

REASONING IN THE OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY  
“THE EXAMPLE OF *TARİH-İ GILMANÎ*”\*

OSMANLI TARİH YAZIMINDA SEBEP SONUŞ İLİŞKİSİ  
“*TARİH-İ GILMANÎ* ÖRNEĞİ”

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**Abstract**

In this article, the reason and result relation will be questioned in the Ottoman Historiography. For this purpose, the book of Mehmet Halife’s *Tarih-i Gılmanî* will be investigated as a case study in this context. It is insisted on this paper that Ottoman history writers did not only narrate the historical events but also brought to light the reason and result relations.

**Key Words:** History, reasoning, result, Ottoman, events.

**Özet**

Bu çalışmada Osmanlı Tarih yazıcılığında sebep e sonuç ilişkisi ele alınacaktır. Bu bağlamda Mehmet Halife’nin *Tarih-i Gılmanî* adlı eseri örnek olarak incelenecektir. Çalışmada, Osmanlı Tarih Yazarlarının da iddia edildiği gibi olayları sadece anlatmayla yetinmeyip olayların sebepleri ve sonuçları üzerinde fikir beyan ettikleri tezi işlenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tarih, sebep, sonuç, Osmanlı, olaylar.

The Ottoman Empire was the most well known long lived empire, its borders extends from the Iranian frontiers in the East, to Vienna in West, and Yemen in the South and south Russian frontiers in the North. There have been many books on the Ottoman Empire and most of the Ottoman history writers presented their books to the sultans and received valuable financial assistance from them as tradition. For this reason, it has been thought that no Ottoman writer could criticize the Sultan’s activity. The historical works were seen a kind of narrative book. True that most of the Ottoman writers wrote their books in a narrative methodology. Mehmet Halife’s book, *Tarih-i Gılmanî*<sup>1</sup>, is not such a book. He was a good observer of the events and good at criticizing what he witnessed. The book is different from other history books in that it reveals strong logical relations between reason of the events and their results.

Here, it will be better touch with Ottoman Historiography. Menage determined in his article that the Ottoman literature submitted by the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Ottoman Historiography reached its peak with İdris-i Bitlisî and Kemalpaşazâde. They wanted to demonstrate that both Ottoman dynasty as elegant as the history of other dynasties, and Turkish language could be used to write history.<sup>2</sup> He accepted, like İnalçık, that Ottoman historiography reached its peak at time of Bayezid II. İnalçık

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<sup>1</sup> Mehmet Halife, *Târih-i Gılmanî*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul 1976; Bekir Kütükoğlu informed scholarly four copies of the book. They are Viena (V), Revan (R), TTK (T) and the Matbu (M) copies; see, Bekir Kütükoğlu, “Tarih-i Gılmanî’nin ilk Redaksiyonuna Dair,” *Vekayi’nüvis Makalaler*, İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, İstanbul (1994), p. 85-102; Franz Babinger, *Osmanlı Tarih Yazarları ve Eserleri*, Kültür Bakanlığı, Ankara 1992, pp. 230-231. Babinger is giving information about two Mehmet Halife but their preordinations are about the same.

<sup>2</sup> V.L. Menage, *The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography, Historians of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p. 168.

explains this case “as a result of the consciousness of having established a great empire.”<sup>3</sup> He interpreted the Ottoman historiography till the era of Bayezid II in his significant article and he analyzed the early sources of the Ottoman historiography.

In this paper, it will be tried to find out the method of reasoning of history in Mehmet Halife’s history book *Tarih-i Gilmanî*. Şerif Mardin claims that the Ottoman history writers did not ask any questions about Ottoman institutions and administrations and only described the era without questioning. Mardin insists that Ottoman history writers used the descriptive method in their works but could not use this method successfully. They were not as successful as Miss Pardoe, for example, who described Istanbul in her book, and they were unaware of world history.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Mehmet İpşirli defends that Ottoman Historiography developed within mainstream Islamic Historiography and succeeded in creating its original style for centuries. İpşirli claims that Ottoman history writers developed a special critical method characteristic of the Ottoman writers. He also notifies that though writers who wrote an historical book by an imperial order were careful in criticizing the era and imperial behavior, while individual writers were rather brave at criticizing.<sup>5</sup> Two different and completely opposite each other opinions can be seen above on the Ottoman Historiography.

