointed out that certain forms are commonly observed in Osman's and others' writings. I briefly mentioned that this has already been discussed by many historians, but that Osman's place in this tradition has not yet been determined, the tradition being that Osman, like many others, always seems to follow a pattern of disclosure followed by moral justification or defense, and that he used this as a form of self-

[76] No sexual crime punished by death, but court records from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that the penalties were quite serious: Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 60.
[77] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 111.

fashioning. By quoting from Osman's encounters in the nightlife, with women, and men, it is argued that he used these encounters as an opportunity to bring attention to the fact that he was a moral and devout Muslim. It is also argued that Osman's memoirs are unusual as a source in that he repeatedly drew attention to similar social issues in a single source and made defenses that were repeated by writers with elite backgrounds. What is also exceptional about Osman is that he has a very different background from the authors of most of the sources with which he is compared.

CHAPTER 2: CONVERSION ANXIETIES IN OSMAN AĞA'S MEMOIR AND HIS WORLD

"When will you take me to the border of Islam?"[78] Osman's repetition of this phrase at the beginning of his captivity (1688), when he is constantly making escape plans, gives clues as to what it means for him to escape. Captivity was not only a physical restriction but also a serious process of questioning and transformation in terms of identity and faith. Besides revealing internal tensions in Osman's faith and his sexuality, Osman's memoirs betray a profound preoccupation with conversion. This holds significant importance within his narration, as shown by his immediate inquiry into the religious affiliations of every new person that he encounters with origins in the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, the rights and freedoms that Osman apparently enjoyed over his 12-year tenure as a slave raise questions in connection with his claim to steadfast faith. It is intriguing that Osman, as a slave, had the privilege to move freely in the city, carry a sword, engage in conflicts with Austrian soldiers, confront the Swedish ambassador in Vienna, seek protection for his supposed brother Ali from his masters,[79] and more. Keeping in mind that Osman wrote his memoirs in İstanbul 24 years after the end of his captivity,[80] I will try to contextualize his discourses within the climate of early modern Ottoman social and religious life. I acknowledge that there is meaning in what Osman chooses to tell, and argue that this effort serves as an attempt to reestablish social and religious belonging. In doing so, I build on Tijana Krstić's argument that life writing is a practical matter

[78] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 74. "Bizi ne zamân alub hudûd-ı İslâmiyye'ye götürürsüz?" Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi*, 40.
[79] Ali claims to be Osman's relative from Timisvar and serves as a slave to Horn, the Swedish ambassador in Vienna. Ali, captured after Osman, introduces himself as Osman's brother when he realizes that Osman is a person of standing among his circle. Ali's appearance is particularly significant in the context of the previously explained process of identification, which involves more than one person. Osman in particular has numerous references to how this had a serious impact on his overall reputation in Vienna: Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 96-98.
[80] Dated 24 Şaban 1136 (18 May 1724).

of reintegration into the community. Osman's narrative fits Krstić's characterization. In the following pages, I use several sources to argue that Osman Ağa's discourses on conversion are part of a trend in the seventeenth-century Mediterranean world. These sources include Paolo di Pietro's confession to the Inquisitorial Court, and the conversations of Janissaries Süleyman Ağa and Ahmet Ağa about his captivity in France; *Risâletu favâ'idi l-mulûk.* Additionally, I reference the captivity memoirs of Christian convert Konstantin Mihailović, and the life story of Georgius of Hungary, who was captured by the Ottomans.[81] In particular, I discuss fears of conversion, freedom, personal transformation, how life stories contribute to the reintegration process and Osman's perception of freedom from captivity, and the role of clothing as a symbolic aspect of conversion.

As Krstic writes, "The early modern period was an age of expansive religious refashioning and upheaval." Particularly referring to the Mediterranean world, Eric Dursteler has referred to this as the golden age of the renegade, as converts (especially those converting from Christianity to Islam) were termed.[82] One of the most influential historians in this regard is Marc David Baer, who argues that Mehmed IV (r. 1648-1687) sought to establish a reputation as a convert-maker, applying pressure to Christian, Jewish, and even Muslim subjects to embrace the dynasty's form of Islam and creating new incentives, including the gift of "Muslim" clothing, for those who converted. This likely contributed to a wider culture of fear and pressure to convert in the empire.[83] Krstic states that it was quite easy to convert to Islam in the Ottoman world; although the profile of converts varied from period to period,

[81] These have been studied widely, but often separately. See Eric R. Dursteler, "Fearing the 'Turk' and Feeling the Spirit: Emotion and Conversion in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Journal of Religious History* 19, no. 5 (2015): 484-505; Marinos Sariyannis, "Un Janissaire à Paris ou un Français au Caire?"; Tijana Krstic, *Contested conversions to Islam*, 52-59; Albrecht Classen, "Life Writing as a Slave in Turkish Hands: Georgius of Hungary's Reflections about His Existence in the Turkish World," *Neohelicon* 39 (2012): 55–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-012-0125-1.
[82] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam,*160: Dursteler, "Fearing the 'Turk'," 484-505.
[83] Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190.

historians know that people of all ages and professions took advantage of this ease during the years under Ottoman rule, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[84] While there is ample evidence of widespread voluntary conversion in the Mediterranean, fear was also widely evoked in accounts of conversion.[85] Molly Greene's *A Shared World* provides compelling examples of Muslim conversions to Christianity, apparently motivated by fear of a possible Venetian victory (c. 1650).[86] The presence of fear and the potential for violence, regardless of their reality, were considered socially acceptable reasons for conversion. Inquisitors approved fear as a valid reason for apostasy, and it often resulted in a prompt reconciliation.[87] While fear undoubtedly influenced some decisions to convert, we should be wary of taking repeated claims of coercion at face value. Many converts who claimed they were forced to convert may have been driven by other motivations, later invoking fear to disguise their apostasy, make their conversion more acceptable, and facilitate their reintegration into their original faith communities.[88]

