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# THE SELIMIYE MOSQUE, THE APOCALYPSE AND THE WAR OF CYPRUS (1570-71): THE CREATION OF SELIM II'S SULTANIC IMAGE

Sultan Selim II (r. 1566-74) ascended the throne of the Ottoman Empire on 24 September 1566, following the death of his illustrious father, Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-66), at Szigetvár.<sup>1</sup> At the age of forty-two, by which age both his grandfather Selim I and his father had conquered vast masses of land, he could not boast any outstanding achievements. During his principedom Venetian ambassadors reported consistently that he was lustful,<sup>2</sup> and while his namesake grandfather earned the cognomen 'the Stern' (*yavuz*), he was simply referred to as 'Selim the Drunkard' (*sarı*). Even his accession ceremony turned out to be a failure: Under the influence of his uninformed advisers Selim omitted the customary oath of allegiance ceremony, which would grant him army support throughout his reign,<sup>3</sup> and violated other age-old protocols.<sup>4</sup> Partly because of these, the janissaries returning from the late Süleyman's Hungarian campaign revolted and humiliated the new sultan by not letting him into the Topkapı Palace until he paid them their gratuity (*cülus*).<sup>5</sup> Ottoman historians of the late-sixteenth century would refer to his outstanding grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha as the 'virtual sultan',<sup>6</sup> in whose shadow Selim would become the Ottoman Empire's first sedentary ruler never to leave Istanbul except for his hunting grounds at Edirne. As the empire's new ruler of so many disadvantages, Selim needed a sultanic image as overwhelming as possible.

In this article I explore Selim II's sultanic image-making through two of his major enterprises, the construction of the Selimiye mosque in Edirne and the occupation of Cyprus (1571), as well as his exploiting the upsurge of apocalyptic and millenarianist fervour symptomatic of imperial

contestation between western polities and the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century. By studying symbolically charged imageries created around these, I propose that the major deeds of Selim's reign were not conceptually separate instances as is suggested in modern scholarship but that they were meant to constitute a new sultanic narrative elevating Selim to the position of a Roman emperor living at the 'End of Time'.

Until recently there had been little scholarly interest in the public figure of Selim II in Ottoman studies. The mere eight years of his sultanate appeared uneventful compared with his father's forty-six-year-long reign, which marks the pinnacle of what is commonly referred to as the Ottoman Empire's classical period. The only exception is the frequently researched and much overstated battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571. In the literature, the cultural, diplomatic and military aspects of the Holy League's victory at Lepanto overshadow mostly everything associable with Selim's short sovereignty. It is perhaps because of this scholarly myopia that studies on the Selimiye Mosque (built 1568-74) and the War of Cyprus (1570-71) keep repeating western misunderstandings stemming from the late sixteenth century and miss to see the larger cultural-historical context in which they constitute an imperial programme.

One of these misunderstandings sees a conceptual link between the Selimiye mosque in Edirne and the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus where there is none. The western *topos* that Selim's sultanic mosque was built from the spoils of the War of Cyprus and that its revenues were assigned to its endowment have been in circulation for almost five centuries. Perhaps the most authoritative occurrence of this *topos* is in Paolo Paruta's *Storia della Guerra di Cipro* (1599), where the Venetian *provveditore della Camera* gives an account of a *divan* meeting in Edirne in November 1569. It is this meeting where, according to Paruta, Piyale Mehmed Pasha, Head Admiral of the Navy, and Lala Mustafa Pasha, Sixth Vizier, managed to win the sultan for the cause of an Ottoman offensive against Cyprus by putting forth their argument that

[...] as this war was of itself holy, so it might be made the more meritorious by applying the rich revenues of this new acquisition to the use of the magnificent Temple, which *Selino* caused to be built in *Adrenopolis*.<sup>7</sup>

Decades before the publishing of Paruta's book the assumption of a financial relationship between Selim's mosque and the War of Cyprus had already been a subject of memoirs and travel accounts by western visitors

to Edirne. One of them, the young Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrovitz, who was entrusted by his relatives to an embassy of Rudolph II to Sultan Murad III in 1591 in order to “gain experience and see eastern countries”,<sup>8</sup> arrived in Edirne with his companions on 16 November. The next day Wratislaw visited the Selimiye, and in the midst of praising its splendour, he wrote in his memoir that

Sultan Selim had this new church thus ornamentally built at the time when he wrested the kingdom of Cyprus from the Venetians. He assigned to it large revenues from the resources of that kingdom, which he transmitted every year to Adrianople.<sup>9</sup>

Salomon Schweigger, who joined the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II's embassy of 1578 to Sultan Murad III as an embassy chaplain, taking over the position of the famous Stephan Gerlach, accounted on the mosque and its revenues derived from Cyprus in his *Ein neue Reiss Beschreibung* (1608) in the same fashion.<sup>10</sup> And so did Reinhold Lubenau, the apothecary of the Austrian Habsburg mission on its way to Murad III's court, who visited the *Selimiye* on 22 March, 1588.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, one aspect of the mosque frequently reported on by westerners was that it was built from the war booty of and revenues extracted from Cyprus following the island's Ottoman occupation. It is also suggested that the income generated from the empire's new territory was assigned to the mosque for the complex's maintenance. In other words, for the western spectator the mosque represented a direct reference to the occupation of Cyprus and, consequently, seemed to be charged with an imperial ideology which resonated with the military events of the recent past. The same assumed financial and conceptual linkage between the War of Cyprus and the Selimiye survives to our days. For instance, Gülgu Necipoğlu, in her seminal work on Ottoman architecture, *The Age of Sinan* (2005), gives voice to this contention by pointing to “European and Ottoman writers [who] concur that the mosque was financed with the sultan's legal share of the booty from Cyprus, revenues of which were assigned to its *wakf*”.<sup>12</sup> However, in the corresponding note she only refers to the aforementioned Lubenau and Wratislaw,<sup>13</sup> leaving out the most decisive document for this argument, the Selimiye's *wakfiye*.

