Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin and Counsel for Sultans: Text and Context in the Nasihatname Genre of the Ottoman Empire, 16th-17th c.

Thesis

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Abstract

This work deals with the *nasihatname* genre of the Ottoman Empire. While I discuss the intellectual predecessors to this genre in Ottoman political literature, I locate Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans of 1581* as the first *nasihatname* and a seminal work that influenced subsequent works in the genre. I engage an intertextual reading of both *Counsel for Sultans* and the anonymous work *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* written in the mid-17th century in order to establish the nature of the genre and the boundaries, albeit sometimes porous, between the *nasihatname* genre and *akhlak* literature. A major part of this process is elucidating consciousness on the part of these authors as participating in a specific genre and therefore it is important to reconstruct the genre from the point of view of the authors, including their moral framework through which they make sense of the Ottoman system. I conclude that there was authorial consciousness in the *nasihatname* genre, and that it was representative of a burgeoning discursive space in which ordinary members of the bureaucracy were able to express their understanding of how the Ottoman system should function in a way that was previously inaccessible before Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans.*
Dedication

Dedicated to Mitya
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis, I discuss the *nasihatname* or advice for kings literature in the Ottoman Empire from its intellectual origins to its maturation as a specifically Ottoman genre in Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans*. In order to elucidate the enduring themes in the *nasihatname* genre, as well as the differences and innovations put forth by individual authors who contributed to this body of literature, I will use examples from both Ali and the anonymous *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin*. While this intertextual approach will provide context in genre, I will also contextualize these works within the historical environment they were created and offer another perspective of the Ottoman system found in European texts of the same era. This is necessary as a means of establishing what was part literary convention as expected from the genre and also what was practical advice offered by the *nasihatname* authors to the Sultan and Grand Vezir. I argue that although the boundaries of this genre were porous, often taking tropes of discourse from other literature, such as that of *akhlak*, the commonalities of *nasihatname* works in the 16th and 17th centuries serve as both a unifying element in textual production, while the differences reveal the idiosyncrasies of the authors and the importance of both personal and political context when examining *nasihatname* production in the Ottoman Empire.
Throughout the history of Islamic empires in western Asia, the advice for kings literature or *nasihat al-muluk* has played a prominent role in the conceptualization of how rulers should rule. In particular, Persian examples provided the precedent for the development of an Ottoman genre, and even the most prominent texts, such as al-Ghazali’s *Nasihat al-Muluk*, underwent an Ottoman Turkish translation near the end of the 15th century.\(^1\) Within the context of both Safavid and Mughal advancements of this genre, the Ottoman case occupies its own discursive space. The rise of the distinctively Ottoman *nasihatname* genre in Ottoman literary production coincided with the development of a dynastic project that embraced the concept of universal sovereignty. By appropriating the advice for kings literature and applying it to the Ottoman context of governance, the *nasihatname* authors situated the Ottoman Empire as a legitimate power in the Islamic world.\(^2\) From the late 16th century onward, *nasihatnames* continued to serve as the main genre in which universal order and its conditions were described, (re)conceptualized, and criticized. Authors of *nasihatnames* focused mainly on the ethics of Ottoman rulership in a way that eschewed a discourse of ideal sovereignty, and instead discussed the actuality of Ottoman governance and described not only the

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2 Ibid.
administrative and military system, but also the ways in which it could and should be improved upon by those in power.

Within these works, nasihatname authors wrote about a perceived “decline” in the empire that was the result of those in power moving further away from the established ruling principles of the Ottomans. These discussions of “decline” or disorder were sometimes threaded with references to the past practices or institutions of the Ottomans in which the author’s own time were compared to a previous era of Ottoman rule. The notion of order in the past, which some modern scholars have interpreted as references to a “Golden Age,” was contingent upon the author’s vantage point and as such, could be shifted along the timeline of Ottoman history. These comparisons to past examples of Ottoman rule were also used to illustrate an era of order that was not necessarily glorious or good. While a Golden Age often served as inspiration for nasihatname writers of the 16th century as they searched for internal precedents as a means of reforming the Ottoman system, in the 18th century critics looked for external examples, focusing in particular on European technical advancements as a comparative framework for reform. This process of change reveals the importance of treating nasihatnames as a literary genre that was

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3 A “decline” is explicitly mentioned by Mustafa Ali in his work Counsel for Sultans, while other authors do not use this language and merely allude to a distancing from order and justice by the Sultan’s administration. It has more often been the work of present-day scholars who ascribe the language of decline in the nasihatname genres. This topic will be dealt with at length in the third chapter.
developed by various authors whose motivations were shaped by their personal experiences and the historical context in which they wrote, providing insight into the political culture of the Ottoman Empire and how those involved in its administration perceived it.