It should not be surprising that Ottoman former captives, who spent a significant part of their lives in France, Austria, Hungary, and other "infidel" lands, managed to turn their misfortunes into opportunities and built careers with the language skills, networks, and knowledge they acquired there. As they occupied important societal roles, their past experiences in Christian Europe must have come under some scrutiny. Accounts of captivity by the "infidels" thus played a role in reintegrating their authors into their communities. I consider the narratives of Osman and other captives (both Christian and Muslim) in this

[84] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 22.
[85] G. Audisio, "Renégats marseillais (1591–1595)," [Renegades of Marseilles (1591–1595)] *Renaissance and Reformation* 16, no. 3 (1992): 32.
[86] Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), *idem*.
[87] Natalie E. Rothman, *Brokering empire: trans-imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 165-189.
[88] Dursteler, "Fearing the ''Turk'," 484.

context, reflecting on the questions and judgments they faced upon returning home. One could argue that their attempt to re-enter their old or new social circles, particularly those crucial to their careers, was contingent on their success in conveying their "genuine religious beliefs".

The question is not whether these authors converted or lived in constant fear of converting but rather the explicit effort in their writings and discourses to assert how they remained Muslims and faithful believers. Why did Janissary Süleyman, who claimed he was never forced to convert, emphasize his continuous faith by gathering witnesses to assert that he had always remained a Muslim? What cultural and traditional factors drove Osman and Süleyman to write these narratives and prove they had not converted? It can be assumed that these efforts to prove themselves were meant to convince some powerful, loud, or gossiping voices that they did not make the "terrible mistake" of converting, influenced by normative expectations imposed from the top down and socially enforced from the bottom up. The captive's repeated assertion of denying the temptation of conversion was not only a form of self-fashioning but also of self-protection. This directly ties to the main argument of my thesis, which that Osman Ağa's self-fashioning narrative is a "normal exception" within his context.

2.1 Navigating Conversion and Fear: Comparative Discourses from the Ottoman World and Christian Europe

There are, naturally, differences among the various sources that I present dealing with the question of conversion. However, there are significant commonalities which suggest a broader pattern. It is no coincidence that anxieties about conversion preoccupied both Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman world in the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Krstic points to similar developments across empires, arguing that the prophetic expectation of doomsday was reinforced by profound changes in the mental horizons of contemporaries across social

boundaries who witnessed plagues, new configurations of religious boundaries, the rapid rise of the Ottoman Empire, the discovery of the New World, changes in technology, the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and increased contact between cultures.[89] Bridges between worlds were created by increased contact between Islamic and Christian spheres.

In this light, it is not surprising that conversion was a theme explicitly raised not only by Osman but also by his contemporaries, both in Ottoman lands and in Christian Europe: historians, travelers, and diplomats. Across a variety of genres, similar fears appear common to early modern man's self-fashioning, self-preservation, and reinvention after capture or during their journeys in foreign lands. Was it really conversion that was feared? Was it Islam or Christianity, a threat to deeply held familiar beliefs? Or was it a longing and loyalty for their home in a land where they were not slaves? Was it because they did not know that even if they converted, they would still be a slave serving at a slightly higher level? It is important to ask these questions because often the anxiety to convert is not a fear that can be explained by religion. So how might the historian explain this anxiety? Why does it coexist in early modern Ottoman, Habsburg, and Venetian ego-documents, and why does it persist in these discourses and through various changes until the nineteenth century? The answers are in the sources, in the discourses of these early modern writers. Identity, culture, politics, career, social environment and religion all together contribute to these concerns.

Since Jean Delumeau's groundbreaking work in the 1970s, which posited that a pervasive "climate of fear" defined the daily existence of pre-modern societies, it has remained a focal point in the study of the history of emotion.[90] Delumeau examines the fears that impact both the common and the educated individuals. It is crucial to keep in mind that the early

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[89] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam,* 76.

[90] M. Weiss, "Introduction: Fear and its Opposites in the History of Emotions," in *Facing Fear: The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective*, eds. M. Laffan and M. Weiss (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 6; J. Plamper and B. Lazier, "Introduction: The phobic regimes of modernity," *Representations* 110 (2010): 58-65.

modern actors whose discourses are examined in this chapter were the children of this "climate of fear".[91] One such fear often mentioned in connection with conversion is the fear of corporal punishment or conversion by physical force. Eric R. Dursteler analyzes Paolo di Pietro, who was enslaved at the age of 13 and recounted that, after six months in chains, "by force and threats [the Turks] made me renounce the holy Christian faith by threatening to cut off my head."[92] Osman, who claims that he was not converted, describes similar fears multiple times. As Osman recounts it, *"*I became extremely worried that I might be forced to accompany him all the way to Austria, and once there, who could say if I would ever see a Muslim country again, or if they wouldn't force me to become a Christian?"[93] Unfortunately, Osman's fears of being taken to Austria materialized: after being assigned to accompany the general's baggage train from Ivanić to Varaždin, he was forcibly taken all the way to Graz. Here Osman uses the terms "*cebren kristiyan*"[94] and "*havf*".[95] This is the first time Osman mentiones conversion, immediately associating with a fear of forced conversion.

According to Osman Ağa's narrative, what was initially fear shifted to a mixture of reverence and sense of duty to his beloved female characters. In the conversations between Osman and his female masters, who he claims loved him very much and do not want to part with him, he describes how they advised him to change his faith. Here, as can be understood from the examples to be given below, Osman is worried about displeasing his masters. The character of Countess Charlotte Ursula von Limburg-Styrum played a significant role in Osman's seven years of captivity in Vienna. She was an immensely rich and powerful woman.