Mehmet Halife was a slave person who was recruited in Bosnia and was brought to Istanbul, and then he entered to the Imperial Palace, the *Topkapı Sarayı*. After completing his education, he ascended to higher ranks and took part in important campaigns. And being at the heart of the Empire, he observed the imperial activities. When he decided to write this book, he gave his book the name of *Tarih-i Gilmanî* himself by explaining, “As I wrote those unheard stories in the Sultan’s Harem, I called the book *Tarih-i Gilmanî*.”<sup>6</sup> Since he belonged to the interior group of the Palace, he was called “*Gilmanî*” meaning slave servant of the sultans. Actually, he did not give any detailed information about himself. Such information can be collected from certain pieces about him while reading about contemporary incidents. For example, in 1656 (H.<sup>7</sup>1067) when he was entrusted to read *Feth-i Şerif*,<sup>8</sup> he gave his father’s name and his birth of place that is “*Mehmed ibn-I Hüseyin el-Bosnevi*” (the son of Bosnian Huseyin). Mehmet Halife was informing his readers when he reached in Istanbul by saying that “*I came to Istanbul just before The Sultan Murat IV intended to organize a campaign against Poland*” and it was in 1043/1633.

Mehmet Halife entered in the service of some greet statesmen such as *Koca Kenan Paşa*<sup>10</sup> who was the chief commander at the military expedition against king *Rakoczy* of *Transylvania*. The second statesman was *Tarhunçu Ahmet Paşa* who one year became the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire between 1652 and 1653.<sup>11</sup> Another important master of Mehmet Halife was *Zurnazen Arnavut Mustafa Paşa*<sup>12</sup> who maintained the vizierate for only four hours in 1656.<sup>13</sup> Mehmet Halife joined all campaigns with *Koca Kenan Paşa* and he witnessed the *Revan* campaign, which the Sultan Murat IV joined as well, and he saw the conquest of *Ahuska*. Since the Paşa succeeded the mission, he was appointed as the governor of *Silistre* and *Özi*. Then the Paşa became chief commander over *Transylvania* and he finally joined to the *Baghdad* campaign in 1638.

*Tarhunçu Ahmet Paşa* was a reformer. He intended to make a reform in economy so he presented an explanatory document to the Sultan. *Gilmanî* says in his book:

Ahmet Paşa, in the time of the Prosperous Sultan, also registered the yearly incomes and the yearly expenditures and presented it to the Sultan. So that he may act carefully, and can not be content with the increase of expenditures so needs

<sup>3</sup> Halil İnalçık, *The Rise of Ottoman Historiography*, **Historians of the Middle East**, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Şerif Mardin, “Tarihe Soru Sormak,” **Yeni Türkiye**, Volume 33, (2000), pp. 384-387.

<sup>5</sup> Mehmet İpşirli, “Osmanlı Tarih Yazıcılığı,” **Osmanlı**, Volume 8, (1999), pp. 247-256.

<sup>6</sup> Halife, **Tarih-i Gilmanî**, 3.

<sup>7</sup> All the dates were given in Hagira Calendar in the Book so we converted them into Gregorian calendar.

<sup>8</sup> A chapter in Koran.

<sup>9</sup> Kütükoğlu, **Tarih-i Gilmanî’nin ilk Redaksiyonuna Dair**, 88.

<sup>10</sup> He was statesman and imperial bridegroom. See, Mehmet Süreyya, **Sicill-i Osmanî**, Volume 6, Tari Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, p. 1746.

<sup>11</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, **Osmanlı Tarihi**, Volume, 3 part, 1, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1988, pp. 261-267.

<sup>12</sup> He was grand admiral of the Ottoman navy then became Grand Vizier in 1066/1656 and lasted only four hours. See, İsmail Hami Danişmend, **İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi**, Volume 5, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul 1971, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> **Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi**, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, İstanbul 1992, 464.

cooperate with him (with Tarhuncu Ahmet Paşa) from whom the sultan can get help.<sup>14</sup>

However, this attempt drew the reactions of some selfish groups in the palace. Finally, the grand vizier was executed. Mehmet Halife saw those important events in their entirety and published the document of *Tarhuncu* in his work.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, we can gather otherwise unobtainable information about Ottoman palace life through his writings. His book is especially important for Ottoman historiography because he was the primary witness of these events.