The epigraph of the mosque's deed of foundation (*wakfiye*) emphasises the same extraordinary features of the building that Schweigger, Lubenau, Wratislaw and Paruta were so enchanted by one, two and three decades

later.<sup>14</sup> However, as one reads on, the suspicion arises that perhaps these unique architectonic and aesthetic features were not meant to celebrate Selim's 1570-71 victory—or at least not the way it was suggested by westerners. In fact, the mosque's deed of foundation makes no mention of Cypriot estates being assigned to the complex. According to the *vakfiye*, the successor of Selim II, Murad III (r. 1574-95) confirms the holdings of the foundation, the details of which constitute the rest of the charter. To the witness of the document, the estates subjected to the foundation were all located in Thrace, primarily in the districts of Yenice, Vize, Lüleburgaz, Çorlu and Malkara. Furthermore, the document leaves no space for speculations whether in one way or another revenues from Cyprus were re-allocated to the mosque's income. The *vakfiye* rules that

the *vakıf* income derived from the households [*müsakkafat*] of the mentioned villages and the collective of other buildings and all of the farmlands [...] by the justice of the *Sharia* are *vakıf*. No commoner or dignitary should violate the law about their expenditure.<sup>15</sup>

Although the Selimiye's revenues did not come from the empire's new province, Cyprus, this would not necessarily render it impossible that the costs of its construction were covered from the spoils of the war. However, the sequence of events taking place during the construction does not support this assumption. The construction of a 150-strong fleet to be deployed at Cyprus began in August 1568,<sup>16</sup> while a regular payment for the Selimiye from the Topkapı Palace's 'inner private treasury' (*iç hazine*) to the 'outer public treasury' (*taşra hazine*), that is, to building supervisor Halil Çelebi, who was later replaced by ex-finance minister Hasan Çelebi, started on 13 April 1568.<sup>17</sup> Selim covered parts of the expenses from his private budget, which accumulated from the tribute from Egypt and a regular stipend from the produce of the imperial gardens.<sup>18</sup> However, a large bulk of the costs, 21,930,000 *aspers*, was needed to be covered from other sources.<sup>19</sup> Although this sum would be paid as a total of smaller payments by the end of the construction in 1574, excluding the outer courtyard and commercial structures, whose construction was financed posthumously from the surplus of the endowment, the vast expenses of the following years required extra income that would allow for costly military preparations (1568-70) and operations (1570-71) as well as the building of the Selimiye (1568-74) simultaneously, not counting the costs of a campaign to subdue the insurgency in the Yemen, which



also lay ahead. However, the treasury could not bear the financial extra demand posed by such costly projects. As we learn from Feridun Beğ, in a *divan* meeting in the autumn of 1566, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Grand Vizier, dissuaded the new sultan from continuing the war in Hungary and suggested peace with Maximilian II as Süleyman's recent campaign had diminished the empire's stock of gunpowder and, more importantly, the treasury was empty.<sup>20</sup> Although the war in Hungary was abandoned, on 14 November 1568, Selim issued a *firman* ordering the confiscation and re-selling of church estates in the *Vilayet-i Rumeli*, the European part of the empire. The legal basis of the decree, according to *Sharia* law, was clear: Even though the lands of Rumeli were under state ownership, *zimmis* bequeathing land to their churches had become a general practice. The illegal assignment of 'state lands' as well as "vineyards, mills, gardens, houses and shops on state land, as well as cattle and their entire property in full legal possession (*mülk*) to the church" was "by no means, valid".<sup>21</sup> Therefore church *vakıfs* were ordered to be inventoried, confiscated, and given back to the churches or others who requested them in exchange for tithe of the produced grain as well as for *salariye* collected for the state. Church property was affected in the *sancaks* of Thessaloniki, Trikkala, Skopje, Kustendil (Sofia), Alaca Hisar, Herzegovina, Dukagin, Srem, and in the *eyalets* of Buda, Temesvár, and Csanád.<sup>22</sup>

After the confiscation of church properties in November 1568, with sufficient funding at hand, the foundation ceremony of the Selimiye was held on 12 April, 1569.<sup>23</sup> On 30 April Marcantonio Barbaro, the Venetian *bailo* resident in Pera, reported back to Venice in an intelligence dispatch that "his Majesty has sent [men] to diverse parts of the Levant in order to look for antique edifices, to make use of their columns and marble panels for the construction that he will make in Adrianople".<sup>24</sup> However, in spite of the re-allocation of revenues from the confiscated estates in Rumeli to the Porte, there were major hiccups in financing the construction on site. Shortages of wagons were reported from Edirne, and the city's *kadi* complained "that this region is lately much consumed, [and] [...] by going there, his Majesty would destroy it completely with a big bankruptcy, and [would] damage the whole Porte".<sup>25</sup> This was not sheer exaggeration. Tax registers show that while the Porte terminated the 1566-67 fiscal year with a large surplus of approximately 119,509,235 *aspers*, due to a 141,736,000 *asper* roll-over from the previous year, the 1567-68 fiscal year, which lacked any major military enterprises, ended with an almost negligible surplus of 7,502,493 *aspers*.<sup>26</sup> Dwindling resources would carry on until

the last phase of the building project. Toward the end of the construction, Selim already had to refrain from attending the Selimiye's inauguration ceremony in spite of looking forward to the finishing of the mosque so suspensefully. In response to a report on severe provision shortages from the *kadi* of Edirne, a sultanic decree issued on 15 October 1574 ordered that the inauguration ceremony should take place in Selim's absence "so that supplications are made for the continuation of my reign, and the stability of my glory and sustenance".<sup>27</sup>

