

Introduction

The Ottomans and the Caliphate

With the fall of Baghdad in 1258, the historical caliphate, embodied by the Abbasid Empire, formally ended with traumatic consequences that, in response, facilitated the rise of a new wave of self-reflection, exploration, and experimentation in all segments of Islamic societies.¹ In the absence of the imperial caliphate, along with the rise of independent regional Muslim dynasties from the fourteenth century onwards, the idea of the caliphate, reinterpreted in response to profound changes taking place in the broader Muslim community, regained its prominence in Islamic political discourse, and, with the rise of the Ottoman Empire, became the linchpin of imperial ideology in the sixteenth century. Modern studies on the question of Muslim rulership repeatedly assume that the historical caliphate, as conceived by Muslim jurists during the Abbasid period (c. 750–1258), continued to define both the concept and the institution in subsequent political thought and praxis. This assumption confines the theoretical construction of the caliphate to jurisprudence, overlooks the impact of later historical experiences, and disregards the formative influence of broader intellectual traditions in framing the caliphate as both an institution and an ideal. The post-Abbasid caliphate, or the making of the non-Arab caliph in the Ottoman case, was reconstructed in the language of Sufism infused with indigenous traditions of rulership and shaped by defining historical experiences, rather than through the juristic canon of medieval universalism. In sixteenth-century political discourse, the Ottoman caliph was a mystic, in the sense that he was a friend and deputy of God on Earth, with sway over both temporal and spiritual realms. The House of Osman was God's chosen dynasty commissioned to serve divinely assigned purposes, and the Ottoman rulership was the seal of the caliphate to last until the end of times.

In the sixteenth century, continuous Ottoman expansionism in all directions entailed that the Ottomans counter and appropriate the legitimating apparatus of their opponents, most notably the Habsburgs, the Safavids, and the Mamluks, which helped introduce the belief in the uniqueness of the Ottoman

dynasty into the mainstream of political thinking. Through mythologizing the origins of the Ottoman state, esoteric interpretations of religious texts, and prophecies of the great spiritual men, the ruling elite perceived the Ottoman dynasty as the chosen one. Further, the triumphalist mood of the age, invigorated by seemingly incessant victories, made statesmen and intellectuals see achievements in the arts, architecture, literature, and government as further signs of Ottoman exceptionalism. In political geography, early sixteenth century Eurasia witnessed the emergence of confessional empires with claims of universal rulership that engaged in a stiff competition for ideological ascendancy. The Sufi-minded theorists of rulership, unchecked by the limits of authority set in juristic and bureaucratic traditions, provided a useful repository of symbolism and imagery to claim the superiority of the Ottoman caliphate. The discourse on the caliphate included an extensive engagement with theories of government expounded in various disciplines and literary genres in the context of Islamic learned traditions. The full corpus of mainstream political theory was widely available to Ottoman statesmen, who appear to have been staunch collectors of such texts and patrons of scholars on statecraft. The discourse reflects competing visions of rulership, languages, concepts, norms, imageries, and styles articulated in an increasingly Islamic but versatile and vernacularizing Ottoman culture. Jurists, Sufis, and bureaucrats contested rival notions of authority and sought to formulate an imperial image that best represented their own ideological imprints, confessional convictions, group interests, and cultural idioms.

Despite their accommodating approach to rulership, jurists per se in the Ottoman Empire ceased to be the leading exponents of the theory of the caliphate because of both theoretical and practical problems they could never definitively resolve. One was the juristic fixation with the historical caliphate as a successorship to Muhammed through an established lineage from his tribe, the Quraysh, a ruling that manifestly stood at odds with that of the Ottoman dynasty. Second, although a few jurists radically altered the theory of the caliphate, the canonical formulation of the caliphate proved impervious to the demands of coercive power or even captivating esoteric visions, and remained unchanged in all the juristic and theological textbooks taught in Ottoman madrasas, creating an unresolved tension between formal Islamic training and individual opinions. This cognitive dissonance created an irreparable rift between jurists who pursued academic careers in the Ottoman madrasas and remained loyal to the medieval ideal and those who pursued legal careers in the imperial judicial administration and tended to be pragmatic by accommodating divergent political realities. Because of this rift, the leading jurists either abstained from writing on the question of the caliphate in normative juristic language or resorted to the mystical philosophy of prominent Sufi intellectuals, such as Ibn Arabi, to reconfigure the caliphate outside the disciplinary confines of Islamic jurisprudence.

Relatively unbound by juristic doctrines, the Sufis offered a radically new understanding of the caliphate that better suited the legitimation needs of a rising Muslim empire. As Sufi orders and their leaders became increasingly involved in public life, their notions and imageries of authority permeated into dynastic visions of authority. Almost all the books on rulership that were taught to dynastic heirs between 1400 and 1600 as part of their training in statecraft were written by prominent Sufi authors. Tutors for princes were mostly renowned Sufis or Sufi-minded scholars whose teaching centered on esoteric, spiritual, and moral interpretations of rulership. Princes had little training in jurisprudence but were deeply exposed to mystical visions of rulership. The close association between the Ottoman ruling elite and prominent Sufi orders turned Sufism into the principal medium of formulating Ottoman dynastic legitimacy and inculcating a sultanic image as a spiritual leader. The Ottoman court countered the political challenges posed by powerful Sufi orders by adopting mystical visions of authority, and by depicting the Ottoman ruler as a caliph who conforms to Sufistic expectations.