Works of this genre, however, were not political treatises that just discussed the functioning of political order in the Ottoman Empire. The authors of *nasihatnames*, primarily experienced administrators who witnessed the daily functioning of the bureaucracy, combined both practical philosophy and ethics in the context of their operative knowledge of the Ottoman administrative and military system, as well as other sociopolitical elements of the system. They produced descriptions of the proper order of this system or offered advice on how to fix its perceived problems, or both. The topics chosen by these authors for discussion was defined by the imperative to (re)create or improve, and ultimately protect order. Those who participated in this genre were motivated by a sense of obligation to illuminate the perceived ills of the Ottoman system as they saw it, framed in both ethical premises and the established system, as a means of maintaining order.

In order to elucidate the divergences and convergences in these authorial perceptions as a part of a genre, it is necessary to engage in an intertextual analysis of these works. Therefore it is possible to locate the narrative threads in *nasihatnames* that weave these works together as a
genre and also the ways in which individual voices have made their own unique contributions in the established framework of the advice for kings literature. This is significant because despite the alterations to the *nasihat al-mulk* genre made by Ottoman authors, an underlying current of traditional conceptualizations of rule as theorized by the Persian authors was extent in its Ottoman manifestation. For the *nasihat al-mulk* genre to be recognized as such by its audience, it must adhere to the established framework as a means of being a legitimate conceptualization, explanation, and critique of administrative practice. While it is difficult to establish the consciousness of the authors participating in the *nasihat al-mulk* genre as we understand it, it is possible to identify elements of this literary tradition in the Ottoman works (i.e. the Persian concept of a circle of justice), while isolating the specifically Ottoman elements, as well as the author’s idiosyncracies. This process provides context to the text through which important insights about the nature of the genre are revealed as it evolved over time. While an intertextual reading is one necessary means of establishing this context, it is also pertinent to examine the environment in which these texts were produced. Therefore, *nasihatnames* must also be analyzed in their historical context, as well.

In this paper, I will employ this approach by examining a representative sample of the anonymous *nasihatname* entitled *Kitabu*
Mesalihi’l Muslimin, composed between 1639-1643, and analyzing it alongside examples from Mustafa Ali’s Counsel for Sultans of 1581. Ali’s Counsel certainly represents a seminal work in the Ottoman production of nasihatnames, the point at which the nasihat al-mulk genre evolved into its specifically Ottoman manifestation. Mustafa Ali departs from the traditional models of advice for kings by using specific examples of maladministration that he witnessed in his time, whereas previous works that predicated the nasihatname genre dealt with principles of rule in a more theoretical manner, deriving examples from the past rather than the present.4 As Mustafa Ali’s Counsel represents a significant moment in the genre, emphasis will be placed on an analysis of examples of this text according to Ali’s recurring points of contention with the state of the empire and how he frames this criticism, as well as the political and intellectual context of its production.

Although Ali never held a high position in the Ottoman administrative system, as an author he defined and influenced the perception of that system as discussed in later historical works. Ali’s personal frustrations, from his own lack of opportunity and recognition to being denied patronage, permeate his work and fuse with his critique of

the system’s corruption (the source of his frustration), intertwining the personal and the political. Despite this, the *Counsel for Sultans* served as inspiration for other authors to write their own works and follow in Ali’s footsteps, albeit these authors often employed a different approach in their critique, using a less polished style and emphasizing different topics.

In his work, Ali identified and redefined the key values of merit, loyalty, solidarity, and honor in the specific context of the highly stratified Ottoman political and literary society. His persona as an author and the ways in which he made the *nasihat al-muluk* an Ottoman genre, were extremely influential. It is possible that his work opened up avenue of literary expression that might have been previously inaccessible to ordinary members of the Ottoman bureaucracy or military apparatus. This is perhaps how an anonymous author of *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin*, likely a former soldier and then possibly a member of the lower echelons of bureaucracy, felt compelled and competent enough to pen his *nasihatname* and dedicate it to the Grand Vezir.

Beyond these works from the *nasihatname* genre, examples will be drawn from contemporaneous accounts of the Ottoman Empire written by Europeans who had their own reasons for wanting to make sense of the Ottoman system in the 16th and 17th centuries. Although such works occupy a sphere of literary production separate from *nasihatnames*, the
parallels between them offer important insights into the construction of Ottoman identity. Most significantly, a comparison of both genres elucidates the ways in which knowledge of the Ottoman Empire was defined by the Empire itself. Before the eighteenth century, the Ottomans occupied a position of power that allowed them to project this image outwardly, as well as inwardly. After this point, there was a discursive shift in the works of Europeans who lived and worked in the Ottoman dominion that was shaped by the burgeoning of imperial culture in Europe, through which perceptions of the Ottoman Empire were altered by this new balance of power that favored the West. Additionally, an analysis of both Ottoman and European accounts reveals the nature in which the Ottomans allowed certain aspects of their society to be open – to both foreigners and subjects – and as such, exposed to both internal and external criticism and sometimes admiration. In this paper, however, I will emphasize excerpts from the writings of Theodore Spandounes and Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq that engage the topics broached by the *nasihatname* writers.