Evidently, the Cyprus expedition cannot have yielded financial support for the construction works of Selim's new mosque. On the contrary, by the time the construction officially began in 1569, war preparations had been in progress for at least eight months, which caused shortages of assets rather than a surplus of revenues. Even if one disregards reports on lacking financial means from as late as 1574, the mere chronology of the events indicates that covering the costs of Selim's building project from the spoils of the War of Cyprus would need to wait at least until the fall of Nicosia on 9 September 1570, where eventually, the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Mustafa Selaniki claims with exaggeration, "the soldiers of Islam acquired so much booty [...] that any similar case is unheard of in history".<sup>28</sup>

The construction of the Selimiye was the first and most ambitious project the new sultan undertook by 1569, and so it was likely that Selim would oversee the construction on location.<sup>29</sup> However, regardless the project's personal significance for the sultan, such a construction was not without conditions. In his 1581 book of advice dedicated to Murad III, the *Nüshatü's-Selatin (Counsel for Sultans)*, Mustafa 'Ali declares that sultans should only finance charitable socio-religious monuments with the spoils of holy war, because the *Sharia* neither permitted the public treasury to be used for that purpose, nor did it allow the foundation of unnecessary mosques or *medreses*:<sup>30</sup> Without military conquests, Ottoman rulers were not allowed to build a sultanic mosque, and if they did, which had never occurred before Selim II, it was considered by the *ulema* unnecessary extravagance at the expense of the empire's treasury. This is why Selim's grandson on the throne, Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) never built one,<sup>31</sup> and when the famous Sultan Ahmed mosque was built (1609-16) without the backing of new conquests, Ahmed I (r. 1603-17) was heavily criticised by the Ottoman intelligentsia and the religious elite.<sup>32</sup> Selim was likewise blamed for violating the custom,<sup>33</sup> which, essentially, seems to be the reason for the Selimiye having been built outside the imperial capital, by

which it stands alone among sultanic mosques. (For comparison, unlike the Selimiye's *vakfiye*, the Süleymaniye's makes mention of Süleyman's victories on the battlefield, which was meant to legitimize the mosque's costly construction and its location in the imperial capital.)<sup>34</sup> Thus, while the War of Cyprus had been on the agenda since Selim's princely years,<sup>35</sup> when the time arrived for Selim to build his imperial mosque, the War of Cyprus was a necessity without which the construction would have been unjustified.

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While seeing a statement about the War of Cyprus in the Selimiye, namely that the earlier provided the financial means for the latter, is a tradition brought to life by western visitors to Edirne in the late sixteenth century, a seventeenth-century Ottoman author shared their viewpoint. The Ottoman navy sailed out of Beşiktaş to head for Cyprus on 26 April 1570, a year after the foundation ceremony of the Selimiye.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the often quoted Evliya Çelebi in his *Seyahatname* (*Book of Travels*, c. 1530) saw a financial correspondence between war and mosque in presenting a reverse order of the events of 1568 to 1574. Çelebi argues that it was the prophet Mohammed, who ordered Selim to build the Selimiye *after* the occupation of the island. According to the *Seyahatname*, Selim one day saw a dream in Fenebahçe, where the Prophet appeared to him and said:

Ah, Selim, you have made an agreement with God. You said that "If I become the conqueror of the island of Cyprus, from the *gaza* booty I will build a mosque". The Creator granted you 170 castles in Cyprus' width of 770 miles. Why do not you keep to your promise and spend the rest of your life on the way of goodness? Request the booty taken from the castle of Magosa [i.e. Famagusta] in mountainous Cyprus from the prudent and efficient vizier Kara Mustafa Paşa, and build a mosque in Edirne.<sup>37</sup>

As for what accounts for Evliya Çelebi's inventing a course of events that obviously contradict the fact that the construction of the mosque began before the campaign was launched, the traveller gives a clue to the reader whereby his reputable ancestry plays a key motivation. A semi-fictitious father figure, Mehmed Zilli, who allegedly died at the age of 117, serves as a link in Evliya Çelebi's work between the War of Cyprus and the Selimiye mosque. From the *Seyahatname* we learn that Çelebi's father fought in

the War of Cyprus and sang the first *ezan* on the walls of Famagusta after the city's Ottoman capture. In return for his bravery the sultan appointed Zilli as the first muezzin of his new mosque, the Selimiye.<sup>38</sup> Çelebi thus establishes a conceptual linkage between the war and the Selimiye by the personal motivation of giving word to the honour that befell him to be associated with the most magnificent Ottoman imperial mosque and its royal commissioner through his father. However, while the fact that the Ottoman traveller individually arrives at the conclusion where western commentators did a few decades earlier, the real significance of this section of the *Book of Travels* is Selim's alleged encounter with the Prophet and this story's conspicuous resemblance to Byzantine and Ottoman foundation myths about the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople. This similitude is not a mere coincidence. Although Evliya Çelebi is known to have invented parts of the *Book of Travels*,<sup>39</sup> he seems to have been well aware of the original ideology which was meant to show up the Selimiye as a paraphrase and rival of the Hagia Sophia from the earliest stages of its planning.