Now, I would like to give a brief account of the Ottoman History at the time of Mehmet Halife. The Ottoman Empire reached its peak position during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. His death date, 1566, is generally accepted as the beginning of the period of Ottoman stagnation by various historians.<sup>16</sup> With the treaty of *Carlowitz* in 1699, the Empire entered the period of decline. At that time, the Empire had to fight at more than one front. In the East, Ottoman-Iranian wars continued since 1514. Persian forces took Baghdad from Ottomans in 1624, and Ottoman-Iranian struggle started again and lasted until 1638<sup>17</sup> when the Sultan Murat IV took the city back. At the sea, Ottomans besieged the Crete Island for 21 years and captured it finally in 1669. For this reason Ottomans were in a heavy struggle with the Venetians. In the West, Ottomans were also struggling with dependent principalities in the Balkans and their western supporters. In the North, Russians increased their activities through the Black Sea but at this front Ottomans were fighting with Cossacks. However, the most vulnerable struggles were occurring in homeland where there were many revolts in various parts of the country. Many *paşas* (higher rank commanders) rebelled in Anatolia and Syria. Besides this, the central army in Istanbul revolted frequently and killed Sultan Osman II. They also started to interfere with the political system of the empire. This led to a political crisis and together with military failure and economic problems, which urged Mehmet Halife to emphasize the balance between income and expenditure.

Europe faced the reformation movement in 16<sup>th</sup> century; the movement divided the continent into pieces. The church and the Holy Roman Empire tried to prevent this religious movement by force, but some northern German principalities accepted Protestantism as their official religion. Europe entered into a period of a religious catastrophe, which finally led to the breaking out of the Great War in Europe called the Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648.<sup>18</sup> Because of these internal wars, Europe did not pay attention to Ottoman affairs.

Mehmet Halife divided his book into three parts and fifteen chapters and an epilogue. He explains the aim of writing the book as follows:

I saw many great men who lived in previous times and they left good works to us so I want also to leave a useful work behind by writing a short history book.<sup>19</sup>

He did not write a complete Ottoman history. He neither wrote a total Ottoman History until his age nor did he write a world History like *Müneccimbaşı Ahmet Dede*<sup>20</sup>. He restricted his book dated from 1650 to 1668. However, he compared Mehmet IV with the ancient Alexander the Great in his poems and described the Sultan as being the King Solomon of the era. He was exalting the sultan to the higher rank so that "*Feridun and Keykubat were slave for you.*"<sup>21</sup> This information could be evidence that he knew about Islamic and Persian Historiography.

In this paper will examine the book considering the points defined above. It will also try to understand what his aim was in writing this book, how he took part in the events or how he observed the events. Now, let us review the text below and see how Mehmet Halife criticized and comprehended the events.

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<sup>14</sup> Halife, 41. "Ahmet Paşa da saadetli Padişahımızın zamanında yılda ne kadar gelir, ne kadar gider bulunduğunu kaydedip Padişah'a vermiştir. Belki, Padişahımızın dikkatli davranıp bundan böyle masrafların artmasına razı olmayarak kendisine bu hususta yardımcı olur diye."

<sup>15</sup> See, Halife, *Târih-i Gilmânî*, 41-46.

<sup>16</sup> Stephan Lee, *Aspects of European History 1494-1789*, Routledge, London, 1984, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Halil İnalçık, "Osmanlı tarihine Toplu Bakış", *Osmanlı*, Volume 1, (1999), p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> John B. Wolf, *Early Modern Europe*, Scott, London 1972, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Halife, *Târih-i Gilmânî*, 2. "

<sup>20</sup> His book *Camiü'd-düvel* was a kind of world History.

<sup>21</sup> Halife, *Târih-i Gilmânî*, 2.

In 1646, the Sultan İbrahim executed the grand vizier *Salih Paşa*, and *Ahmet Paşa* became the new Grand Vizier. According to Gılmanî, the *paşa* was bribe-taker, unjust, cruel and tyrannical. He caused all his subjects great suffering from heavy taxes. As a result the Janissaries, with Istanbul public and countrymen began to hate the sultan and the state. Everybody was afraid of complaining about the situation to the sultan fearing the grand vizier. Mehmet Halife, comprehending the situation believed that a good Sultan should disguise himself and observe the condition of the country and investigate statesmen's activities.