A central argument of this paper is that the *nasihatname* genre was an Ottoman sphere of literary production that obtained characteristics unique to this specific context. The *nasihatname* arose from the need to explicate the nature of *Ottoman* statecraft. An important part of
illuminating this process of defining Ottoman statecraft is therefore examining who attempted to command this discourse of what the Ottoman state should be and what was preventing the state from achieving these ideals. Therefore, by locating the moments of discursive shift in the *nasihatname* genre, particularly at times of crisis in the empire (often meaning a lack of order and justice) – whether real or perceived – that precipitated the literary production of these authors, we can elucidate how their intellectual and political roles in Ottoman society were related to changes in perceptions of statecraft more broadly.

By using the aforementioned texts and employing a framework that allows for both continuity and changes to be apparent in the establishment of the *nasihatname* genre and its continuation, I hope to locate the point at which the *nasihat al-muluk* genre became Ottoman, arguing that Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans* is representative of this moment, and how the contributions of other authors, namely the anonymous writer of the *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin*, was emblematic of this literary sphere widening its scope of not only topics engaged, but also authors engaged in offering advice. A part of this process is recognizing the Persian and other Near Eastern models of statecraft that served as initial means of legitimizing the empire, but again, at what point does the amalgamation of Persian and Central Asian paradigms of political legitimacy evolve into something Ottoman and at what point in the existence of the empire does this
become a tool of legitimacy as an Islamic empire that can be both internally and externally projected?

The very term *nasihatname* is the Perso-Islamic advice for kings literature in its Ottoman Turkish manifestation. Employing the fundamentals of translation theory, there is a source language and target language.\(^5\) Inherent in this process is the recognition of an “Other,” and in the context of the establishment of Ottoman Empire as a comparatively new polity in Central Asia, it could in fact be considered as the Other. Establishing legitimacy would therefore be contingent upon appropriating accepted symbols of power that could be easily recognized by newly conquered peoples, as well as those within the imperial household and those employed in administrative positions. Therefore, the advice for kings literature was initially useful as a means of reaching this target culture and presenting Ottoman legitimacy as an Islamic polity. Over time, however, it would also become necessary to take these accepted symbols and reshape them in accordance with the specific dynastic project of the empire, so as to craft a self-contained legitimacy. Using Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans* as representative of the point at which advice for

kings became the Ottoman *nasihatname*, perhaps the burgeoning of this self-contained legitimacy becomes more apparent, particularly when compared to the *nasihatname* literature of the later period in which certain motifs were either completely abandoned or reshaped in order to defend Ottoman legitimacy against a growing external, rather than internal, threat to Ottoman sovereignty personified by Europe.  

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 will provide sufficient background information regarding the history of the *nasihatname* genre. In this chapter, I will discuss the history of *nasihat al-muluk*, authors who are accredited as the forbearers of the *nasihatname* genre, the intellectual precedents of the *nasihatname* (i.e. *ahlak*), and the genre’s evolution from before and after Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans*, locating the *Kitabu Mesalihi‘l Muslimin* in this period. I also examine the state of secondary literature that engages *nasihatnames*, as both subject and as an object used by scholars to supplement arguments of decline in the Ottoman Empire, blurring the original intent of such works. *Nasihatnames* as an important historical source for accounts on the functioning of the Ottoman administrative and military apparatus and also societal and cultural issues

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6 Aksan, Virginia. “Ottoman Political Writing, 1768-1808,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Feb. 1993. The scope of this paper is limited to the 16th-17th c. and therefore will not cover this time period, although the *nasihatname* writings of the latter centuries serve as an additional important context for earlier works.
will be discussed in this chapter. The following two chapters deal with specific issues gleaned from an intertextual reading of the sources used. In Chapter 3, I examine how the authors discuss the topic of Ottoman administration, while Chapter 4 engages the issue of the military. Chapter 5 is conclusion that attempts to elucidate the consciousness of *nasihatname* authors as participating in the genre. I employ a thematic framework in order to analyze the ways in which the information provided by these texts corroborate and differentiate from one another as a means of elucidating the nuanced nature of the genre itself. As will be demonstrated, while the historical trajectory provides new context for *nasihatname* writers, the way in which the criticisms of the Ottoman state are framed gives the genre cohesiveness and reveals the porous boundaries between conceptualizations of justice, morality, and corruption in Islamic literary production more broadly.
Chapter 2: The *Nasihatname* Genre

In Islamic literature, *nasihat al-muluk* refers to the genre in which well-meant advice regarding statecraft was addressed to a particular ruler. Conceptualizations of statecraft in the Islamic context engaged issues such as the personal and political conduct of a ruler and his administration, the relationship between the ruler and his subjects (*re‘aya*), as well as topics pertaining to warfare, diplomacy, and so forth.\(^7\) These aspects of sovereignty were framed in a discourse of morality and justice, revealing the influence of *akhlak* or practical ethics literature.\(^8\) *Akhlak* literature was the product of ideas derived from pre-Islamic Arab tradition, Qur’anic teachings and Persian and Greek philosophy that were refracted through an Islamic prism form the 11th century onward.\(^9\) Focusing on the value of “good character,” a wide array of authors from philosophers and mystics to *nasihat al-muluk* writers appropriated the language of *akhlak* as a means of illustrating the upstanding values and morality that was expected from a ruler and his administration.\(^10\) Examples of these values were

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\(^8\) Ibid.