To understand the semantic link between the Selimiye and the Hagia Sophia underlying this imperial objective, we need to go back more than another hundred years in time. After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and it becoming the Ottoman capital, Ottoman authors pronouncing different attitudes to the conquest and its aftermath produced a body of literature observing the city's past and monuments. One of the Byzantine sources most frequently used by fifteenth and sixteenth-century Ottoman authors was the *Patria*, a collection of Greek texts on the history and monuments of Constantinople, which was translated, upon Mehmed II's (r. 1451-81) commission, into Persian and Ottoman soon after the fall of Constantinople.<sup>40</sup> The Ottoman translation of 1480 by dervish Şemsüddin Karamani entitled *Tevarih-i Bina-i Cami-i Şerif-i Ayasofya* (*The History of the Building of the Great Hagia Sophia*) was made to meet the commissioner's intention to downplay the pagan and eschatological associations apparent in the foundation legends of Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia, Şemsüddin in his translation of the text omits references to the first two churches on site of the Hagia Sophia built by Constantine and Theodosius, and focuses entirely on the founder of the current structure, Justinian I (r. 527-65). The text claims that the emperor was ordered by no other than God to build the Hagia Sophia:

Justinian once saw a dream, in which he [God] told him: "If you want to be above all the Christian denominations of the world, build a church for the whole world to strengthen the faith of Jesus".<sup>41</sup>

Mehmed II's programme was clear: By emphasising the church's foundation upon divine order, the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque received an ideological meaning, which demonstrated that just as Islam had taken the place of Christianity in this imperial space, Mehmed took the position of Justinian as a new Roman emperor, who ruled with God's support.

Ottoman translations and paraphrases of the *Patria* commissioned by Mehmed II and their un-commissioned spin-offs became popular and inspired Ottoman authors to collapse early legends of the Hagia Sophia's foundation into stories about the construction of the Selimiye. The aforementioned Evliya Çelebi claims that, just like the the Hagia Sophia was built upon God's order and its plan revealed to Justinian by Jesus' messenger, the Selimiye was built upon Mohammed's request and the mosque's plan was also marked out by the prophet:

In 972 he went with all of the soldiers of Islam to Edirne, and they made a place to station there for the winter. Then Selim II saw the Prophet of This and the Other World again in his reality: "Build the mosque on that Kavak square." The Holy Pride of Prophethood himself marked out the mosque's foundation and the place of the *qiblah*, there is no finer *mihrab* than that of the Selim Han mosque in the heart of the city of Edirne and there is no straighter direction to Mecca (*kiblegah*) than that of the Eski *Camii*.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, the eighteenth-century Dayezade, in his *Edirne Sultan Selim Camii Risalesi* (1751), claims that the Prophet Mohammed marked out the construction site of the Selimiye to the sultan in a dream, and that a rock equal in its dimensions to those of the mosque appeared when the digging of its foundations began.<sup>43</sup> Such legends about the divinely ordained and assisted founding of the Selimiye find their justification in the *Tevarih-i Bina-i Cami-i Şerif-i Ayasofya*, according to which the plan of the Hagia Sophia was revealed to Justinian by one of the angels of Jesus in his dream.<sup>44</sup> However, seeing the parallelism between the Selimiye and the Hagia Sophia was not merely the product of some Ottoman authors' artistic intuition. It is evident from the Selimiye's architect the Imperial Chief Architect Sinan's autobiographies that the Selimiye was

meant to rival Hagia Sophia in response to an international competition voiced by the critique of European architects. Sinan's preoccupation with his global reputation is reflected in one of his autobiographies, the *Tezkiretü'l-Bünyan*, which mentions the "so-called architects of the infidels" who had upset him by claiming that the Hagia Sophia's peerless dome could not possibly be equalled in size by Muslim architects.<sup>45</sup> However, rivalling the Hagia Sophia by the Selimiye mosque complex is only one side of the coin. Sinan's personal objectives, to which his autobiographies give voice, were paired by an ideology mastered at the court. Selim's goal was to draw parallels between the Hagia Sophia and the Selimiye not only in their extraordinary physical dimensions but also through the re-enactment of the foundation legends which were available to the Ottoman elite in translation about the Hagia Sophia during the Selimiye's construction.

The *Patria* treats Justinian's effort to collect pillars, slabs and revetments from the East and the West, and explicitly names some of the places from where the Hagia Sophia's building material came from,<sup>46</sup> besides the material which was 'recycled' from local sites in Constantinople.<sup>47</sup> One of the sources was the island of Aydıncık (Cyzicus), where, according to legend, Solomon's palace, once built for the Queen of Sheba, used to stand.<sup>48</sup> Oruç Beğ, in his history entitled *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman (The History of the House of Osman, post-1501)*, while discussing the founding of the Hagia Sophia by Constantine the Great, also claims that some of the marbles used for the building of the Hagia Sophia came from Aydıncık.<sup>49</sup> As opposed to *spolia* collected from Solomon's palace, the principal source for freshly cut marbles to be used in the Hagia Sophia was the island of Procopius (Marmara). Even though most of the Procopian marbles had been stripped off the Hagia Sophia before the Ottoman conquest (many of which were re-used for the building of St. Mark's cathedral in Venice, and thus only one such slab remains in its original place on the Hagia Sophia's western façade),<sup>50</sup> the freshly cut marbles of the Selimiye also came from the same island.<sup>51</sup> However, Justinian did not only rely on his empire's source of marble. According to legend, Justinian received *spolia* from every part of the world.<sup>52</sup> The Süleymaniye Mosque Library's manuscript *Ayasofya Tarihi (The History of the Hagia Sophia, c. 1600)*, which belongs to the same literary tradition in Ottoman writing as the *Tevarih-i Bina-i Cami-i Şerif-i Ayasofya*, even quotes the imaginary letter of Justinian to the princes of the world:

Oh, princes of the seven climates, let it be known to you, that I, İstü Yanos [i.e. Justinian] talk to you from Konstantiniyye: Upon the order of Jesus, I have to build a peculiar and sublime church. If you have any kind of marble materials in your *vilayets* [...] cut them from those sublime temples, and by any means that is convenient, send them to my *imaret*. They will be, all of them, a gift in the *imaret* [and] this will greatly strengthen our affectionate friendship.<sup>53</sup>

Later, *Ayasofya Tarihi* tells of entire buildings being dismantled and shipped to Constantinople from diverse parts of the world from the Balkans to Hindustan.<sup>54</sup> So it is little surprise that *spolia* for the Selimiye's construction were also collected from various parts of the Mediterranean and special attention was given to pillars collected in Aydıncık. Evliya Çelebi claims that "on its [i.e. the Selimiye's] four sides there are twenty-six various pillars, most of which came from the place called Temaşalık",<sup>55</sup> the antique ruin on Aydıncık thought to have been Solomon's palace,<sup>56</sup> where a sultanic decree in 1568 forbade collecting marbles during the Selimiye's construction.<sup>57</sup>

The re-enactment of Justinian's imperial act of collecting *spolia* from various parts of his empire, including Aydıncık, and using them for the building of the Hagia Sophia had been an important part of the Süleymaniye Mosque's construction less than two decades earlier as well.<sup>58</sup> In fact, reusing marble of earlier edifices had been a common practice to legitimize power since Antiquity.<sup>59</sup> However, for Selim this symbolic act was not simply to weigh his imperial mosque against the Hagia Sophia. The Selimiye Mosque was built to be the new Hagia Sophia. To make the semantic tie between the Selimiye and the Hagia Sophia even stronger, Selim ordered the renovation of the latter during the construction of his imperial mosque in Edirne, and articulated the sultanic status of the Hagia Sophia mosque in Istanbul by increasing its minarets from two to four, thereby emphasising the iconographic link between the two architectonic masterpieces.<sup>60</sup> But above all the main feat of the Selimiye was going to be its dome, unrivalled in size, and as there had not even been an attempt to build a dome larger than that of the Hagia Sophia before, Selim's endeavour to establish an obvious semantic parallel between his and Justinian's imperial temple depended only on whether the dome could be built. Thus it is only obvious that Selim waited until it was certain that his mosque's dome would stand before he went on to adjusting the Hagia Sophia to the outlook of the Selimiye. The construction reached dome

level in April 1573, and later the same year the sultan's order to begin the renovation of Justinian's temple was issued.<sup>61</sup> With the two domes almost of equal size as well as four minarets each at the two buildings' four corners (in contrast, the only other mosque equipped with four minarets at the time, the Süleymaniye, had its minarets at the four corners of its courtyard), the Hagia Sophia and the Selimiye were subject to a semantic cross-fertilization to draw parallels between the two buildings. This identification of one mosque with the other required confirmation in the two building's surroundings too. Now that the Selimiye stood freely on an open square, the shops and houses attached to the Hagia Sophia's walls needed demolition. Two *fetvas* on the matter of the expropriation and compensation of the owners and hirers affected by the clearing of the Hagia Sophia's surroundings were issued,<sup>62</sup> and the buildings were removed.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, the two buildings' functions were switched. The chronicler Mustafa Selaniki writes in his *Tarih-i Selaniki* (1563-95) that Selim II was accompanied by viziers, grandees, and religious scholars during his inspection of Hagia Sophia in 1573 when the sultan

personally commissioned Koca Mimar Sinan Agha with his blessed words: Build strong buttresses in necessary places and clear the surroundings for the purpose of consolidation; it is my wish to renovate the noble Friday mosque as my own imperial monument.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, Selim was buried at the Hagia Sophia, which, according to Ottoman custom, was the ultimate purpose of an imperial mosque. The renovated monument thus became Selim's sultanic funeral mosque, while the Selimiye seems to have been stripped of its imperial functions. This is also suggested by the absence of a foundation inscription on the Selimiye, which makes it the only Ottoman sultanic mosque without one. The sculpted *muqarnas*-hooded gate of the Selimiye features three empty panels suggesting that it is *not* Selim's imperial monument,<sup>65</sup> or that it is not a sultanic mosque at all. Although at first glance Selaniki's words may seem a contradiction at a time when it was clear that the building of the Selimiye had cost Selim too much both financially (although it cost less than the Süleymaniye complex,<sup>66</sup> the Selimiye was built at a time of financial scarcity) and in battle (the Cyprus campaign resulted in the Holy League's sweeping victory at Lepanto two years earlier), they in fact make perfect sense inasmuch as Selim aimed at building a new Hagia Sophia in Edirne by surpassing its dimensions and leaving it behind when he had



demonstrated his qualities equalling those of Justinian. And indeed it was a strong symbolic act which was picked up on by western visitors to the empire as well: Genoese sources claim that the Hagia Sophia, during its renovation was renamed to 'Selimiye Camii'.<sup>67</sup>

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While the Selimiye has no foundation inscription, it has plenty of inscriptions on the interior, a puzzlingly large number of which are references to the Last Judgement. While the Süleymaniye mosque's inscriptions, which are references to orthodox religious duties none of which are engaged with eschatological themes, the Selimiye's epigraphic programme seems to be focused entirely on the Last Judgement.<sup>68</sup> Borrowing from the Koran and the *hadith*, these calligraphies address the mosque's commissioner and the congregation, which Necipoğlu attributes to the Ottoman populace's penitence invoked by the navy's defeat at Lepanto (1571) only a year prior to their making.<sup>69</sup> The eschatological ideological programme apparent in the mosque's interior inscriptions is supported by the muezzin's tribune, which, unusually for Sinan's *ouvre*, stands in the centre underneath the dome. This novelty together with the octagonal domed baldachin that surrounds it is likened by Sinan's biographer Sai Mustafa Çelebi to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, where God's throne was believed to descend at the Last Judgement.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike Necipoğlu, I see little likelihood of the Selimiye being the carrier of a pensive imperial mood over the Ottoman defeat at Lepanto. Rather, I suggest that the Ottoman attack of Cyprus, the intended cross-referencing between the Selimiye and the Hagia Sophia as well as the eschatological references encoded into Selim's mosque constitute an imperial narrative, can be fully comprehended only when 'read' against the early modern cultural historical backdrop of apocalyptic lore.