In his study of kingship and sainthood in early modern Iran, Central Asia, and India, Azfar Moin perceptively noted that “the scriptural notions of the messiah (*mahdi*) and the renewer (*mujaddid*), the mystical concepts of the pole or (*qutb*) and the perfect individual (*insan-i kamil*), and the kingly notions of divine effulgence (*farr-i izadi*) and the lord of conjunction (*Sahib Qiran*) all referred to human agents who could usher in and maintain the just religiopolitical order of a particular historical era.”² One may easily add to this mosaic of imageries a long list of other notions and concepts that originated from various learned and indigeneous traditions including those constructed with *dawla* (fortune), *ḥūt* (fortune), *khātām* (seal), *gharṣ* (succor), *mazhar* (manifestation), *zill* (shadow), and *āya* (evidence). Granted that each term retained its peculiar meanings in specific contexts and usages, in various strands of Ottoman political thought, it was the caliphate that served as the anchor concept into which all these otherwise little related notions of human distinction could harmoniously be assimilated as its descriptive markers.

The caliphate, in both concept and practice, could tie the historical with the utopian, the temporal with the spiritual, the individual with the communal, and the object with the subject. It could be equally meaningful in philosophical, juristic, and Sufistic discourses, and utilized for conversation among different disciplines, world views, and social structures. Whether simply considered as “succession” of authority in historical practice or the very act of “creation” of human beings per Sufi cosmology, the term’s defining qualities remain to be “representation” and “performance.” As one Arabic text in the sixteenth century formulated, *khilāfa* does not materialize unless the *mustakhlaf* (successor) fully reflects the *mustakhlif* (succeeded).³ Namely, however it was conceived, the caliphate was always contingent on something else, having no significance without the signifier, no status without what it stands

for, or no existence without what it manifests. The very etymology, semantics, scriptural sanction, and historical applications of the term made it inherently suitable and infinitely flexible for political speculation and craftsmanship.

In Ottoman practice, envisioning the caliphate as a comprehensive cosmological position that encompasses both temporal and spiritual realms was embroidered in discursive narratives constructed by dynastic apologists and enigmatic letterists as well as mainstream scholars through literary articulation, artistic representation, and occultic revelations. This caliphal myth, as part of the central theme of the imperial ideology, entailed that the House of Osman was commissioned to rule as the “Great Caliphate” of the end of times foretold in the Qur’an, prophesied by Prophet Muhammed, envisioned by saints, and proven by discernible manifestations of divine providence. The caliphate as such was closely tied to an eschatology drawn from indigenous traditions and Abrahamic teachings conveyed via Islamic sources. The Ottoman caliphate, turned into a powerful foundational myth that was enhanced by a syncretic amalgamation of popular imageries and formal teachings of Islamic disciplines, then became the defining mantra of Ottoman imperial ideology continuously adapted to new political configurations and confessional manifestations, and reworked until the end of the empire.

The Caliphate in the Age of Süleyman

This study examines the mystification of the caliphate from its post-Abbasid origins to the late sixteenth century by privileging the age of Süleyman the Lawgiver (r. 1520–1566) for a more detailed analysis during which the caliphate turned into a patently Sufistic concept. In explaining the rise of Sufi tariqas in the late medieval Islamic world, Marshall Hodgson briefly but perceptively hinted at the newly forming mystical notion of the caliphate:

The *ulama* never ceased to think of the ideal unity of Islam in terms of a *khalifa*, a Caliph ruling a human empire. The Sufis made much of a very different sort of *khalifa*, the human being who as perfected microcosm is the final end of, and holds limitless sway over, the world of nature and men together. He is a Muslim, and exercises his power largely upon and through Muslims (the *Abdal*); but there is a recognized place under his care for the believers in every faith however crude, not only peoples of the Book as in the historical Caliphate, but outright pagans. The kings who come and go are but the servants of such a saint, as many beloved anecdotes make clear; no Caliph had such power over his governors as the Sufi *shayhks*, and especially the supreme *shaykh*, the Qutb of any given time, had over the earth’s rulers.⁴

But Hodgson’s signpost was largely overlooked in subsequent studies. The impact of Sufism on political thought, however, has been getting increasingly

more attention in Islamic studies in the past few decades. Among others, Cornell Fleischer, Kathryn Babayan, Mercedes García-Arenal, and Azfar Moin masterfully demonstrated how rulers of the post-caliphate Islamic world from Morocco to India constructed colorful visions of rulership by decorating themselves with mystical imageries and posing themselves as caliphs, lords of conjunction, renewers of religion, Mahdis, and saints. These studies treat the politicization of Sufism or mystification of politics within the larger framework of Islamic eschatology, messianism, millenarianism, and revivalism. While this study complements previous scholarship and furthers the inquiry, it parts ways in several directions. First, it focuses on the idea of the caliphate and treats messianic visions only to the extent they are related to it. Second, while taking the broader cultural and social context into consideration, this study mainly examines the political literature in all its diverse strains. Third, it tells the post-Abbasid story of the caliphate as a process of negotiation between Sufi groups and the Ottoman ruling establishment. Finally, it traces and explains the trajectory and transformation of the core vocabulary of political thought in Ottoman experience, or the rise of the Ottoman vernacular in political discourse.

The caliphate, in its various conceptions and manifestations, became more pronounced during the age of Süleyman as displayed in the extensive political corpus, royal titles, artistic representations, and public displays. More, Süleyman appeared in Ottoman thought as the personification of the supreme universal leader of the Muslim community whose image was made to fit various notions of leadership theorized in different Islamic disciplines and proclivities. The age of Süleyman is by far the most extensively studied period in both academic as well as popular historiography because it is considered a pivotal era of Ottoman history, if not of the entire early modern world. No other period of Ottoman history has attracted such a degree of interest. Süleyman has been the subject of more biographies than all other Ottoman sultans combined to quench the thirst for understanding this archetypical ruler, ranging from the crude Orientalist inquiries into the mystique of oriental rulership to contemporary infatuation with Süleymanic enlightenment. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more than twenty memorializing epic biographies with the title *Süleymānnāme* (the Book of Süleyman) were composed.⁵ At the height of his power, Süleyman was arguably the most commonly recognized universal ruler across Eurasia, from Sumatra to France. It is no surprise that his contemporaries called him with such titles as the second Solomon and Mahdi. As reflected in his more common epithet, “lawgiver” (*ḳānūnī*), Süleyman was commonly perceived to be an epoch-making sultan both in Ottoman memory as well as in modern historiography.⁶