\(^10\) Ibid.
drawn from a variety of sources and were contingent upon the author’s subjectivity and experiences as a part of the system that he criticizes, although the dictates and standards of the *nasihat al-muluk* as an Islamic genre endow its audience with certain expectations in form and content. Additionally, the enduring practice of framing notions of rule in the context of what is moral and just is representative of the porous boundaries between the genre of advice for kings and *akhlak*. While the context in which authors wrote changed, morality, justice, and also order were universal as they were intrinsic to the foundations of Ottoman rule in regard to the relationship of reciprocity between the Sultan and *re’aya*.

In the context of the public and private spheres, *nasihatnames* occupy an almost paradoxical space. In the *Türkiye Yazmalari Toplu Katalogu*, the union list of manuscripts located in Turkey, *nasihatnames* do not occupy a significant space. The lack of multiple copies of Ottoman *nasihatnames* suggests that these works were meant to be read by one or very few people, more specifically, to whom it was dedicated (i.e. the Sultan or Grand Vezir). A small audience who were in a position of power to respond to the authors’ advice or at least consider it then likely read *nasihatnames*. This suggests a private readership or a very limited one. In the context of justice in Islam, however, *nasiha* is a form of

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11 Since many *nasihatnames* do not include “nasih” or “nasihat al-muluk” in their titles, this may also be attributed to the way the works are classified by modern cataloguers, presenting a challenge to locating *nasihatnames* in this context.
advice often containing criticism in which public officials are held accountable according to their character and ability to pursue justice in their administration.\textsuperscript{12} It is therefore the duty of a Muslim to advise a fellow adherent of the faith of his moral missteps.\textsuperscript{13} Making one’s critique known to the ruler did not necessarily mean that it was made public, except in the instance that such a work was well-received and appreciated by the ruler to an extent that it acquired merit of its own. In this instance, the work would serve as an example of a successful contribution to the genre and would be copied in order for other authors to follow the model, as was most probably the case with Mustafâ Ali’s works. Similarly, within the \textit{nasihatname} genre, the element of what is hidden and what is known plays a significant part in determining the moral fortitude of a ruler. This trope is prevalent in the \textit{nasihatname} genre and will be discussed at a later point.

The development of the Islamic advice for kings genre dates back to the downfall of the Umayyad Empire, the political legitimacy of which depended upon the caliphate as a means of organizing the structure and functioning of government.\textsuperscript{14} Burgeoning dynasties, however, eager to craft their own forms of legitimacy, looked to the Persian theories of kingship and sovereignty, a

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Fodor, Pal. “State and Society, Crisis and Reform, in 15\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} Century Ottoman Mirror for Princes,” \textit{Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientarium Hungaricae}, Vol. 40, 1986. p. 24
significant trope in mirrors for princes literature. According to the writers of these works, the state and its affairs were vested in the personal authority of the ruler, thus emphasizing the importance of justice in the exercise of power.

A number of works from this genre served as models for the nasihatname. Scholars most often attribute Kay Kaus ibn Iskander’s Qabusnama (1082), Nizam al-Mulk’s Siyastnama (1090), Yusuf Khass Hajib’s Kutadgu Bilig (1069), and Lutfi Pasha’s (d. 1564) Asafname as particularly significant influences on the emergence of nasihatnames. Cornell Fleischer considers the Asafname to be representative of the Ottoman adaptation of the Persian advice for kings literature. In addition to the Persian influence, the ahlak or “ethics” literature also occupies a significant space in the birth of nasihatnames. Fleischer characterizes ahlak literature as the “Islamicized version of Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophy,” of which Kinalizade Ali Celebi’s (d. 1572) Ahlak-i Ala’i written in 1564 serves as the most significant example in its Ottoman adaptation. In his work, Kinalizade utilizes the “circle of equity” concept as a means of explaining the nature of the relationship between the sultan

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 25
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
and society; each class was dependent upon the sultan’s personal justice for its protection and well-being.22 The sultan and his moral disposition, therefore, was the most important part of the circle of justice. The moral character of the *re’aya* was rarely discussed, rather the involvement of the sultan with various social groups among the subject population was the main point of contention in such works. Another significant theme employed by Kinalizade is Ibn Khaldun’s “cycle of dynasties,” which encouraged political writers to put forth the idea of Ottoman decline in order to inspire the fortification of institutions and administration.23

Fleischer locates another significant predecessor to the *nasihatname* genre in *The Erring Soul’s Summons to Virtuous Works* by Shehzade Korkud, the son of Sultan Beyazid II.24 Written in 1508 to his father in Arabic, Korkud requests to be relieved from the governorate of Antalya and to withdraw his candidacy from the throne in order to travel to Egypt and dedicate his life to the Islamic sciences.25 In *Summons*, Korkud explains that to be a good ruler and a good Muslim was nearly impossible in times such as his own, in which the government was oppressive and the Islamic faith was relatively weak.26 He argues that current practices in both government and society were against *shari’a*

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22 Aksan, “Ottoman Political Writing,” 53
23 Ibid., 54
24 Fleischer, “Cultural Origins,” 70
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
and offers specific examples of the ongoing decadence in the empire. Fleischer argues that while this work is not a *nasihatname*, it is significant for its criticisms of Ottoman government analyzed through a religious point of reference – one of the earliest examples of such a document that utilizes themes of equity, justice, and conceptualizations of “decline” brought about by immorality long before they appeared in later political criticisms.