To examine Selim's imperial programme in the context of early modern Mediterranean apocalypticism, a medieval tradition which defined western thinking about Islam since the seventh century needs to be discussed. The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople happened at a time when the fall of the city in Byzantine, Jewish and Islamic apocalyptic thinking had come to foreshadow the End of Time/Last Hour. Some elements of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition associable with the fall of Constantinople dated to the earliest centuries of the empire, and featured the city's monuments laden with apocalyptic fears,<sup>71</sup> while

others were more recently developed locally or borrowed from Near Eastern apocalypses. One of the most influential of the latter,<sup>72</sup> which would have a decisive and long-lasting effect on Christian views of Islam, was the *Revelation of Methodius*, whose Syriac original was falsely attributed in the Middle Ages to the fourth-century martyred Bishop of Patara in Lycia.<sup>73</sup> The *Pseudo-Methodius*, the “crown of Eastern Christian apocalyptic literature”,<sup>74</sup> was written during the Arab conquest of northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century by an anonymous author,<sup>75</sup> hence the title *Pseudo-Methodius*. The text presents a salvation history of mankind, whereby Muslims and a certain Last Emperor would play important roles at the times immediately preceding the Last Judgement. Like most apocalypses, the *Pseudo-Methodius* was written at a time of crisis, and thus this anti-Muslim manifesto not only called for Christian resistance against the invaders but also provided hope for its readers. The author envisions an emperor who would defeat the ‘Ishmaelites’ (i.e. Muslims), the enemies of Christ and “...great peace and quiet over the earth”,<sup>76</sup> which will be followed by the release of the “nations which Alexander enclosed” (i.e. the peoples of Gog and Magog).<sup>77</sup> Subsequently “the Lord God will send out one of the commanders of his army and he will smite them”<sup>78</sup> before the Last Emperor moves to Jerusalem, where he will stay for ten and a half years until the Son of Perdition (i.e. the Antichrist) appears causing the emperor to send his crown up to heaven from Golgotha and give out his soul before the Son of Perdition is denounced and the Second Coming ushers in the Last Judgement.<sup>79</sup> Although the *Pseudo-Methodius* is the first existing record of the legend of the Last Emperor, the trope was the continuation of an earlier tradition preserved in the Sibylline Oracles. This body of literature attributed to inspired prophetesses of Antiquity was in fact an eschatological genre consisting of Hellenistic Jewish and Christian oracles, which also drew on (even) earlier apocalyptic traditions.<sup>80</sup> After the Roman Empire’s adoption of Christianity, Christian Sibyllines began to see Constantine the Great as a messianic king, and the eschatological significance of the Roman Emperor did not cease after Constantine’s death either. The first Christian Sibylline was the so-called *Tiburtina* (fourth century CE), which prophesies the events leading up to the Apocalypse in a way that makes its influence on the original Syriac *Pseudo-Methodius* inevitable.<sup>81</sup> The ‘Last Emperor’, arguably the most powerful prophetic *topoi* informing Christian eschatological interpretation of the role of Islam in human history, reached western Christianity by way of the *Pseudo-Methodius*, which was translated into Greek—thus

becoming available for the Byzantine clergy—and Latin early, and later printed and widely read in numerous European vernaculars.<sup>82</sup>

The dialogue between Muslim and Near Eastern apocalypses was unchecked since as early as the writing of the *Pseudo-Methodius*, in effect of which Islamic apocalypticism borrowed greatly from the Byzantine tradition,<sup>83</sup> and by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople absorbed two apocalyptic tropes which showed extraordinary relevance in the Ottoman cultural historical context. One of these was the apocalyptic associations of Constantinople itself, which were available to the Ottomans among other sources by way of the aforementioned *Patria*,<sup>84</sup> and the other—the occurrence of the ‘Blond People’ or the ‘Blond Race’, a central trope in the Byzantine Daniel apocalypses.<sup>85</sup> In the Byzantine synthesis of apocalyptic traditions the conquest of Constantinople would be followed by the occurrence of the Last (Roman) Emperor, who, with the help of the Blond People would wage a decisive defeat on the ‘Ishmaelites’. The ‘blond people’ was widely a recognizable *topos* within the Ottoman tradition whereby in different historical periods they were identified with different peoples and polities of the Christian faith from the Byzantines to the Habsburgs varyingly.<sup>86</sup> The Ottoman elite’s familiarity with Constantinople’s apocalyptic lore and their identification of the Blond People with Christian polities which would execute a devastating counter-attack on the Ottomans seem to have been among the main reasons that prompted some to strongly oppose to Mehmed II’s decision to turn Constantinople into his polity’s first imperial capital, thus, with the help of careful selection and interpretation of *hadith* the apocalyptic role of both the city and the prophesied people needed to be downplayed (even though the Prophet’s sayings also include references to Constantinople’s apocalyptic significance).<sup>87</sup> However, Ottoman authors uninvolved in Mehmed II’s image making allowed themselves to handle the apocalyptic literature available to them with more sincerity. Perhaps the most influential of such authors working during Mehmed’s reign was Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu (died c. 1466), whose cosmography entitled *Dürr-i Meknun* was written shortly after the Ottoman occupation of Constantinople,<sup>88</sup> and contains two chapters dedicated to the “signs of the (last) hour” (*esrat-ı saat*).<sup>89</sup> Ahmed Bican was inevitably familiar with the Byzantine tradition (including translations of the *Pseudo-Methodius* and elements of the Daniel apocalyptic literature),<sup>90</sup> which he merged with Islamic apocalyptic prognostications<sup>91</sup> thus arriving at the conclusion that the end was not immediate but the tribulations preceding the advent of the