In this study, the Süleymanic age refers to the period that roughly corresponds to the tenth century of the Islamic calendar. It is marked by the ascendance of a new imperial elite that started to take form after the conquest

of Constantinople, thrived under his reign, and carried his classicizing legacy after his death. Süleyman's birth coincided with the beginning of the tenth century, which lent an added excitement to the brewing millenarianism of the period. The age of Süleyman thus conveniently corresponds to the millennial century of Islam, which also loosely syncs with the sixteenth century. Süleyman's mark was already evident before his succession and remained afresh long after his death. Neither Süleyman's succession nor his death caused any major disruption in administrative continuity. Although Süleyman was enthroned in 1520, he appeared on the Ottoman dynastic scene before 1512 during the succession struggle of his father, Selim I. By playing a crucial role in his father's takeover of the throne, Süleyman secured his own succession as the crown prince. As the sole heir to the throne, the only such case in all of Ottoman history, he himself was well aware of his uniqueness, and his contemporaries were keen to highlight this exception as a sign of his chosenness. When he succeeded to the throne at the age of twenty-five on the sudden death of his father, he continued to rule along with the statesmen and ulema promoted by Selim I, most notably Grand Vizier Piri Paşa (d. 1532) and Sheikh ul Islam Zebbilli Ali Cemali Efendi (d. 1525). When he died in 1566, Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Paşa (d. 1579) and Sheikh ul Islam Ebussuud (d. 1574), two major figures of his later reign, remained in office until Selim II's death in 1574. Major intellectual figures of his reign such as Ibn Kemal (d. 1534), Taşköprizade Ahmed (d. 1561), Celalzade Mustafa (d. 1567), and Birgivi Mehmed (d. 1573), had a defining impact on later Ottoman thought.

The intellectual landmarks of the political thought of Süleymanic age are Idris-i Bidlisi (d. 1520), who wrote his treatise on political philosophy, *Qānūn-i Shāhanshāhī* in Persian, and Kınalızade Ali (d. 1572), the author of what came to be the Ottoman canon in ethical philosophy, *Ahlāk-i Alāī*. During this time, Ottoman intellectuals displayed a burgeoning interest in writing on various aspects of rulership and government. After a long tradition of political writings in the form of translations and reworkings of previous works, as well as a few original compositions since the rise of the Ottomans, *Qānūn-i Shāhanshāhī* appeared to be the first major attempt at an elaborate theory of rulership following the reconfiguration of the Ottoman polity from an ambitious frontier state into a universal empire under the reigns of Mehmed II and Bayezid II. Perceived by later generations as one of the major legacies of the Süleymanic age, despite the considerable debt it owes to previously formulated theories of ethics, *Ahlāk-i Alāī* was written with a claim to surpass all other works on the same subject and conceived to be an exposition of Ottoman moral, social, and political ideals of the period.⁷ The period between Bidlisi and Kınalızade was a flourishing era of intellectual vigor, creativity, and curiosity among Ottoman men and women of learning.

The age of Süleyman is best known in historical memory, modern scholarship, and popular imagination for its classicizing legacy in arts, literature,

learning, lawmaking, and institutionalization. Yet, in originality and future effects, political thought was no less spectacular than any other achievement of the era. The most conspicuous development of this period was the emergence of an extensive corpus of political literature across various genres and disciplines with an unprecedented range of dissemination. Juristic, philosophical, ethical, sufistic, and theological views were expressed in the conventions of their respective disciplines or in the synthetic genre of mirrors for princes. The sheer number of political texts in circulation alone attests to the emergence of a broad-based interest among the reading public on questions of rulership. Accompanying this surge of interest was the gradual broadening of the field of political thought. Increased contact of Ottoman men of learning with the non-Ottoman body of political writings led them to deal with issues and questions that had not appeared in pre-sixteenth century Ottoman political literature. *al-Siyāsa al-shar'iyya*, for example, a field that developed during the Mamluk period, came to the attention of Ottoman scholars only toward the middle of the sixteenth century, after the conquest of Egypt. Similarly, the question of *bayt al-māl* or public treasury, a topic not included in previous Ottoman political writings, became an important issue in this period, largely because of the influence of the Mamluk tradition of political writing. In addition, the Ottoman experience in government posed new questions to address in the political literature. *Ḳānūn*, for example, in the sense of law, had never made its way into political theory before this period, because no pre-Ottoman polity had such a highly developed legal system characterized by *ḳānūn*.

This broadening of the spectrum of political writings did not bring all conventional issues of previous political corpus into the Ottoman context. On the contrary, except for a few issues, most of the common questions that had busied pre-Ottoman authors on rulership did not resonate among the Ottoman audience and were simply ignored. The question of required qualifications for the caliphate or imamate, for example, which preoccupied jurists and theologians for so long, fell from favor in this period, even though the Ottoman sultan always implied his superiority over all other Muslim rulers. The broader field of political thought in this period was exposed more to influences from the Turkic and Persianate east than from the Arab south. For practical reasons, Ottoman authors found political teachings formulated in the East more relevant because of the affinity of the Ottoman political system with its Eastern counterparts. This influence was facilitated by a constant influx to the Ottoman realm of eastern scholars, bureaucrats, and literati, who carried political ideas and conventions along with them. Despite the full incorporation of the Arab south, Ottoman political thought remained to be articulated mainly on the cultural plane of what Shahab Ahmed called the *Balkans-to-Bengal complex*.⁸

Although the Ottoman authors of this period wrote on a variety of subjects in different genres, the Sufistic language dominated the overall discourse on

rulership. Besides the mystics who wrote on government, most scholars writing on the subject were either themselves affiliated with a Sufi order or were well versed in mystical teachings. Most works on rulership and ethics are imbued with teachings, imageries, and vocabulary of mostly Turko-Persianate Sufism. Advice literature, in particular, was largely under the spell of, in Dabashi's words, Persianate literary humanism.⁹ The ritualistic terminology of Ottoman Sufism was largely Persian because of the popularity of Persian works on the subject as well as the dissemination of Sufi orders that originated in the East. The Sufi world view that captivated Ottoman intellectuals naturally shaped the mode of thinking and the language of writing on rulership. Among others, works of Attar (d. c. 1221), Sa'di (d. c. 1291), and Rumi (d. 1273), as repositories of Sufi wisdom on government, were among the shortlist of classics of which any rank and file Ottoman intellectual was expected to have mastered.