The emergence of the *nasihatname*, while engaging the traditional concepts present in the advice for kings literature, was predicated by the establishment of the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic power. Part of this process of crafting Ottoman legitimacy as an Islamic empire was drawing upon Near Eastern models of sovereignty, while also acquiring its own theoretical models; the needs of which were at least partially elaborated in the development of *nasihatname* literature. As has been previously stated, the mirrors for princes genre was well established by the 16th century, however, in the hands of Ottoman authors, these works on statecraft acquired distinct features that distanced them from their antecedents. Additionally, the penning of these treatises in Ottoman Turkish reinforces the concept of advice for kings literature coming into its own, distinguished genre as *nasihatnames*. This is more broadly linked to the process

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27 Ibid., 71
28 Ibid., 74
29 Fodor, “State and Society,” 67
30 Ibid.
by which the Ottoman Empire sought to establish itself as an Islamic polity with a literary language that had the same prestigious qualities as Persian and Arabic.  

Authors such as Koci Beg, Katib Celebi, Naima, and Mustafa Ali wrote specifically in an Ottoman context, addressing what they perceived to be the causes of a “decline,” and offering potential solutions to the causes of this. This is a clear departure from previous works that discussed theories of governance and sovereignty in a comparatively generic way. While earlier prototypes of advice literature used ancient examples often reaching back in time to the pre-Islamic rulers of ancient Persian kingdoms, authors of *nasihatnames* drew from current examples that illustrated societal and administrative disorder. The *nasihatname* genre also became a discursive space occupied by members of the Ottoman bureaucracy who were familiar with the daily functioning of administrative practice and as such, dedicated to the preservation of Ottoman principles of faith and state. A commitment to both the observation and criticism of the Ottoman system was viewed by the participants of this genre as a means of enforcing the state’s legitimacy from an empire built by conquest to a centralized polity that was Islamic in character. For *nasihatname* writers,
this meant an amalgamation of both administrative principles and Islamic culture within the framework of “universal justice.”³⁶ Through this genre, the scribal class sought to make sense of the Ottoman system and to explain the administrative apparatus in all its complexity and often, ambiguity, to those who may have been alienated by it, such as members of the military and administrative elites.³⁷

This also begs the question of intended audience for nasihatname works. As with most manuscripts of this era, they were typically dedicated to either the Sultan or Grand Vizier of a particular administration in hopes for a financial reward in the form of patronage.³⁸ While addressing a nasihatname to a Grand Vizier is uncommon, the previously mentioned anonymous nasihatname entitled Kitabu Məsələli’l Məsləhin və Menəfī’l Məmmədic does just that.³⁹ Throughout this work, the author employs a very specific tone in which he encourages the Grand Vizier to respond to certain everyday sort of problems, such as opium usage among muezzins, unclean infidels working in the bakeries of Istanbul, and a lack of continuity among market measurements, and in return, he will earn

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³⁶ Ibid.
³⁷ Howard, “Genre and Myth,” 140
sevap for his good deeds.40 Perhaps it would have made more sense for this author to address such a work to the Grand Vizier than the Sultan, who would have been more concerned with such practical matters occurring in the everyday lives of Ottoman subjects. More broadly, as Mustafa Ali’s Counsel for Sultans makes evident, whether a work (of any kind, not just nasihatname) was presented to either imperial personage likely engaged a specific strategy employed by the author so as to further one’s chances of gaining patronage.41 While an author, such as Mustafa Ali or the anonymous author did not hold an appointment of substance, the potential for patronage would have been an incentive to produce their works or advance in their occupation.

This strategy may have also involved issues surrounding the balance of power in the imperial administration. Again, Mustafa Ali seems to suggest that the power amassed by Selim’s Grand Vizier, Mehemmed Pasha, may also mean that he had more executive power. It is certain, however, that writers of nasihatnames, at least in Mustafa Ali’s time, sought to have their works read by the those who occupied positions of power in the sultan’s administration, suggesting the significance of a vertical readership, particularly in the context of a manuscript culture. As Douglas Howard suggests, however, this may have changed over time to reflect the growing consciousness of the bureaucracy who

40 Ibid.
41 Tietze, Counsel, pt. 2, pp. 73-74: Here Ali discusses shifting strategy from trying to capture the attention of Sultan Selim to settling for his Grand Vezier.
became disenfranchised by the increasing privacy of the Sultan and the shift of power to the sultan’s household, and therefore sought to have their works read by one another in order to reaffirm their ideals of a centralized administration with power vested in the authority of the Sultan.42