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[91] Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries,* trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).
[92] Dursteler, "Fearing the 'Turk'," 484.
[93] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 110. Kreutel und Spies, *Leben und Abenteuer*, 44 "*...İvaniça kal'asından Varozdine varınca sen dahı 'arabalar yanınca na'an gitmek lazım gelmiştir deyü emr edib biz ise andan içerü Nemçe vilayetine gitmek gayet havf iderdik zira eğer vilayet-i nozbura gitmek lazım gelürse kim bilür bir dahı müslüman vilayetin kaçan görürüz bizi anda cebren kristiyan iderler..*" Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi,* 47.
[94] جَبْرًا, cebren: By force and the use of force. (Arabic origin).
[95] خَوْف havf: Fear, frighten. (Arabic origin).

Married to the Habsburg high commissioner of war, she presented an intimidating and distant presence for Osman. Osman describes the countess's attitude towards him in the following words: “His wife always looked on me kindly."[96] Osman portrays her as benevolent and genuinely concerned for his well-being, willing to use her influence to protect him, even from her stern and intemperate husband. Countess Charlotte's affection, however, came with a condition. She openly and rapidly expressed her desire for Osman to become an official protégé of her husband, a move contingent upon his conversion to Christianity.[97] This insistence on conversion, besides endangering his soul, would mean relinquishing any hope of returning to his former life.[98] Countess Charlotte Ursula von Limburg-Styrum emerges as a pivotal figure, her conditional affection intertwining with the expectation of Osman's conversion.

Osman supposedly navigated the pressure to convert, yet its weight lingered, leading him to hesitate in seeking emancipation papers after the conclusion of the Ottoman-Habsburg conflict, apprehensive of the countess and her husband's disapproval. Throughout his captivity, Osman faced numerous suggestions and both direct and indirect hints about conversion from his noble female masters. Osman relates that when he disclosed his escapeplans to the steward, this is what he heard: “The truth is that they would have done so [made Osman their protégé] already if you had shown any inclination to embrace our faith.”[99] Repeatedly, Osman makes it clear that he never accepted the offer. As Osman explains it, every time conversion was offered, his masters would say that if he embraced Christianity, he could be a free man. Besides showing Osman’s efforts to establish his religious fidelity, this raises the question of what exactly it

[96] “*bize eyü göz ile bakub dayim nazar iderd”*

[97] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 94: “My husband is very fond of you. If you were to adopt our faith, he would make you his head of wardrobe, that is to say, Kammerdiener, such that we would become your patrons.” “«Eğer âyînimizden olsanız sizi kaftâncı başı ya‘nî kamerdiner ederlerdi ve sizi bir çırâğ eylemek murâdımız idi!» Biz dahî kadına temennâ edüb, «Biz ol mansıbların recülü değiliz, hemân efendilerimiz kendü kulları üzerinden hüsn-i nazarlarını dirîğ buyurmayalar!»” Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi,* 55.

[98] Casale, “The Intimate Lives of 17th-Century Women,” 3.

[99] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 114. “Zîrâ eğer ağam ve kadın hazretleri seni ziyâde sevüb sana rağbet ederler ve hem hizmetinizden hôşnûdlardır ve dahî me’mûl ederler ki bir takrîb ile seni bunda alıkoyub bir çırâğ edeler ve hakîkati budur ki eydürlerdi eğer dînimize gelüb rağbet eylesen.”

would mean for Osman to be free. Was Osman Ağa, the slave who went to taverns in Vienna, carried a sword, fought with soldiers and was involved in many personal dramas, already free in some sense? [100] Was Osman free when he returned to Tımışvar?

2.2 Freedom and Reintegration

Osman orchestrated a complex escape with the intention of crossing the border incognito. This decision illuminates Osman's internal conflict—abandoning the woman who simultaneously served as his captor and protector. The importance of this struggle becomes vividly apparent in a dream he claims to have had during his escape. Pursued by dogs on the mountain of Sremski Karlovci along the Ottoman-Habsburg border, Osman reaches a summit where he sees a palace. Inside, the Countess paces back and forth. Despite his betrayal, she smiles at Osman, offering reassurance. According to Casale, Osman's interpretation of this dream as a sign that the Countess was still watching over him reflects Osman's profound internal turmoil surrounding his decision to escape.[101]

In the narrative source telling the story of the Osman's near-contemporary, janissary Süleyman, he warns his interlocutor that he is often accused of praising infidels. In Janissary Süleyman, one encounters another early modern figure who claims that he was never forced to change religion despite apparent evidence to the contrary.[102] According to the narrator, after returning to the Ottoman Empire after 8 years in "the land of the Franks" (1685–1693), Janissary Süleyman openly praised France.[103] Suspicious of this, the members of an *ehl-i*

[100] For more on the Ottoman population and condition of slaves in eighteenth-century Vienna, see David do Paco, *L'Orient a Vienne au dix-huitieme siecle* [The Orient in Vienna in the Eighteenth Century] (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015).
[101] Casale, "The Intimate Lives of 17th-Century Women," 4.
[102] Sariyannis, "Un Janissaire à Paris ou un Français au Caire?" 581-600; Gürsoy, "Siyasetname hüviyetinde bir esaretname," 77-142; Akıncı, *Türk-Fransız Kültür İlişkileri (1071-1859).*
[103] Gürsoy, "Siyasetname Hüviyetinde Bir Esaretname," 115.

meclis (conversation assembly) in his homeland of Egypt summoned Süleyman and asked him questions about his experiences.[104] Specifically, suspicion arose because members of the *ehl-i meclis* had heard Süleyman saying that there are better horses in France, which angered them and prompted them to ask him to come and explain. According to the narrative, the janissary, fearing that he might be called an infidel, does not want to speak at first. However, after his interlocutors tell him that they are too open-minded to make such an accusation, he begins to relate what he knows. None of the members of the council thought that horses as good as the ones in a Muslim country could be found in a Frankish land. "Since you were a prisoner in the Vienna (Beç) campaign, you became close to the infidels and were influenced by them," [105] they said, according to the narrative. Süleyman responded to the accusation: "I was captured when we lost in the battle in front of the castle of Neuheüsel (Hungarian Újvár, today Nové Zámky, Slovakia). They gave me to a French young man who was among the Nemçe (Austrian) lords and had the desire to watch the battle. The Frenchman took me back to his country. I served him for eight years and he never forced me to convert. He respected me the world over."[106] Osman, Süleyman, Pietro, and the other figures who I discuss in this chapter may have all conveyed their narratives of slavery with a different but presumably common motivation: to live in their communities without being judged.