Last Hour would begin to take place in 1494-95 (900 A.H.) and that the Last Hour itself may be scheduled for 1590-91 (1000 A.H.).<sup>92</sup> According to Ahmed Bican, both Byzantine and Islamic prognostications (derived mostly but not exclusively from the *hadith* and *cifrî*) pointed to the Ottoman occupation of Constantinople being the first sign that the apocalypse was near. The Blond People (i.e. the Christians) would collect their forces and re-conquer the city, which would be followed by another but failed Ottoman military attempt, and the ultimate Muslim conquest would only occur when the Mahdi (Messiah) defeats the Blond People and enters the city.<sup>93</sup> In another apocalyptic, the *Münteha (Epilogue)*, Bican claims that the main objective of Mehmed should be to conquer Rome and all the lands of the Blond People too, whose attack from the West before the Last Judgement is certain.<sup>94</sup> The *Dürr-i Meknun*, especially its two chapters engaged with the Last Hour and its portents, soon became an influential work in Ottoman apocalypticism. By the end of the sixteenth century these chapters had begun to live their own lives through adaptations and emulations and were copied separately from the original work.<sup>95</sup> The advent of the Islamic millennium and the geopolitical environment in which the Ottoman Empire operated in the sixteenth century, especially its continuous conflicts with European polities which could be interpreted as the 'Blond People', allowed for Ottoman interpretations that saw Selim II's conquest of Cyprus in an episode of the *Dürr-i Meknun* where in the Last Hour a certain Selim would wage naval battles and conquer the 'Western Island' (*cezire-i garb*).<sup>96</sup>

In the Christian West by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries theories abounded about an approaching Great Year that would see the universal triumph of a single religion often linked to prognostications based on the *Old Testament's* 'Book of Daniel', and on the ongoing Joachimist tradition of prophecy pointing to the imminence of a Last Emperor.<sup>97</sup> These eschatological expectations found their outlet of expression in the 'New Jerusalem' of the Florence of Savonarola (1452-98), which saw Charles VIII of France as the Last Emperor, in the claims of the proponents of French universal monarchy, especially Guillaume Postel, and of the Habsburg revival of the ideal of a universal Holy Roman Empire under Charles V (r. 1519-1556).<sup>98</sup> Meanwhile in the Ottoman Empire, the approach of the millennium in the *Hijra* calendar in the sixteenth century and the empire's contest with both Christian powers and the Safavi state the situation was ideal for rumours about the arrival of a messianic leader. Selim I, as the first Ottoman caliph after the conquest of Eastern Anatolia, Syria and Egypt

was described as “*sahib-kıran*” (Master of the Conjunction) or World Emperor.<sup>99</sup> According to Lutfi Paşa’s *Tevarih-i Al-i ‘Osman* (*The Histories of the House of Osman*, c. 1550) Selim was addressed in congratulatory letters after the Battle of Çaldıran (1514) as the Mahdi of the Last Age and the Alexander-like World Conqueror, whose coming at the end of the Islamic era had been foretold by apocalypses (*melheme* or *mülhime*) dating from the time of the Prophet.<sup>100</sup>

However, as Selim I died without conquering the world or seeing the Apocalypse, the Ottoman eschatological programme allowed for continuing. Lutfi Paşa claims that “Selim hewed a garden from a disorderly world; it was left to his heir Sultan Süleyman to enjoy its fruits”.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, Süleyman the Magnificent and his entourage (most notably Grand Vizier İbrahim Paşa and personal favourite Alvise Gritti) created a public image of the sultan being the Mahdi and *sahib-kıran*, which was to be understood both literally and symbolically: In the rivalry of Charles V and Süleyman both emperors claimed universal sovereignty. Mevlana İsa, an Ottoman *kadi* who lived through at least half of Süleyman’s reign, composed three recensions of Ottoman history in verse entitled *Camiü’l-Meknünat* (*The Compendium of Hidden Things*, 1529-1543). In the recension of 1543 the *kadi* takes on an extraordinary dramatic vision: The approach of the year 1000 A.H. (1552-53) would see the terrestrial triumph of the true religion as the expected result of the rivalry between Süleyman with Charles V for recognition as the *sahib-kıran*. On this basis, the author states that Süleyman is either the Mahdi or his conquering forerunner.<sup>102</sup>

As Süleyman died in 1566 and the Apocalypse still had not occurred, Mevlana İsa’s second scenario, that Süleyman’s heir would fulfil the time’s eschatological expectations, could finally be implemented. While in the Ottoman Empire Ahmed Bican’s *Dürr-i Mekkun* allowed for an interpretation to identify Cyprus with the eschatological ‘Western Island’ and its conqueror as Selim II,<sup>103</sup> western authors, deriving their theories from apocalyptic prognostications and calculations came to the conclusion that Selim II would in fact be the last Ottoman sultan. Heinrich Müller in his *Türkische Historien* (1563) claims that all prophecies about the Ottomans show there would be no more than twelve emperors, and, according to his calculations, Süleyman was the eleventh.<sup>104</sup> Although the eleventh in the row of Ottoman sultans was Selim II, the number of rulers was often miscalculated in the West, and Selim was often thought to be the one in whom the Ottoman dynasty would meet its fate. For instance,

Michel Jove in his *Vray Discours de la bataille des armes Christienne & Turquesque* (1571) reproduces an imaginary conversation taking place between Sülyeman and a “famous astrologian of Armenica” (here I quote the 1579 English translation):

And it might wel be applied which the Hebrewes or Iewes doe affirme of the Monarchie of Turkes, the which (say they) ought to take end at the fifteenth Lord the which is Selim, reigning at this present.