Thus far, Mustafa Ali has only been briefly touched upon, in regard to his life, his work, and his impact on the nasihatname genre. It is necessary to provide some information regarding Ali’s background and the world in which he lived and produced an exceptional amount of works. Throughout his lifetime, Ali produced approximately 50 texts; he wrote poetry, translated works from Persian and Arabic, constructed an enormous universal history, and of course, wrote the Counsel for Sultans.43 He worked under four sultans, starting his bureaucratic career during the reign of Sultan Suleyman and died during the reign of Sultan Mehmed III.44 As Fleischer argues, Mustafa Ali’s experiences and sheer volume of literary production makes him at once an extraordinary figure in Ottoman history and also very much a man of his time – “an ideal subject for a study of the human realities of the Ottoman Empire.”45

The social, cultural, and political environment of Ali’s time, the mid-16th century, was very much representative of the Central Asian heritage of the

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42 Howard, “Genre and Myth,” 151
43 Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, 4
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
The askeri, military class, which also staffed the administrative, as well as military, apparatus of the empire, served as the protectors of the re’aya, the “flock” or taxpaying subjects. Whether sipahi, janissary, or high-level administrator, members of the askeri were in a position of power over the re’aya; this distinction meant that entry into the askeri class was, in theory, exclusive. Additionally, under Sultan Fatih Mehmed, the ulama were co-opted by the state, becoming bureaucratized, and judicial appointments were under the Sultan’s supervision. The classic Ottoman formulation of careers was as follows: Men of the Sword, Men of Learning, and Men of the Pen. Theoretically, each career path was mutually exclusive and advancement was contingent upon meritocratic values, engaging separate procedures of hiring, training, and hierarchy of occupations. In Mustafa Ali’s time, however, these strict delineations were challenged by social, economic, and political changes throughout the late 16th c. that disrupted these structures and allowed the permeation of the askeri by members of the re’aya. Although, such an occurrence was partially in line with common practices, as members of the janissaries came from the re’aya.

46 Ibid., 5
47 Ibid., 5-6
48 Ibid., 6
49 Ibid., 7
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 8
With this context in mind, we now turn to the ways in which Mustafa Ali advanced the *nasihatname* genre and contributed to it. According to Fleischer, Ali’s *Counsel of Sultans* is representative as the first instance in which a “spokesman for kanun-consciousness” emerged.⁵³ Fleischer defines kanun-consciousness as “an awareness of a specific regional and dynastic tradition enshrined in the kanun laws issued by the Ottoman house.”⁵⁴ Ali and other intellectuals of his time viewed kanun as more than temporal, secular legislation, and instead regarded it as a symbol of Ottoman legitimacy of rule.⁵⁵ The notion of justice was of paramount concern in regard to both kanun and *shari’a*, both of which Ali was familiar with as a graduate of a *medrese* and as an acting bureaucrat who also had significant military experience.⁵⁶ As such, a literate and educated person of his background was inclined to believe that he could procure a position as a Man of the Pen or a Man of Learning; however, during Ali’s time, the government offices suffered from being overly staffed, and a bureaucratic culture that was not welcoming to those who were perceived to be amateurs in the craft.⁵⁷

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⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100
Ali’s personal frustrations – from being denied patronage for his numerous works to being sent “to the frontier of Rumeli”58 – were, according to him, a symptom of the ills of the Ottoman system. In 1581, Ali penned Nushat us-Selatin, the Counsel for Sultans, while he was stationed in Van.59 This work exhibits many characteristics of the advice for kings genre, but Ali uses his personal experiences and firsthand accounts of Ottoman decadence as a means of framing his criticism of Ottoman administration.60 Counsel for Sultans was completed in the winter of 1581, a self-proclaimed original work, and prepared for presentation to Sultan Murad, along with Ali’s statement that he was “unafraid of the wrath of viziers.”

While it is difficult to glean as much information about the author of the Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin as he is anonymous, the topics broached in his work, as well as information that he reveals about himself through his writing, lead to some clues about who he was and in what time period he wrote. Yaşar Yücel has determined that the Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin was written sometime between 1634 and 1643 during the reign of Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-1640) or during the first three years of Sultan Ibrahim’s reign (r. 1640-1648).61 These dates are suggested because of the author’s mention of his contemporary Yahya Efendi in Beşiktaş, the Sheikh al-Islam, as well as the author’s discussion of the Kızılbaş, a

58 Tietze, Counsel, pt. 2, p. 73
59 Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, 95
60 Ibid.
61 Yücel, Osmanlı Devlet, 61. Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-1640),
major issue in the first half of Murad’s reign. Yücel also determined that the
Grand Vezir to whom the author dedicates his work is likely Kemankeş Mustafa
Pasha, who was promoted to janissary commander, yeniçeri ağası, and soon
grand admiral before being appointed to the position of Grand Vezir by
Sultan Murad IV. Additionally, Kemankeş Mustafa Pasha was a supporter of
Yahya Efendi, which further supplements Yücel’s argument. While a single
copy of this manuscript is preserved in Konya’s Kotunoglu Library (within a
mecmua) indicates its small impact, the work did not go unnoticed; it was
included in Katib Çelebi’s bibliographic work Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-
kutub wa-al-funūn.