Yet, despite the continued prestige of Arabic in normative thought and of Persian in literature, Turkish established itself as the primary language of political discourse in this period. Although the combined number of works compiled in Arabic and Persian was still much higher than those in Turkish, only Turkish texts reached a wide circulation. A large number of translations produced in this period demonstrate the existence of a growing readership in Turkish that turned this language into the principal medium of political discourse. The availability of a large number of classical works on rulership in Turkish certainly facilitated its rise as a language of choice in writing on rulership. The spread of political texts in Turkish texts and the upsurge of interest in reading on the subject were two developments that fed each other. In terms of terminological richness, conceptual sophistication, and literary and artistic potentialities, Turkish became a more convenient language for expressing political views. While Arabic and Persian stood relatively apart, Ottoman Turkish evolved in full engagement with both languages and their cultural backdrop. For the learned who were typically well versed in three languages, Turkish evolved to become the only venue where diverse traditions represented in Persian and Arabic could be amalgamated into a single medium of expression.

The Caliphate as a Moral Paradigm

In the age of Süleyman, the general tenor of political writing was set by the moralist tendency that had dominated political discourse since the rise of independent rulers in the eleventh century against the overarching rule of the Abbasid caliphate. During the high caliphate of the ninth and tenth centuries, the main quest of juristic political thought was to establish the normative principles of governance, whereas theological writings were limited to the proper definition of imamate in response to alternative claims of authority. Philosophical works, in the main, treated the political as part of their search for the best form of human association that leads to the attainment of a higher

form of life. Regardless of disciplinary interests and priorities, the dominating theme of political discourse was defining the best qualified candidate to lead the Muslim community. The holy grail of political theory during the formative age of Islamic thought was to define the most perfect ruler to lead the community in the right direction towards its ideals with less regard to moral technologies of reforming the ruler-in-charge.

With the decline of the central caliphate and the rise of independent rulers, the discrepancy between classical juristic theory and political practice widened. As best illustrated in a burst of mirror for princes literature, moralism replaced idealism as the central theme of political discourse. This fledgling breed of political literature, which ultimately originated from the writings of Ibn al-Muqaffa in the eighth century but was overshadowed by the juristic discourse, shifted the focus from the qualifications of the universal caliph to the moral recuperation of the ruler in office, and from the uncompromising but abstract *sharʿī* principles of governance to specific instructions to turn existing administration into an efficient but just one. Because instating the best qualified candidate to the universal leadership of the Muslim community remained an unrealized utopia, the moralist tendency that aimed to turn the ruler in office into the best possible one found widespread appeal among statesmen, jurists, philosophers, and Sufis alike. Despite this shift of focus toward specific principles of rulership, the medieval fixation that the best governance could only be undertaken by the best of people survived as a noble ideal in political writing.

Guided by the moralist-pietistic tendency, most Ottoman authors pursued to improve the quality of rulership while totally disregarding its form. Ideal rulership was to be achieved not by finding the best form of political authority but by improving the moral quality of ruler and his aides in government. Thus the defining element of rulership was not its institutional sophistication but the human agent at the helm. Those moralists commonly defined rulership, in the generic sense, as the mere acquisition of sufficient executive power to rule. This ordinary rulership transforms into true rulership only when the ruler achieves personal sophistication in morality, spirituality, and piety. False rulership, also dubbed as worldly, material, and temporal, was most commonly labelled as *şūrī* (in appearance) and regarded as an imperfect form of rulership that should be turned into a superior one. True rulership, characterized by such designations as *māʿnawī* (in meaning), *rahmānī* (manifesting God's mercy), and *rabbānī* (manifesting God's lordship), extends its authority over both the material and spiritual realms as a result of the ruler's moral perfection. Morally conscious authors with these convictions did not pay much attention to the institutional features of government or the principles of governance but simply extended the teachings of ethics, piety, and Sufism into the realm of rulership. With their focus on the human agent as the benchmark of true rulership, there was virtually no difference between reforming

an individual initiate in a Sufi tract and a ruler in power. For Sufi moralists, the Qur'anic concept of the caliphate, not the historical one, provided the perfect model, a moral paradigm for the perfection of rulership. The historical caliphate, as a legal and social construct, was the political embodiment of the Muslim community's collective responsibility to uphold and execute Islamic law and services. The Qur'anic caliphate, in Sufi idiom, was the fulfillment of the very purpose of creation *par excellence*, the materialization of God's representation on Earth through human being's manifestation of the divine by adopting God's attributes (*ahlakullāh*) as his morality.

The Rumi Character of Political Writing

The scope of this study is limited to Rumi expositions of political thought that include Ottoman authors who either dedicated their works to the sultan or lived in the core provinces of Asia Minor and the Balkans, excluding other parts of the empire. Many authors who wrote on the subject from the Arab provinces, such as al-Hamawi (d. 1529), are excluded from the study.¹⁰ Although the practices of past rulers, as recounted in mirrors for princes, continued to inspire political writings, moralists and *kānūn*-conscious bureaucrats alike increasingly idealized the Ottoman precedence in government as a benchmark for good governance and a penultimate objective of perfect rulership. These Ottomanists perceived their own achievements in state building to be on a par with the greatest accomplishments of the past that filled their imaginations from histories, epics, and legends. While still greatly revering such past idols as Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 BCE), Khosrow Anushirvan (r. 531–579), Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809), and others, they illustrated their teachings more and more with anecdotes and aphorisms attributed to the past Ottoman sultans, statesmen, scholars, and Sufis. For them, government and rulership reached its unsurpassable perfection in the realm of Rum under the Ottoman dynasty, just as the Rumis perfected human potential in character refinement, morality, and creativity.