A famous Astrologian of Armenica, saide unto Soliman, that the raigne of the house of the Ottoman should ende in his personne, to the which he answered: Not in me, but in my successour, of the which the Turkes are in great doubt, according to a prophesie which thay haue saying, Our Empire shall come, a kingdome shall take it, figured by a red apple.<sup>105</sup>

Likewise, the *Oracles of Leo the Wise* foretells a similar scheme for the apocalypse. Erroneously attributed to Byzantine Emperor Leo IV (r. 886-912), the majority of these oracles were in fact produced in the sixteenth century (however, some of the shorter ones concerned with the fate of the empire and especially that of Constantinople were in existence in the twelfth century) and survive in several manuscripts and printed volumes.<sup>106</sup> The Bodleian Library’s Greek manuscript, the Baroccianus M.S. 145 (1573), commissioned by Venetian humanist Francesco Barozzi, tells the story in the following manner:

five kings descended from Hagar will, by the dispensation of God, our Master and Lord, rule this city – I mean Constantinople – and dominate it with great might. [...] And of the fifth he says that he will forthwith come to an end, and a Christian emperor will once more rule this city...<sup>107</sup>

Selim being the fifth Ottoman sultan to have reigned in Constantinople, the Greek text obviously refers to him. Yet, as a *vaticina ex eventu*, the oracle strangely refers to the War of Cyprus as the defining event of Selim’s reign, instead of the Battle of Lepanto, which would have validated the prophecy of Leo the Wise.<sup>108</sup>

In the “Book of Daniel” (11:30) it is prophesized that at the end of days two kings (the King of the North and the King of the South) will wage war on each other: “For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy

covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant." The name Chittim stands for Cyprus, and apparently refers to the "ships of the Romans", which will wreck the King of the North, whose heart "is against the Holy Covenant" (Daniel 11:28). These words later inspired an apocryphal "Vision of Daniel" apocalyptic to emerge called *The Vision of Daniel on the Isle of Cyprus*, which survives in at least nine manuscript copies to our days.<sup>109</sup> Drawing on this tradition Gregorios Klontzas, in the 1590s composed his illuminated universal history in Venetian Crete, whereby he attributed the same apocalyptic portent to the War of Cyprus. Klontzas was only one of the authors writing *vaticina ex eventu* about the War of Cyprus. Although later authors would see the island's Ottoman occupation as a forerunner to the Ottoman navy's defeat at Lepanto, we find various treatises like the Venetian Francesco Sansovino's *Lettera, o vero discorso sopra le predizioni le quali pronosticano la nostra futura felicità per la guerra del Turco l'anno 1570* and Giovanni Battista Nazari's *Discorso della future et sperata vittoria contra il Turco* which saw the coming of the Antichrist in the Ottoman victory at Cyprus.

While both in the Ottoman Empire and in the Christian West age-old traditions pointed to Cyprus and Selim II's reign as of apocalyptic importance, which the Ottoman court began to exploit in building up the sultanic image of the newly inaugurated Selim, the image of Selim being a Roman emperor living at the End of Time came full circle only after his death. The translation of Abd al-Rahman al-Bistami's (c. 1380-1455) *Miftah-ı Cifrü'l-Cami* (*Key to Esoteric Knowledge*) was commissioned by Mehmed III in c. 1600, which, rather than relating a chronological history to the Ottoman dynasty that links them with a series of historical prophets and caliphs, projects the dynasty's portrait onto an eschatological account of the end of the world. In the *Miftah-ı Cifrü'l-Cami's* visual and textual programme the figure of the Mahdi is no longer used to be associated with a single sultan. Although in the scripts belonging to the images depicting the Mahdi he is referred to as "*İmam Mehmed Mahdi*", which is an obvious allusion to a wished-for eschatological image of Mehmed III,<sup>110</sup> the *Miftah* bears witness to the new ideological program, which was to depict the entire House of Osman as the last ruling dynasty of the world, and thus the military events of the late sixteenth century taking place between Muslims and non-believers or the Tatars were identified with and shown as the widely known prognosticated events of the 'End of Time'.<sup>111</sup> Thus where the image depicting the apocalyptic *topos* of the

Muslim army slaying the fleeing Christian army on the 'Western Island' (*cezire al-rum*, literally Roman Island), the Ottoman army's victory in Cyprus takes the scene.<sup>112</sup>

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From the beginning of his reign, Selim II followed a scheme necessary to create an overwhelming sultanic image of himself as had been done by his predecessors. In this image-making there was no element which had not been used before separately by Mehmed II, Selim I and Süleyman the Magnificent, yet they have received little scholarly attention so far. The Selimiye mosque and its semantic affiliation with the Hagia Sophia served to fashion Selim as the new Justinian; the War of Cyprus created a justification for him to build the Selimiye and at the same time allude to Christian and Islamic eschatological traditions expecting the Last Emperor and a major battle taking place on a 'Western Island' immediately before the Apocalypse. Selim's sultanic image as a Roman emperor living at the End of Time is thus the ideological mortar that holds the deeds of his reign together and lends a meaning to them in an overarching imperial narrative.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The research presented here has been made possible by the support I have received from New Europe College in Bucharest and access to the collection of the Islamic Research Centre's Library in Istanbul, which I have been granted at several occasions since 2010.
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