Although the author of Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin is anonymous, it can
be discerned from the text that he was at some point in his life involved in the
janissary corps. This is apparent from the many chapters in his work dedicated to
military issues, as well as the details he gives regarding the habits of the janissary
troops and their conduct in campaign. He speaks knowledgeably about the daily
issues that confronted the janissaries and problems that arose in conditions while
engaging in military campaigns that only someone who has experienced them
could write about and suggest solutions for with such confidence. Additionally,
out of the 57 chapters in his work, the longest ones are on the subject of the

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 62
64 Ibid., 61
military, the area in which he is most comfortable and most knowledgeable discussing.

Compared to Mustafa Ali’s sophisticated prose and frequent usage of verses to summarize his arguments and to illustrate of the ills in Ottoman administrative culture, the author of the *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* uses decidedly less sophisticated prose to get his points across. The organization of the works themselves is also very different. While Ali divides his work into four large sections, the anonymous author divides his work into 57 chapters that vary from a few sentences to several pages in length and cover multiple topics even within a single chapter. The difference in style and organization could be attributed to the motivations of the authors in writing their *nasihatnames*. Mustafa Ali, striving to prove his qualifications and goodwill to the Sultan, was using the *Counsel for Sultans* as a means of illustrating his literary talent and intelligence. He frequently refers to *qasidas* and verses he composed in the past, emphasizing their brilliance and therefore, his talent. The anonymous author, however, makes no such references to himself, his life or struggles, or his talents. Mustafa Ali fulfilled his claim that the *Counsel for Sultans* was an original work. As a significant moment in the advice for kings literature in the Ottoman context, Ali’s work was representative of this genre becoming Ottoman, and therefore his work may have opened avenues for others who may have otherwise not participated in the political sphere through which they discussed
conceptualizations of Ottoman sovereignty in its ideal state and criticisms of it in practice.

This is perhaps why an author, such as that of the Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin felt compelled to write his own nasihatname, despite his likely lowly position in Ottoman administration and less sophisticated literary abilities than that of Mustafa Ali. Despite this, the anonymous author compensates with extraordinary detail and what appears to be firsthand experience in regard to the issues he discusses, particularly in the context of the military. The divergences and at times convergences between these two authors’ works are exemplary of the nasihatname genre itself. Both operate in the same genre and are therefore adhering to certain standards of style and content, however, their criticisms of the Ottoman system are the result of the context, experience, and idiosyncrasy of the individual author.

As accounts of Ottoman statecraft, administration, military, and society, nasihatnames are invaluable resources for historians. While historians recognize the importance of the genre, how modern scholars have used nasihatnames often blurs the original intent of the works. In his chapter Genre and myth in the Ottoman advice for kings literature, Douglas Howard offers a succinct examination of the secondary literature on the topic of nasihatnames and what he considers to be the best way for modern scholars to treat the substance of these works. He argues that historians must explore nasihatnames as a genre by
analyzing as many works as possible in order to elucidate both the similarities and differences between them.\textsuperscript{65} Through this process, the nature of the genre is revealed. Howard also suggests modern scholars have not paid necessary attention to \textit{nasihatnames} as a genre, ignoring the motifs prevalent in the work and other literary devices that bind the works together as a part of the genre.\textsuperscript{66}

Howard locates burgeoning European interest in the \textit{nasihatname} during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, in which an imperial context was the catalyst for discussions about Ottoman administration, institutions, and so forth.\textsuperscript{67} An earlier example of this interest is Paul Rycaut’s \textit{The Present State of the Ottoman Empire}, published in 1668. In this work, Rycaut likely used the writings of Ayn Ali and Koci Beg.\textsuperscript{68} Interest in \textit{nasihatnames} was a part of a different motivation by twentieth century scholars who sought to use these works as a means of buttressing a historiographical narrative of decline in the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{69} This narrative was framed by a discussion of non-Western empires falling, as western civilization arose in prominence. Bernard Lewis’ work, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline,” is exemplary of this use of \textit{nasihatnames} and was especially influential.\textsuperscript{70} In this context, \textit{nasihatnames} were treated as objective accounts of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[65] Howard, “Genre and myth,” 141
\item[66] Ibid.
\item[67] Ibid., 142
\item[68] Ibid.
\item[69] Ibid.
\item[70] Ibid.  see Lewis, Bernard, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline,” \textit{Islamic Studies} I (1962): 71-87
\end{footnotes}
decline, not as a part of literary genre that employed the motif of “decline” as a discursive trope. While not all nasihatname authors explicitly used the term “decline” or framed their arguments in the context of a decline, Mustafa Ali does mention decline in the Counsel for Sultans, but more often in the context of decline in kingship, not empire.\(^7\) It is important, however, to stress this decline as a part of the author’s perception of his world, rather than an absolute reality. In Kitabu, the anonymous author, for instance, makes no mention of “decline,” but rather disorder.