It was suitable for the Sultan that: he should investigate the conditions of the homeland in disguise thus that he is able to see the image of his grand vizier and his surroundings, and what are the public saying (gossiping) about the Sultan, how suffer the subject from the Grand Vizier, he should examine, thus, the subject do not turn away from sultan, and do not plot against his life because when the subject turn away (from him), the situation became difficult.<sup>22</sup>

He thought that when the Sultan investigated in secret, he should see the real condition of the country and how its subjects were suffering from the situation of the state. If a sultan keeps himself apart, subjects will not turn away and flee from the sultan. Unless he does this, he cannot really see anything about the country<sup>23</sup>. Mehmet Halife also compares sultan İbrahim and Murat IV. The recent one was often in disguise (*tebdil-i kıyafet*) but the former was not. This paragraph is similar to a kind of mirror image of the prince, a well-known writing method used by writers of this sort in the Ottoman Empire. *Mustafa Âli* was one of them, but such advisors mostly wrote or advised the sultan about imaginary conditions. On the other hand, *Mehmet Halife* wrote after witnessing an actual event.

The next case is known as *Çınar Vakası*, in which Halife states the real reason of the incident. According to him, the incident was the result of a loss in monetary value, or inflation. In his view, the income of the treasury is less than its expenditures so the grand vizier could not pay the salary of army. In order to pay their salaries, he devaluated *akçe*<sup>24</sup> by %50. As a result, one *kuruş* increased from 80 *akçes* to 120 *akçes*. When the *Janissary* army received their salary, they saw how their money decreased. The army tended to take revenge for lost money and they wanted the sultan to face them in *ayak* council, and asked for the heads of some statesmen. Finally, the rebellious army sacrificed a lot of upper class statesmen. The writer of *Tarih-i Gılmanî* broadly described the incident and exposed the real reason behind it. He believed the state's income was less than its expenditure so in order to balance the situation; the grand vizier decreased the value of the money. Finally, some sections of the army, at that time fighting against the Venetians, quickly returned to Istanbul, and received devaluated money as their delayed salary and realized its worthlessness when they aimed to buy some necessities in the Istanbul Bazaars.<sup>25</sup> It is clearly seen in the text that Mehmet Halife not only described the events but also interpreted them. He also emphasized that the reason of the incident was the result of incomprehension of *Tarhuncu Ahmet Paşa* and his fiscal report, which he presented to the Sultan. He stressed it in his book as:

It is very likely, as *Tarhuncu Ahmet Paşa* recorded that (the incident occurred because of) the excess of expenditures and insufficiency of incomes.<sup>26</sup>

Mehmet Halife usually stresses the importance of the balance between incomes and expenditures in the budget. He tried to understand the reason of increasing the expenses. According to him, there were two reasons for this problem: one was corruption among upper statesmen; and the other was the over increasing number of *janissaries* in the army during this century. He believes both of these reasons are interconnected and transitive. When some people wanted to join to the Janissary army, they offered the statesmen bribes. The upper statesmen sold the posts to pay the salary of the army because unless this was done, they would revolt. However, with the fear of losing their post in a short time, the *Janissaries* started to pressurize the public to get back what they had paid the statesmen. In turn, the statesmen increased the taxes to hinder a probable uprising of the army. Finally, the public could not endure such

<sup>22</sup> Halife, *Târih-i Gılmanî*, 25-26. "Padişaha yakışan o idi ki, kıyafet değiştirerek memleketin durumunu soruştursun. Ta ki, vezirinin ve yakınlarının ona nasıl göründüklerini bilmesi, kendisi hakkında halkın neler söylediklerini, çektikleri acıların ve zulümlerin kimden geldiğini sorup öğrenmesi gerekti. Böylece halk ondan uzaklaşmaz, canına kasd etmezdi. Çünkü halk yüz çevirince durum güçleşir"

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> The Ottoman money unit.

<sup>25</sup> Halife, *Târih-i Gılmanî*, 50-55.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 55. "İhtimal, *Tarhuncu Ahmet Paşa*'nın kaydettiği üzere harcamaların çokluğundan ve gelirin azlığındandır."

heavy taxes and they escaped to *Dârü'l-harb*,<sup>27</sup> and many provinces were emptied.<sup>28</sup> He explains the situation as:

The subject could not endure the increased amount of taxes therefore some of them migrated to Iran some migrated to *dârü'l-harb* (non-muslim Land).<sup>29</sup>

He mentions this problem again in the next chapter. He believes that in order to increase the income, the statesmen were selling the posts to valuable people, and those state officers tried to collect twice as much as what he paid to common people. As a result, the people chose not to bear such tortures and abandoned the country unwillingly and went to Iran and other non-Muslim countries<sup>30</sup>. He believes Köprülü Mehmet Paşa was a savior for the country. He wrote:

The exalted God sent a heartless man like *Köprülü* who hated and could wipe out the bodies of those (janissaries) on the earth because of their tyrannical suppress over the subject.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, Mehmet Halife was a good observer and a very smart interpreter of his time. He not only took notes for his history book but also thought about their essential meaning. *Tarih-i Gılmanî*, is not only concerned with political incidents but also deals with social life of the Empire. In 1660, there was a large fire that destroyed many priceless buildings in Istanbul. He thinks Istanbul as the greatest city of the world and believes no travelers have seen such magnificent city in the world. He enumerates palaces, dervish lodges, shops, charitable establishments, mosques, baths, caravansaries, small mosques (*mescids*) and schools (*medrese*). According to him these buildings were innumerable. Mehmet Halife states that the Palace of Ibrahim Paşa was worthless. Still some parts of his Palace stand today in Sultan Ahmet Square. And he considers the palace of Siyavuş Paşa as the most valuable palace, which had 1200 windows. Unfortunately, there is no trace of it today. Besides, he was a reasonable person, and sometimes does not escape from interpreting the era, in explaining the moral reasons for the fire of 1660. He states that the fire happened due to the immoral behavior of all people of Istanbul, and that it was a divine penalty for the evil actions in the city. He also recounts one by one such action of all classes in. At first, all dwellers of Istanbul felt proud of their wealth, and so began to deceive each other. In addition, the learned men (*ulema*) did not obey the religious rules, and the statesmen started to take bribes. The traders began cheating people and servants started to disobey the rules. Finally, he believes all these actions led to the fire. In actual fact, however, a smoker was the cause behind it.<sup>32</sup>

Mehmet Halife described the fire from how it started to how it destroyed the city in general. According to him, 2700 men died by fire, and 120 palaces, 100 depots, 360 mosques, 40 baths, many schools (*medreses*), small *mescids* and *caravansaries* were devastated by the fire.<sup>33</sup> In addition, he witnessed increasing prices of all goods such as bread and meat and water shortage occurred in Istanbul because the fire destroyed the entire water drainage system. He also informs us of some dramatic scenes in which some people perished by starvation and drought. At the end, he believes that all these bad conditions caused the plague after the fire in Istanbul.

The Book of *Tarih-i Gılmanî* also makes some mentions of underground societies. Mehmet Halife gives three names of them: *Ahmet Kolu*, *Petko Kolu* and *Cevahir Kolu*.<sup>34</sup> They were described as being *Deccal* (the false messiah) in his book, which could explain why they emerged in Istanbul. He was certain of this kind of crime organizations appeared because the Sultan chose to live in Edirne instead of Istanbul. Since the Sultan went away from Istanbul, such underground groups took courage in their activities there. We understand from his account that as a result of their actions they were condemned to row in military ships.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Non-Muslim land.

<sup>28</sup> Halife, *Târih-i Gılmanî*, 56.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. "Halk bunların aldıkları vergilerin çokluğuna dayanamayıp kimi Acem diyarına, kimi Dar-ı Harb'e kaçıyordu."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>31</sup> *Op.cit.* "Yüce Tanrı, zulme uğrayanların inim inim inlemelerine sebep olan Kul tayfasının vücutlarını yer yüzünden kaldırıp yoketmesi için, onlar hakkında merhameti kalmamış bulunan Köprülü gibi hâkime seyf-i inzarı vermiştir.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-98.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*

Consequently, the author of *Tarih-i Gılmanî*, Mehmet Halife, was not an official history writer; he wrote his book by himself for the sake of God and to leave an auspicious work behind him. As being from the sultan's servants, he witnessed very important events. After deciding to write a book, he took notes for his future work. His work is not a complete Ottoman history. It covers the history of the Ottoman Empire from 1650 to 1668. He was not a passionate supporter of the sultans. He couldn't stand criticizing the Sultan Ibrahim (1640-1648) and The Sultan Mehmet IV (1648-1687) by giving advice to them. In deed, he often uses verse of Koran and the prophet's Hadiths to warn sultans. He sometimes wrote a poem to praise the sultan or to warn him. *Mehmet İpşirli* states the difference between the *vak'a-nüvis* (official historian) and individual history writers that the official writers just narrated the events without interpreting but individual writers analyse them. Moreover, these kinds of historians use verses of Koran, Hadiths, Proverbs and Poems.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Mehmet Halife was lacking sufficient group of the world history; he could not see what was happening in the world especially in the west. Although he knew western borders and the wars between the Austrians and the Ottomans, and Ottoman-Iranian wars in the East, he could not comprehend them correctly. And this side is the weakness of his book.

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<sup>36</sup> İpşirli, "Osmanlı Tarih Yazıcılığı," 252.