One of the questions that Süleyman's captivity story raises is whether these writings were part of an attempt at reintegration. Süleyman's narrative, just like Osman Ağa's, makes

[104] Gürsoy, "Siyasetname Hüviyetinde Bir Esaretname," 79.
[105] Sariyannis's transcription: "Ahmed Ağa dedi ki França diyarında bir müddet karar eylemişsin ve niçe şeylere vukuf-ı tahsil etmişsin Mustafa Ağa bize ba'z-ı şeyler nakl eyledi, ol ahval gerçek midir doğrusın söyle senden sıhhatı üzre haberin almak murad ederiz dediler. Süleyman eyitdi emr sizden ita'at bizden ancak şöyle ki bizim adetimize muhalif şeyleri şimdi lisana getürüp beyan eylesek gayet müşkildir zira vilayetinin medhin eder bu dahi henüz kâfirdir dersiz dedi. Ahmed Ağa eyitdi hayır sen öyle kıyas etme biz öyle 'inad edici hakka razı olmaz müsülmanlardan değilüz kim gayri milletde ma'rifet ve iz'ân sahibi yokdur diyelim; dinimiz ayrı ise tanrımız birdir deyü cevap eyledi."
[106] Sariyannis's transcription: "Nemse beğzadelerinin arasında bir genç Fransız cengi seyr etmek sevdasına zahıb olup onların içinde bulunmağla beni ona verdiler; ol beni alup França diyarına getürdi; ve ona sekiz sene kadar hizmet etdim ve beni dinimden çevirmek içün asla cevr etmedi."

the reader question whether they are reading a travelog or a slavery narrative. Süleyman does not mention as many converts and offers he received to convert as Osman. However, his desire to prove to his community that he is not a convert is clearly apparent. To return to the issue of self-fashioning, of persuasion, all of these efforts to prove serve the one person whose personal history we are reading. The loyalty of a convert, particularly one who had relocated from elsewhere, was always suspect.[107] It could be argued that not only known converts but all individuals who spent a lot of time on "the other side" may have suffered from accusations of disloyalty in an Ottoman context.

Like Rothman, Krstić explores these questions of loyalty in earlier sources and offers pioneering approaches to the field. Osman's and even Süleyman's anxieties were the normal exception and a continuation of a tradition that goes back much further. According to Krstić, a similar tendency to write to prove one's loyalty is evident in the works of Christian captives who managed to escape Ottoman captivity and return to Christian lands, such as the autobiography of Konstantin Mihailović. In Mihailović's memoirs, he seeks not only to satisfy the curiosity of European Christians who are attentive to stories about the "Turks", but also to dispel their suspicions that he might have converted to Islam during the relatively long time he spent in Ottoman territory. What this means is that Mihailović was trying to re-enter the Christian community through his memoirs. Krstić argues that Mihailović's work is a powerful anti-syncretic declaration of his commitment to the Christian community to which he was reincorporated, in which he views the converts who entered the Ottoman fold and lost their faith as a "species" inferior in every sense to those who adhered to any orthodox religious tradition, thus dispelling suspicions that he was "mixed" and therefore "spoiled."[108]

[107] Natalie Rothman, "Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth Century Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (June 2006).
[108] Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 58.

Although Mihailović wrote his captivity narrative in a borderland context, Osman wrote his memoir in İstanbul. After his captivity, Osman spent most of his career as a dragoman in Tımışvar and moved to Istanbul after the fall of Tımışvar to Habsburg forces (1716). Perhaps one can speculate in Osman Ağa's case as to why he waited 24 years to write his memoirs. It is possible that the social pressures of the borderlands and those of İstanbul were not the same.[109] Perhaps Osman did not write his memoirs immediately upon his return to Ottoman lands because he did not need to, but upon entering an elite (and perhaps more confessionally rigid) Istanbul social milieu in the 1724s, these new pressures drove him to write his memoirs, clarifying the details of his past.

Similar anxieties are examined by medievalist Albrecht Classen in his analysis of the *Tractatus* (ca. 1480) of Georgius of Hungary. According to Classen, Georgius expresses a feeling of abandonment in his treatise and offers his readers a systematic way to protect themselves in similar situations. He strives to explain his victimization, having converted to Islam and now, after escaping, questions why God allows so many to abandon Christianity for another faith. Reflecting on the many converts he witnessed, Georgius warns about this new and powerful temptation for Christians.[110] George's work has been analyzed by different historians who have found it to have a highly apocalyptic tone in the Christian Western tradition, reinforcing beliefs about "Turks" and the fear of being drawn to Islam as a sign of

[109] It is a very fruitful discussion, one that can be explored in the context of Osman Ağa, but it is not the subject of my thesis: see Palmira Brummett, "The early modern convert as "public property": A typology of turning," in Claire Norton, ed., *Conversion and Islam in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Lure of the Other*, 103-129 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2017): "Evliya observed the ambiguous religious practices of converts in regions of the Graeco-Balkan peninsula once ruled by Christians. He specifically mentioned Albania as a "conversional space" where the population lived in a state of flux between Muslim and Christian influences, due to its contested territory and diverse geographical features such as coastal and mountainous areas. These areas served as the breeding ground for individuals like Philip Dandulo, a former Turk who converted to Christianity, where both Christian and Muslim customs coexisted. Evliya even questioned the conventional notion of conversion, suggesting the concept of "half-turning" or simply practicing religion as one sees fit, rather than a complete transformation."