A flurry of conquests in all directions in the early sixteenth century turned a large number of learned men living in these regions into Ottoman subjects within a generation. But the self-perception and cultural identity of the Ottoman elite did not extend to include every subject of the Ottoman sultan, especially those who fell under Ottoman authority in Arabic-speaking lands. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire was at the same time the extension of the universal authority of the Rumis. Ancient centers of Islamic culture and learning with their distinct institutions and cultural traits preserved their autonomy after the conquest. Numerous madrasas in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, for example, were not integrated into the central and hierarchical Ottoman system of learning. Although an increasing number of Arabic-speaking scholars and bureaucrats entered into service in various branches of the ruling

establishment, only a few of them were included in biographical dictionaries composed by Ottoman scholars. Ottoman authors, intellectuals, scholars, literati, and a variety of other designations that are constructed with the adjective “Ottoman” refer to a cultural identity and perception, not an ethnic, political, or geographical one. The adjective “Ottoman,” in a strictly political sense, referred to the entire imperial establishment, territory, and subject population. In a sociocultural sense, however, it referred to *ehl-i Rūm*, namely, the people living in Asia Minor and the Balkans, whose primary medium of communication was Turkish. Biographical dictionaries written in this period, most notably those of Taşköprizade, Sehi, Latifi, and Aşık Çelebi, included in their works, scholars, Sufis, and poets who were deemed to be Ottoman, or *ehl-i Rūm*, excluding their counterparts outside Asia Minor and the Balkans. In an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan social fabric, the Ottoman elite differentiated themselves from the rest of the sultan’s subjects by their Rumi identity.

The age of Süleyman was also the time when the Rumi elite increasingly added their own voice into the broader tradition of political thought. Geographical expansion and increasing contacts with the outside world sparked new curiosities and interests that turned the learned more inquisitive about non-Ottoman cultural repositories. The unification of the central lands of the Islamic world had by itself transformed the Ottoman ruling elite from being distant recipients of the cultural heritage of this region to its inheritors, protectors, and promoters. Increased mobility of scholars and circulation of classical works opened new venues for Ottoman men of learning to become acquainted with political ideas that found expression before their time or outside their former cultural geography. During the age of Süleyman, for the first time in their history, Ottoman men of learning became fully exposed to the vast corpus of political writings produced before them outside the Rum. Ottoman readers and authors on rulership became fully integrated to diverse traditions of political writing in Arabic and Persian. The Ottoman court and institutions of learning were exceptionally resourceful on the subject. A contemporary witness and the author of a political treatise, Taşköprizade, praised the reigning Süleyman for his unmatched investment in library building and book collecting. He observed that these libraries provided all kinds of books, religious or nonreligious (*shar‘ī wa ghayr shar‘ī*), in Arabic or Persian, to the extent that there was no book one could not find there.¹¹

In addition, the expansion of learning institutions and bureaucracy created more appetite for reading and writing on political theory that turned the question of rulership into a staple of Ottoman public discourse. Struggles for succession among princes, factional rivalries in government, voices of dissent in society, competition among social groups to gain the favor of the sultan or to influence his policies, and clashes with neighboring dynasties turned various political questions into public matters. Ottoman political writings before this

period were dominated by translations of some of the well-known classics of political works in Arabic and Persian. While the translation activity continued with accelerating speed and diversified interests, during the age of Süleyman, Ottoman men of learning from different walks of life grew more confident and began to compose their own works on the subject. This fast growing political literature was accompanied by a large body of official documents that came to be produced en masse and became increasingly laden with political ideas. Law codes, sultanic decrees, inscriptions, correspondence with other states, legal opinions issued by the leading ulema and official chronicles, in addition to the specific reasons for their compilation, served as media to express political views. Further, histories, poetical works, biographical dictionaries, and hagiographies were charged with contemporary ideals, interests, and sensibilities regarding rulership and government. In the age of Süleyman, writing on rulership and government, once the preserve of a small group of leading men of learning and statesmen, became part of a public discourse where ordinary scribes, obscure mystics, low-ranking provincial commanders, and poets with no training in statecraft could write on political matters. Although most of the political corpus was still dedicated to the sultan or the grand vizier, they ceased to be the sole addressees of political writings. Taşköprizade, in his encyclopedia of sciences, explained why ordinary people needed to learn about governance:

The science of governance (*‘ilm al-siyāsa*) is the body of knowledge that concerns state (*mulk*) and executive power (*saltāna*), condition of dignitaries and subjects, and the welfare of cities. This is a science which rulers need first, and then other people. Because a human being is by nature social. It is a religious obligation that a person resides in a virtuous city, migrates from an unvirtuous one, knows how the residents of the virtuous city can benefit from him, and how he can benefit from them.¹²

As profusely illustrated in dynastic epics and histories, the imprint of the Rum in political theory was often marked by Ottoman exceptionalism that articulated the Rumi style in government based on laws, wisdom, and principles of perfect rulership. Writing within the confines of conventional genres, scholars such as Kınalızade and Celalzade, despite their unflinching conviction about the greatness of the Ottoman state and society, were still reserved in incorporating the Ottoman experience into political theory. Their works, still reflecting the timeless wisdom of good morality and governance envisioned in non-Ottoman cultural and political contexts, were not suitable to express political views with specific relevance to the realities of the Süleymanic age. In the face of such inherent constrictions, the rising Ottoman consciousness that introduced the Ottoman experience into political theory brought about the genesis of a completely new type of political writing, the epitome of which

was Lütü Paşa's *Āşafnāme*.¹³ Despite its innovative approach to the question of governance, *Āşafnāme* owed as much to pre-Ottoman traditions of political writing as to the genius of its author and the unique Ottoman experience in government. Writing around the same time, the anonymous author of *Meşālihü'l-Müslimîn* achieved a complete break with traditional forms of political writing and conventional ideas by dissociating political theory from the ruler and his morality and replacing them with state and law as primary objects of political reasoning.¹⁴ This new breed of works that increasingly dominated the crowded scene of Ottoman political discourse from the mid-sixteenth century onward was marked by a focus on contemporary issues of Ottoman rulership and government. Authors who wrote in this vein were mostly statesmen or officials who employed an empirical method of analysis, a critical perspective from their observations, and a terminological framework drawn from the current administrative language.¹⁵