[110] Georgius of Hungary, *Tractatus de Moribus*, 328-346.

the impending apocalypse.[111] Despite all the temptations of Islam after being taken prisoner, he says of his personal struggle with this threat, "I doubted the Christian faith not a little"[112]. He credits God's grace with rescuing him from this danger.[113] Ultimately, although Georgius provides an example of discourse on conversion from the fifteenth century, it is important to observe that his concerns persisted 200 years later. In particular, his *Tractatus* contributes to the historiography that attributes the fear of the Turks on the Ottoman Balkan borders to Ottoman successes in the fifteenth century.[114]

Georgius asserted, "So, I can summarize my opinion about them in the absolute sentence: It is impossible for any Turk to accept the Christian creed."[115] However, Georgius would probably have been quite surprised by the situation in the coming centuries. According to Greene, Muslim conversions to Christianity are sometimes mentioned in the sources due to fears of an eventual Ottoman victory in Crete, which did come to pass in 1669. In the correspondence from Candia, captured by Venetian forces between 1660 and 1661, *rinegadi*s are frequently mentioned. However, these were Muslims who converted to Christianity, not Christians who converted to Islam, as was commonly portrayed by travelers to Ottoman Crete.[116] Furthermore, Osman Ağa's memoir mentions that he encountered Turkish, Serbian, Albanian, Bosnian, Armenian, and Greek male and female slaves captured from Ottoman lands, many of whom were converts from Islam to Christianity.[117]

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[111] Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 57-59; Charles Sabatos, "The Ottoman Captivity Narrative as a Transnational Genre in Central European Literature," *Archiv orientální* 83, no. 2 (2015):237-39; Cornell H. Fleischer, "A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. 1/2 (2018): 18-90.

[112] "*de fide Christi non modicum dubitaui*" Georgius of Hungary, *Tractatus de Moribus*, 146.

[113] Classen, "Life Writing as a Slave in Turkish Hands," 60.

[114] See Hans-Joachim Kissling, "Türkenfurcht und Türkenhoffnung im 15./16. Jahrhundert. Zur Geschichte eines 'Komplexes'" [Turkish Fear and Turkish Hope in the 15th/16th Century: On the History of a 'Complex'], *Südost Forschungen*; Munchen Vol. 23 (Jan, 1964): 1-18. (Translated via DeepL).

[115] **"***Unde de opinione... nunc indubitatam sentenciam de eis proferre possum, quod impossibile sit aliquem Turcum fidem Christi recipere*" Georgius of Hungary, *Tractatus de Moribus*, 372.

[116] Greene, *A Shared World*, 95; For the Cretan War, see Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 2006), 57

[117] "As the news of peace between the two sides spread far and wide, most Muslim captives—men as well as women, and those who had converted as well as those who had not—all made plans to return to their native

2.3 Osman's Perception of Convert Slaves

Another interpretation that can be made on the basis of Osman's narrative is that Osman had a particularly negative opinion of Muslim converts to Christianity. For example, while narrating an incident that took place in Buda during his escape, he claims that a group of converts to Christianity reported him and his acquaintances to the Habsburg general Johann von Pfeffershofen. He wrote that after his release, "Outside, a group of men and women, some of them the troublemaking converts who had informed on us to the general, as well as some Armenian and Greek turncoats, had come to the citadel assuming that the general would put us to death, and curious to see what form of execution he would choose."[118] In another episode, Osman Ağa claims that he went to the Serbian bazaar outside of town to buy essentials and look for a reliable guide, but a troublemaking convert woman spotted him and accused him of fooling General von Nehem and planning an escape. Hearing her, Serbians, Greeks, and Armenians approached him with offers to help him escape to Belgrade, but none of them could fulfill his needs.[119] Osman mentions that the same "accursed convert woman" came to his neighborhood every morning to check whether he had escaped or not. In Osman's discourse,

countries." And Mehmed Sipahi (probably Macedonian) was pretending to convert to Christianity: Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 113.

[118] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 112. "Ammâ biz tâ Beç'de ve Budun'da istimâ' eyledüğümüz ba'zı esîr kaçırıcı Urûm ve Ermenîler var imiş, mahall-i mezbûrda dahî Patariç nâm Ermenî bir mürted müselmân 'avretini alub mahall-i mezbûrda otururmuş. Mesfûru su'âl edüb evini bulduk ve kendüsüyle bir mikdâr söyleşüb ferâset ile bizim murâdımızı deyüb bize bir gün ziyâfet edüb yiyüb içüb münâsebet ile ahvâlimizi ve esrârımızı fâş eyledik. Ammâ evvel kendüye yemîn verüb kendüyü inandırub bizim Belgrad'a gitmek tarîkını söyleşüb her gûne tahmîn olundu." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi,* 78.

[119] "Bir kaç gün bunun üzerine mürûr edüb günde bir kerre iki def'a Sırf varoşu tarafına çehârşûya varub me'kûlât ve meşrûbât ve sâ'ir iktizâ eden eşyâları alub hem alış veriş ederdik ve hem usûl ile mu'temedün-'aleyh kulağuza muntazır idik. Her varub geldikçe ol mel'ûne mürted 'avreti bizi görüb feryâd ederdi ki, «Bak emdi bu kişi Ceneral de Nehem gibi âdemi ve bir 'âkıl kimesneyi aldatdı! Kendüyü inandırub istedüğü üzre gezüb yürür. Firâr eylemek içün fursat arayub gezer!» derdi. Bu sözleri anda olan Sırf ve Urûm ve Ermenî kefereleri istimâ' edüb tenhâ yerde yâhûd usûl ile yanaşub söz açardılar, «Eğer murâdınız Belgrad tarafına kaçmak ise bana i'timâd edin! Ben sizi âsân vechle alub kaçırabilürüm!» derlerdi, puhte çehre edüb redd ederdik."

the prevailing description of the converts was that they were usually bandits, troublemakers, prostitutes or simply bad people.[120] He always singled out those who pretended to be converts, some of whom were his friends.[121]

Osman Ağa relates that since the only way to escape was to pretend to be a convert, he also pretended to be a convert. In Buda, General von Pfeffershofen,[122] suspicious of Osman during his escape, asks Osman where he is from. In Osman's own words: "There is no way to conceal my origins. I was born a Muslim and am originally from Lipova. But when General Caraffa conquered Lipova, I was taken prisoner and became a captive, after which I was sent to Austria. There my master introduced me to the Christian faith and emancipated me."[123] There are many similar examples of feigned conversion, but it should be noted that this did not always work. It was a common but very risky lie used by slaves, spies and many others in danger in the "infidel" land. Osman attributes his rescue to the fact that he speaks fluent German and dresses like an Austrian. Osman took care to be very clear in justifying his pretending to be a renegade, which brings us back to Osman's attempts at self-fashioning and self-protection.

Osman and his escape partner Mehmet Sipahi both altered their identities, notably adopting the guise of converts during their escape—a strategy reminiscent of narratives found in contemporaneous sources. Molly Greene has observed, "Ambiguity in religious identity is a persistent undercurrent in the stories of high-ranking officials-both Christian and Muslim-in

[120] The translator was a Hungarian convert from Islam to Christianity, Fatima of Belgrade (aka "the convert woman"). Osman says that she is a notorious whore, Patarich's converted wife: Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels* 161-67.

[121] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 113 "a young man known as Mehmed Sipahi, who was originally from the administrative district of Strumica, and had served in the Rumelian cavalry corps.He was taken prisoner at the siege of Budapest and became a captive of General Dünewald. Pretending to convert to Christianity...".

[122] Baron Johann Valentin von Pfeffershofen (1638–1715) was governor of Buda between 1699 and 1710. See Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 187.

[123] "Aslımız inkâr olunmak mümkin değildir. Bizim vâlideynimiz müselmân, vilâyetimiz Lipova'dır. Mukaddemâ Ceneral Karafa Lipova'yı feth eyledikde biz anda esîr olmuş idik. Ba'dehu Nemçe vilâyetlerine nakl olunub mahall-i mezbûrlarda ağalarımız bizi hristiyân dînine tahvîl edüb âzâd olmuş idik." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi*, 76.

Crete at this time." For example, a Venetian spy, documenting his dinner with the janissary ağa of Candia, noted the ağa "acting like a Christian" and undergoing a secret baptism. Greene posits that the fluidity observed in religious identity among ordinary subjects extends to the highest echelons of society.[124] After all, these were the times of the so-called the golden age of the renegade,[125] and Osman Ağa, like his contemporaries, was part of this trend.

Osman's strategy involved simulating a conversion and modifying his appearance, all with the overarching goal of safely returning home to the Ottoman Empire. This emphasizes Osman's play on the "fluidity in religious identity" prevalent in the historical context in his memoir. When he describes his encounters with each person with origins in Ottoman lands, he first draws attention to whether they have changed their religion or not. Sometimes he even states that they were not converts but pretended to be, emphasizing that they were still Muslim internally.

2.4 The Role of Clothing in Conversion

Among Osman Ağa's many comments about being or pretending to be a convert, the following observation about looking like a "*kafir*" is of interest:

> I had long black hair, and wore a Genoese linen vest with white stripes, trousers, thin stockings and matching shoes, and a blue broadcloth cape. In a separate chest, I also kept a separate set of clothes and a double-breasted waistcoat. Altogether, I looked like any ordinary military officer, and no one would have ever supposed from my appearance that I was a Muslim. The woman by my side was also dressed smartly and convincingly looked the part of an officer's wife. The other two had clothes in the Austrian style appropriate to their rank. We all agreed never to utter a word of Turkish and always to address one another in German.[126]

[124] Greene, *A Shared World*, 203.
[125] Dursteler, "Fearing the 'Turk'," 484.
[126] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 117. "kendümün siyâh uzun saçlarım var idi. Ceneviz bezi üzerine beyâz tire ile işlenmiş 'anterî ve çakşır ve ince çorablar, ana göre pabuc ve kırmızı ince çûka dolama ile mâ'î yağmurluk ve sâ'ir esvâb ile sandık ve câmadân bi'l-cümle mevcûd olub bayağı bir zâbit kimesneye müşâbih kimesne idik. Gören hiç müselmândır deyü kıyâs etmezdi, yanımızca olan hâtûnun dahî nefîs kisveleri olub bir zâbit 'avretine benzerlerdi. Ol birleri dahî oluruna göre Nemçe kisveleri var idi ammâ kavl eylemiş idik ki beynimizde hiç Türkçe

This excerpt from Osman's grand escape tells exactly how Osman and his partners pretended to be converts: dressing like an Austrian and speaking German or an 'infidel' language. In another passage in which Osman formulates an escape plan, he relates that he "now knew German quite well, praise Allah, and I could easily pass for one of them, particularly if I planned in advance and dressed appropriately."[127] Clearly, some slaves were allowed to wear clothes from their own culture, since Osman had to buy new clothes to look like an Austrian. While he did not walk around Vienna dressed in rags, Osman himself stated that he dressed like a Muslim. This raises a question: Osman could not have spent 12 years in the same clothes as he wore when he first arrived. Where did he find new Muslim clothes in Vienna? Perhaps dressing like a Muslim just meant wearing a turban on his head.[128]

Meanwhile, in an attempt to prove that he had never converted, Janissary Süleyman uses the following expressions: "He (Süleyman's French Master) took me around in Ottoman clothes, he did not force me to dress in any other way. He took me to the houses and palaces of the elite in my own clothes."[129] Changing clothes, a process that maybe Osman and Süleyman were aware of when they were living in the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps it was part of their intention to prove that they did not dress like Christians, to prove that they were not converts, conveying to their readers that they had previously both dressed and perceived

musâhabet etmeyelim, dâ'imâ Nemçece söyleşelim." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi*, 74.