The prescriptive exaltation of the Ottoman experience brought about an extensive reshuffling of ideals, visions, symbols, and theories pertaining to rulership and governance that had a lasting impact on the way the Ottoman ruling elite viewed their ruler, government, and society. This paradigmatic watershed in the course of Ottoman political thought was no less original than any other spectacular achievements of the Süleymanic age. The pursuit of moralism in government that dominated the political theory gave way to legalism that evaluated rulership by its conformance to the now archetyped Ottoman model of government rather than moral excellence. The observance of customs and sultanic laws became the touchstone of measuring the quality of government that was previously gauged on the basis of ethical norms, piety, and juristic prescriptions. The caliphate in this model was envisioned as a cosmic rank between Man and God, attained in the spiritual sphere, with the implication of a comprehensive authority over both temporal and spiritual planes as conventional conceptions of rulership in mainstream political theories became increasingly infused with esoteric teachings of Sufism. The focus of political analysis shifted from the personality of the ruler to the existing government and its institutions. From this perspective, institutional aspects of government and procedural practices mattered more than the personality of the ruler or his direct control of day-to-day affairs of state.

This development gradually led Ottoman authors to envision the state as the primary object of analysis and an entity separate from the household of the sultan or the dynasty. Unlike previous conceptions that once reigned supreme in political theory, in the new paradigm, the grand vizier replaced the sultan as the center of government. The sultan was then conceived to be a distant but a legitimating figure for the dynasty while the grand vizier was promoted to the position of actual ruler of the Ottoman state. Consequently, in contrast to the moralistic, idealistic, personality oriented, and sultan-centric paradigm of the broader political literature, this realist and empirical

approach to the question of rulership promoted such ideas as “government by law” and “institutional continuity of the state” as primary objectives of rulership. While the Ottoman sultan was exalted to have the same comprehensive authority as the prophets, poles (*qutbs*), rightly guided caliphs, and the Mahdi, the Rumi ruling elite, in turn, attached themselves to the Ottoman state as much as to the ruler and assumed exclusive authority to rule the government by reconfiguring the state as a rational institution that operates per prescribed laws and procedures under the management of properly trained statesmen. In the post-Süleymanic era, the state increasingly detached from the sultan’s household, and such questions as the independence of high bureaucrats within their respective spheres of authority became common problems to deal with in political theory.

Outline of the Book

This book details the post-Abbasid trajectory of the caliphate and its Sufistic reconstruction in five chapters. Chapter 1 examines the Ottoman political discourse from its origins in the early fifteenth century to the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Views on the caliphate were expressed through a diversified corpus of works on government and rulership across various genres and disciplines accompanied by a broad-based interest in engaging with issues related to government among the Ottoman readership. This diverse body of political literature, written in different languages and genres, was produced by an equally diverse group of authors from various backgrounds, including statesmen, jurists, and Sufis. Along with the expansion of the public sphere in sixteenth century social life, not only did ordinary folks come to be more interested in matters of government but new questions and sensibilities were introduced to the sphere of the political as well. The conventional form of political discourse that was largely confined to providing advice for rulership by a select few gave way to presenting views on all aspects of government by people from different walks of life.

In the early fifteenth century, the Timurid invasion of Anatolia created an existential crisis that led the early Ottomans to engage intensively in studying rulership and statecraft as part of the reconstruction of the Ottoman state. The little-educated early Ottomans and their ruling entourage sought to remodel their new state on the example of the Timurids, whose cultural florescence in Central Asia was more luminescent than any other center of classical Islamic civilization. More than a dozen classical texts on Islamic political thought were translated to serve as handbooks for statecraft and envision the Ottoman ruler in a way that suits the expectations of learned Islam. This humanistic enterprise was coupled with extensive translation activity through which almost all the canonical works of Islamic political theory in Arabic and Persian were either rendered into Turkish or reworked to serve new purposes.

By analyzing authors, texts, audiences, and specific issues raised, Chapter 1 lays out the full scope of the Ottoman discourse on rulership and its impact on state and society. A key problem discussed in this chapter is the question of intended media to convey political ideas. In the context of the sixteenth century, proponents of different visions of rulership expressed their ideas via three principal languages that emerged in this period. The administrative language of the bureaucrats was empirically drawn from the very Ottoman experience in statecraft and therefore exclusively belonged to its specific context. The juristic language was part of the standard Islamic law and enabled one to speak for and engage with the universal legal imperative of the broader ulema network. The esoteric and symbolic language of Sufism was an encrypted medium of communication and always purported to have contained hidden messages intelligible only to the properly trained.