[127] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 114: "Biz dahî el-hamdü li'llâhi ta'âlâ lisân-ı Nemçe'yi vâfirce tahsîl edüb kılığımızdan bizi her kes bilmez."

[128] Although we do not know for sure whether Osman wore a turban on his head or not, there is a part where he mentions it as a distinction between being a Muslim or not; Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 143: "...we could see men on board wearing white turbans. Understanding that they were Muslims, and we had nothing to fear, we stopped trying to avoid them..."; on the visual othering of slaves by dressing them in generic "oriental" clothes, see Josef Köstlbauer, "Slavery in the Holy Roman Empire," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*, eds. Damian A. Pargas and Juliane Schiel (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 267.

[129] Sariyannis's transcription: "bana dünya kadar re'ayet eyledi ve beni kesvetim ile gezdirüp gayri kesvet ki deyü cevr etmedi ve kendü kesvetim ile büyük ademler evine ve saraylarına girerdim". For an example of slave clothing from the French colonies in the seventeenth century: Robert S. DuPlessis, "What Did Slaves Wear? Textile Regimes in the French Caribbean," *Monde(s)* 1, no. 1 (2012): 175–91.

themself as a Muslim. In fact, in both narratives, clothing does not have a prominent space, but where it does appear, it is usually associated with religion.

In the early modern world, it was important to be able to identify by the way a person dressed which land, and therefore religion, he or she belonged to, and then to make a judgment about that person accordingly. To become a convert in the world that Osman and Süleyman came from, there were very definite and distinct stages that had to be completed.[130] Even if their sources do not mention these issues, it is possible to speculate that they may have been aware of what was happening in the empire where they were born and raised, and thus may have been aware of what was expected of a convert, the steps of adopting a new identity. In this sense, Baer's studies pioneered the field, rethinking the traditional portrayal of the sultan Mehmed IV, suggesting that he saw his relationship with religion as central to his role as sultan. Understanding the influences on Osman and Süleyman who were captured while serving under Mehmed IV and his empire due to his role is part of making sense of why their life are narrated this way. Baer gives the following details about the conversion ceremonies of converted Christians and Jews:

> Christian men were circumcised on the spot. Converts were re-dressed from head to toe and given Muslim names and purses of Ottoman coins (silver asper, akçe) minted for the occasion, which had more symbolic than real value. Because hierarchies of dress were intended to distinguish members of different religions, changing the body by dressing it in new clothing was fundamental to transforming Christians and Jews into Muslims.[131]

Even if it is not a Christian converting to Islam, the similarities of the process in terms of adopting a completely new socioreligious system are obvious. Building on Baer's assertion, Fatima of Belgrade, a Christian convert described by Osman as a "whore" who tried to put Osman and his friends in a difficult position through various schemes, had fully adopted

[130] For more examples of symbolic role of clothing in conversion and a Turkish convert in Vienna: Tobias P. Graf, *The Sultan's Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575-1610* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 62-63.
[131] Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 10.

Christian customs of dress.[132] In another one of Osman's escape attempts in the early years of his captivity, he exchanges his own clothes with shepherd: "…so that no one would know that I was a Muslim."[133] His main purpose in this clothing swap, as well as in the last escape story, when he changed his clothes to look like an ordinary military officer, was to not look like a Muslim. This indicates the centrality of dress in adopting a new identity and the important role religion played in how people were perceived.

In conclusion, this chapter focuses on discourses of conversion on the early modern Ottoman and European borders, written in a similar vein to Osman Ağa's memoir. It examines the conclusions that scholars of conversion have drawn from other sources and attempts to prove that similar judgments apply to Osman. Osman was an exceptional example of the themes discussed by other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, and the contradictions of border-crossing and conversion that his narrative is essentially about. His narrative has been compared with those of Paolo di Pietro, Süleyman the Janissary, Georgius of Hungary, and Konstantin Mikhailović. Fear of conversion was fairly common in the Ottoman borderlands with "Christian Europe" in the 1690s, and those who spent a lot of time in "infidel" lands were often accused of being converts. I have thus argued that the fears of these early modern actors and their efforts to prove their loyalty were less about personal religion and more about trying to reintegrate into the old social milieu, and that Osman was part of this tradition. This loyalty is expressed within their narratives through assertions of loyalty despite duress, whether it be physical or emotional, as in the case of Osman's relationship with his master's wife, as well as through descriptions of what clothing they did or did not wear during their captivity. In other

[132] "Fatima of Belgrade...she had acquired a taste for Christian customs, to the point of becoming a notorious whore." Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 126. "...Belgradlı Fatma derlerdi. Bir hüsnüdâr 'avret ve Belgrad'da bir hâcı kızı idi, ammâ esîr olunca hristiyânların 'âdetleri kendüye hôş gelüb gāyet ile fâhişe olmuş idi." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi,* 80.

[133] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels,* 76. "firâr edüb iki gün ormanlarda yalnız yürürken ba'zı çobanlara râst gelüb üzerimde olan kisvelerimi ol çobanlara verüb ve anlardan işbu üzerimde olan kisveleri alub giydim ki beni müselmân olduğumu kimesne bilmeye deyü." Koç, *Bir Osmanlı Türk askerinin maceralı esirlik hikayesi,* 42.

words, Osman, like others who wrote their captivity experiences, was engaged in a process of self-fashioning stemming from the need to legitimize his present self as opposed to the former self.

Finally, before moving on to the conclusion of the thesis, a brief example of what happened to Osman after he wrote his memoirs supports my argument that Osman's efforts to fashion himself gave results and that he therefore wrote the book as an attempt at reintegration. While questions such as why Osman wrote his memoirs as an older man and what path his life took are thought-provoking, the most important of all the known details of Osman's career came after he had written his memoirs.[134] Records show that he returned to Vienna 1726 as an interpreter for the first consul appointed to Vienna (Ömer Ağa). This suggests that Osman's self-fashioning attempts to build a good reputation for himself and, as Casale points out, his extensive writing bore fruit. He was evidently trusted, respected, and considered to be knowledgeable enough to be sent back to Vienna. Indeed, the people in his inner circle had close ties directly to the Ottoman and Habsburg courts. When Osman returned to Vienna, he worked with his student Heinrich von Penckler, with whom he had given Oriental language lessons in Istanbul. Penckler, who also worked as an interpreter in Vienna as well as the consulate's auditor, wrote this to say about Osman: "[Ömer Ağa's] interpreter was a respectable old man named Osman Efendi, who had been a prisoner of war in Germany for several years and had learned to speak and write German well there, who was my teacher of oriental languages in Constantinople from 1720 to 1726 and who kept in constant secret contact with me."[135] Penckler also states that Osman was highly respected in Vienna, where he stayed until

[134] Casale, *Prisoner of the Infidels*, 19.

[135] "Sein Dolmetscher war ein gewisser Osman Efendi, der früher einige Jahre in Deutschland in Gefangenschaft gelebt und dort gut deutsch sprechen und schreiben gelernt hatte – ein würdiger und schon bejahrter Mann, der in der Zeit von 1720 bis 1726 in Konstantinopel mein Lehrer in den orientalischen Sprachen gewesen war und mit mir in beständiger vertraulicher Verbindung blieb.": David Do Paco, "Une collaboration economique et sociale: Consuls et protecteurs des marchands ottomans a Vienne et a Trieste au xviiie siecle," *Cahiers de la Mediterranee* 98 (2019): 61.

1731. As Casale notes, Penckler's writings provide the last information that we have on Osman. His knowledge and network of people about Vienna must have been influential, as he was a preferred dragoman for diplomatic officials in both empires. Penckler's favorable remarks about Osman and his insinuations of closeness raise very provocative questions. Why did Osman share secrets with a Habsburg Dragoman? Could Osman have been a spy working for both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs? Why did he give the Pencks information about Ömer Ağa? What does this suggest about the ambiguities of loyalty and identity that we find within Osman's memoirs themselves?

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have considered the many sexual and gendered discourses that Osman and other early modern actors wrote and encountered. I have considered a number of questions, such as, what Osman was trying to achieve by providing these details? What do the sexual discourses say about Ottoman society in general in relation to the way they shape themselves? Examples are given of Osman's attempts at some form of confession and defense in each sexual encounter, and it is a topic that has been widely studied by other historians working on ego-documents. It has also been argued that Osman's writings were attempts to make sense of his self in 1724 rather than his past. Osman, as always, presents himself as a moral man, sometimes describing a woman, sometimes a boy, in detail as an attractive creature, but stating that he is absolutely innocent. This is a pattern of discourse that other sources follow, reminding us that they are somewhere between confession and moral affirmation. Whether this is really to prove their innocence or because it was a trend among the writers of the period can be the subject of a larger study. Among his contemporaries, especially Hassan Esiri's Risāla-i Hediyyat al-Muslimīn and many others have been found to address similar issues and have the same moral concerns, though not as explicitly as Osman.

With these examples, I have studied the place of Osman's memoirs in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman world. It has been argued that it is still possible to recognize them as exceptional examples of “normal” tensions between the discourses and practices of normative sexuality, religious morality, and how women were perceived in the Ottoman world, as previously discussed by Andrews, Kalpaklı, Ze'evi, and Krstic. Moreover, given the geographical proximity and intertwining of the Ottoman Empire and “Christian Europe”, it has been argued that the social conerns and tensions found on one side of the border were necessarily found on the other.

The second chapter of the thesis focued on the phenomena of faith and conversion in Osman's many shared memories of the European-Ottoman intellectual world and social milieu. In the second part of the thesis, Osman's narratives are compared with the ego-documents of the writers before and after him, and it is shown that they all follow the same discourses of moral and religious confirmation. It is argued that Krstic's argument of life writing as a form of reintegration into the community, which she uses in her sources, can also be applied to Osman Ağa and is a tradition to which Osman belongs. Although Osman claims that he did not convert, the possibility that he might have done so is questioned in light of the freedom and opportunities he enjoyed in Vienna. From here, questions such as for whom and why Osman wrote his memoirs have been traced, and speculation has been made that the reason he wrote his memoirs while living in Istanbul, long after his return home from captivity, may have been because of rumors in the circles in which he was involved in Istanbul, and that Osman may have written them to prove that he was not an 'infidel'. In addition, it has been argued that concerns about common fears of conversion found in the narratives of other authors are echoed in Osman's world. It has also been argued that there are similar physical changes followed by the converted person or those who pretend to be converted. This was to dress and appear as a Muslim or as a Christian, depending on the religion one had converted to. There are so many examples in the sources, all of them quite exciting, that they could not be included due to the length of this thesis.

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