Chapter 2 deals with the formative period of Ottoman political thought from the formal end of the Seljuk state at the turn of the fourteenth century to the Egyptian campaign of 1517. It argues that political ideals and imageries inculcated from the Ottomans' own historical experience, appropriation of Arabic, and the Persian corpora on Islamic political theory; and its exposure to indigenous practices of authority constituted an integral part of state formation and ruling ideology that redefined rulership in general, and the caliphate in particular. Having been founded at the western fringes of the Islamicate society in the midst of nominally converted Turkish-speaking nomadic populations, the Ottomans at large were only gradually exposed to learned traditions of High Islam. Popular spiritual orders of autonomous frontier dervishes who imagined rulers in the image of their shaykhs played a crucial role in the process whereby the Ottoman elite acquainted themselves with Islamic notions of rulership. Two foundational epics of the Ottoman Empire, *Ḥalilnâme* and *İskendernâme*, were composed in this period. These narratives were among the first Turkish texts that defined the Ottoman state in Islamic terms and portrayed the Ottoman ruler as caliph. Translation of political texts and composition of frontier epics gradually transformed Turkish, which was continuously despised by the learned as a profane language of illiterate nomads with no alphabet, into one of the three principal languages of Islamic learning and culture.

A steady influx of émigrés into Ottoman territories, mostly mystics who fled political turmoil in the Persianate east, continuously furnished the Ottoman elite with Sufistic imageries of authority. Transmission of Islamic knowledge was expedited by deliberate policies of fifteenth-century rulers who sought to attract prominent Sufis, jurists, poets, and artists with exceptional favors and privileges. Among them were a number of scholars who specialized in statecraft and played critical roles in the process of empire building. With the conquest of Arabic-speaking lands in 1516–1517, which entailed the acquisition of a vast juristic literature on government, the Ottoman appropriation of the full corpus of Islamic political thought was complete. By inheriting the scholarly

establishment and cultural repositories of Syria and Egypt, the Ottomans also fully incorporated the legitimation apparatus, iconography, and ideological manifestations of the Mamluk dynasty, including the title of “the Custodian of the two Noble Sanctuaries.” Having unified the central lands of Islamic civilization, the Ottomans appropriated all the symbols and material representations of preceding Muslim empires while commanding the largest and the most versatile contingent of scholars to craft an imperial ideology based on the caliphate.

Chapter 3 examines the innovative panoply of views on the nature of political authority, and visions of the sultanate as its form of embodiment. Virtually every author writing on rulership felt it necessary first to address the question of what political authority really was, its *raison d'être* and status among humanity, how it was acquired or lost, the nature of the ruler and his morality, and historical models of rulership. No author doubted the consensus-confirmed view that the sultanate was the highest rank a human being could attain, but they took divergent paths in defining its nature, scope, and entangled boundaries. A common attitude was to reconcile between various historical and theoretical models of political authority including philosopher-kingship, prophethood, and imamate by defining them in ways compatible with their own visions of rulership. Elaborating on a particular vision of rulership almost always involved an explanation of human nature, human beings' existential status, and the purpose of life. There is a strong correlation between one's perception of human nature and vision of ideal rulership.

The practical application of this ontological consideration was worked out through three principal theories of acquiring rulership. By largely disregarding qualifications formulated in medieval Islamic sources, Sufis, bureaucrats, and jurists argued whether rulership was attained by grace, merit, or executive power. The prevailing view, however, purported that it was a grace from God (*ni'met*). It was a grace for humankind for which all should be grateful, as without political authority chaos and anarchy would prevail in the world, and people of different dispositions, interests, and talents would be unable to cooperate. It was a grace for the ruler because it placed him at the highest position among humankind, in the line of the prophets and the rightly guided caliphs, and offered him the opportunity to become the governor of both the material and the spiritual realms at once. Undergirding these arguments were different perceptions of human nature, both as individuals and social bodies. For Sufis, for example, a human being is inherently related to and is a reflection of God through his nature and therefore created to be His deputy on Earth. Every individual is considered to be a political being and, by nature, qualified to be His caliph. Such a perception made virtually every Sufi saint a potential claimant for universal caliphate as shown by many high-profile uprisings by rebel mystics who challenged the legitimacy of the Ottoman ruler.

This Sufistic conception of the caliphate was qualitatively different than its medieval construction as it represents an epistemological break with the

juristic imperative of High Islam. Sufi-minded authors engaged in a phenomenological undertaking in order to cultivate imageries of rulership drawn from an esoteric interpretation of Islamic ontology that led to the invention of an all-encompassing notion of political authority equated with the caliphate. This notion of the caliphate was illustrated through archotyping based on the Sufi cosmology. The absolute model for the caliph was God Himself, his attributes and relation to His creation. This conception was not simply an imitation of God's government on Earth but referred to a condition of being entrusted with God's very government. Prophets with executive power, including Adam, Moses, Solomon, and Muhammed, were portrayed as perfect role models in practicing the human extension of God's government. Historical figures drawn from past empires whose grandeur and mission the Ottomans were purported to have inherited—such as the Persian Ardashir, the Greek Alexander, and the Abbasid Harun al-Rashid—were cited as ideal models of how prophetic government is exercised by fallible human agents. As such, the Ottoman caliphate came to be spiritually envisioned, theologically sanctioned, and historically established.

Chapter 4 continues to examine the views on the nature of authority in Islam, diverse visions of the caliphate and its relation to sultanate as a political regime, and portrayals of the perfect ruler through archetype-building and re-interpretation of Islamic history. At the core of this discourse was the question of prophethood that came to be widely contested in the post-Abbasid Muslim society, namely, who was Prophet Muhammed, who inherited his position, and in what capacity? The emergence of Turko-Mongolian dynasties whose Islamic credentials were at best questionable, the decline of the power of the jurists, and the spread of Sufi orders in response to spiritual anxieties of fragmented Muslim society enabled the Sufis to resolve this question in their favor. It was consensual among Ottoman Sufis to argue that the Prophet had three distinct natures: spiritual (*wilāya*), political (*saḷṭāna*), and prophecy (*nubuwwa*), where the latter two emanate from the first one. In this configuration, the jurists, as inheritors of Muhammed's prophecy, and rulers, as claimants for his political nature, were obliged to submit to the spiritual authority, namely the perfect human being among the Sufis whose identity was disclosed only to the worthy.

The juristic conception of the caliphate formulated by medieval jurists was, in theory, a contractual relationship between the ruler and the Muslim community, provided that an elaborate set of conditions—including the ruler's descent from the tribe of the Prophet—are met. Being a non-Arab dynasty, the Ottoman authority could hardly be legitimized in the form of a caliphate on the basis of the juristic canon. The fragmentation of the post-Abbasid unity of Muslim polity and society had irreversibly compromised the universality of Muslim rulership. For the medieval caliphate, it was the jurists who formulated the script for the political ecumene, exercising a near monopoly for religious justification by establishing the standard of law across the ecumenic

cosmopolitanism of the Abbasid Empire. In the post-Abbasid world, this role was overtaken by the Sufis whose esoteric and syncretic teachings let them profoundly reinterpret the concept of the caliphate by dissociating it from its historicist justifications and juristic normativism. While the Ottoman historians successfully docked their dynastic lineage to the historical caliphate, the juristic conception was confined to the scholarly study of legal texts in Ottoman madrasas. The juristic/historical caliphate was a successorship to Muhammed (*khalīfat Rasūl Allāh*) in his political capacity through a sanctioned physical lineage. The Sufi-minded proponents of the Ottoman dynasty, however, envisioned the caliph to be God's unmediated deputy (*khalīfat Allāh*) and attributed to the Ottoman ruler the same spiritual qualities and powers accorded to the axis mundi (*quṭb*), the invisible perfect human being to whom God entrusts the management of His whole creation in Sufi cosmology.

Chapter 5 analyzes the mystification of the Ottoman caliphate and the apocalyptic-messianic reconstruction of imperial ideology in the context of the long Ottoman–Safavid conflict of the sixteenth century. Current studies in the main treat the Ottoman–Safavid conflict as no more than a sectarian conflict between two expanding Muslim empires. The Ottomans, however, perceived it as an apocalyptic conflict between primordial forces of faith and disbelief, often expressed in manicheistic dichotomies. Being one of the most aggressively fought religious wars in Islamic history, it profoundly altered both Sunni and Shiite conceptions of history and rulership. The Safavids, being at once a Turkoman chieftainship, a Shiite dynasty, and a Sufi order, were better endowed with esoteric image-making skills than the Ottomans, whose juristic and theological arguments against heresy were, simply, by definition nullified. Despite the Ottoman military might that overwhelmed the Safavids in multiple battles, the Safavid–Shiite call resonated much more strongly among the vast Turkoman diaspora from Central Asia to the Balkans, particularly among popular mystical orders of the countryside. In response, the Ottomans renewed their weakened alliances with prominent Sufi orders and rehabilitated discredited Sufi figures with controversial teachings. Ibn Arabi, for example, perhaps the most potent of medieval mystics whose extensive corpus of writings provide an endless repository of possibilities for alternative interpretations, quickly rose to the status of a patron saint for the Ottoman establishment. Endowed with the teachings of Ibn Arabi, or the Greatest Shaykh, as now commonly called, it was Sufis who fought at the forefront of an intensive ideological warfare against the Safavids. The principal goal of this undertaking was to invalidate the Safavid claims for spiritual authority and propagate the Ottoman sultan as a Sufi-caliph, or even the awaited Mahdi of the end of times.

Sufi-minded Ottoman historians reconstructed Islamic history in which both the Ottomans and the Safavids were identified as the parties of the same perennial conflict since the creation of Adam. In the final chapter of this

struggle, the Ottomans and the Safavids—both ethnically Turkic dynasties—were identified as the Romans and the Persians in allusion to the well-known Qur’anic prophecy that the former would defeat the latter. Perception of the Safavids as the perfect other for Islam was not mere war propaganda. The conquest of Constantinople, reportedly prophesized by Prophet Muhammed, and the approach of the end of the first millennium of the Islamic calendar had already sparked apocalyptic anxieties. Astrologers, geomancers, diviners, and occult specialists who were long discredited by the Sunni scholarly establishment now became respectable figures of religious and political discourse. Even the mainstream jurists and Sufis openly engaged in the practice of prognostication. Occultic practices, long performed by enigmatic esotericists, now turned into sought after mainstream arts with which the learned began to be increasingly endowed. Believing in their own divine mission, a series of Ottoman rulers provided patronage to a large contingent of such scholars who continuously occupied themselves with revealing prophecies; unearthing God’s hidden messages; and deciphering meanings behind names, numbers, heavenly conjunctions, and the like. Through the endeavors of high-profile jurists and mainstream Sufis, this esoteric epistemology was fully reconciled with the formal teachings of Islam and became an important component of political imagery and imperial ideology.

To counter the Safavid propaganda, Sufi-minded scholars first fabricated a noble lineage by infusing Abrahamic, Persian, and Turko-Mongolian traditions of origination that not only tied the Ottoman dynasty to prestigious empires of antiquity but also Islamized its lineage and portrayed it as divinely ordained to rule. Second, they put Islamic sources to a new scrutiny to discover divine revelations regarding the Ottomans, which resulted in constructing an elaborate eschatology in which the Ottomans were specifically foretold to rule. Third, the Ottoman rulership was depicted to be the seal of the caliphate; that is, there would not be any other Muslim authority until the end of times. Süleyman I was often compared to his namesake, King Solomon, and found mightier than the latter, for in fighting the war of the end of times he was endowed with unique qualities by divine providence. One of the most interesting texts of the entire Islamic corpus on political prognostication was written in this period by a prominent Sufi, Ibn Isa Saruhani. This was an elaborate future history of the Ottomans from 1516, the year it was composed, until 2028 CE, the year it was believed the world would end. For generations, the text was continuously updated to refresh the Ottoman myth as God’s chosen and final caliphate by validating Ibn Isa’s prognostication. This and similar undertakings produced a new genre of political writing that exclusively narrated the unique qualities of the House of Osman and its Islamic credentials. First conceived and drafted by Idris-i Bidlisi in his chronicle, this account was continuously updated and expanded at critical junctures, and served as the basis of imperial ideology with constitutional import until the very end of the empire.