Douglas Howard’s examination of the nasihatname genre is exemplary of a revisionist stance in 21st century scholarship. Earlier works, however, such as Cornell Fleischer’s Bureaucrat and Intellectual and “Cultural Origins of the Nasihatname” contextualized mainly the work of Mustafa Ali as both a part of a genre and a product of his personality and experiences in the Ottoman system. More recently, Virginia Aksan’s article “Late Ottoman Political Writers” sought to reexamine political discourse in the Late Ottoman Empire by examining the continuation of nasihatname writers in their historical context and in the context of earlier works. Although Aksan argues that some traditional aspects of nasihatnames, such as the “circle of equity” were abandoned in the 18th century, it seems more likely that such concepts underwent an evolution in the context of new political relations and realities, acquiring new meanings along the way.

\(^7\) Tietze, Counsel, part 1, p. 22
rather than disappearing completely.\textsuperscript{72} Stephen Dale’s *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* is an example of recent scholarship that still uses *nasihatnames*, in particular the work of Mustafa Ali, as a means of supporting the decline argument. Dale places far too much explanatory weight on the *Counsel for Sultans* as a means of elucidating signs of decline after the reign of Suleyman. In her work *Approaching Ottoman History*, Suraiya Faroqhi warns against scholars using the work of *nasihatname* authors, especially Mustafa Ali, at “face value,” and like Howard, suggests that contextualizing these works in their literary and political context prevents scholars from adhering to the decline metanarrative in historiography.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Aksan, “Late Ottoman,” 58

\textsuperscript{73} Faroqhi, Suraiya, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 150
The nature of the Ottoman administrative system and the conduct of those involved in the executive process of ruling and managing the empire is a prominent topic of discussion in *nasihatnames*. Both the anonymous author of the *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* and Mustafa Ali frame their advice and criticism of various elements in this system in the dichotomy of order and disorder. Inherent in this discussion is either a criticism of what the authors considered corrupt behavior on the part of Ottoman officials in the administration, as well as a lack of justice in the political sphere or advice on who should occupy high positions in government and what duties these positions entailed. The specific topics dealt with by these authors reveal what each one perceived as the most important issues in Ottoman administration in regard to making the system function properly with its many parts and participants as a whole.

In Chapter 4 of his work, the anonymous author of *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* argues for a standardized currency and system of weights and measures throughout Anatolia. He writes, “in the provinces ruled by the Sultan, Refuge of the World, his Majesty, there is one *hutbe* and one coin,” two significant

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74 Yucel, *Osmanli Devlet*, p. 94
symbols of the Sultan’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{75} These were signs of central authority emanating from Istanbul. Mismatched coinage and also different standards for what constitutes a yard or bushel threatened the centralization of authority in the capital under the Sultan or at least, what symbols represented this authority. According to the author, the variance in weights and currency throughout the provinces also made it easy for visitors to these places to be cheated by sellers of goods and moneylenders, causing an injustice.\textsuperscript{76} The author’s solution to this problem is to make all measurements equal to that of Istanbul.\textsuperscript{77}

Throughout the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the silver \textit{akçe}, Ottoman issued coinage, was subject to tumultuous market prices of silver and also an unsteady state treasury that was stretched by military expenditures.\textsuperscript{78} During this time, debased European coins gained widespread use throughout the Ottoman Empire as an alternative to the \textit{akçe}.\textsuperscript{79} In this context of different coinage used in the Empire during times of fiscal strife, introducing a standard currency and system of weights and measures would be an attempt to end financial disorder in daily life and offer some stability to the state treasury, while simultaneously promoting the idea of a centralized state under the Sultan.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{79} Ottoman coinage, at this time, was also debased. The problem was that European coinage replaced the Ottoman.
In *Counsel for Sultans*, Mustafa Ali also mentions what he perceives to be the problem with the Ottoman coinage and argues for standardized prices in the 16th century. According to Ali, “in general, the Ottoman currency which should be preferred over all other coins is gradually losing prestige.”

Decades later, it appears that Ali’s observation about the Ottoman currency losing prestige was correct, as evidenced by the frequent preference for debased European currency over the *akçe* and similar lament by the anonymous author regarding the currency suggests this was an ongoing issue in the Ottoman Empire.

Unlike the anonymous author, however, Ali goes on to discuss problems of the lack of price standardization and those who occupy the position of market superintendent. The crux of his criticism is that neglect on the part of petty businessmen is the source of “evil” which causes Muslims to suffer financial losses, and creates disorder in the community. Those who could prevent this, the *muhtasibs* (market superintendents) are unqualified and do not have the best interest of Muslims in mind. He also argues that such unfair pricing above what should be standard is a public disaster and affects not only those of the lower classes, but everyone. According to Ali, it is the duty of the Sultan to

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80 Tietze, *Counsel*, pt. 1, p. 83
81 Ibid., pt. 2, p. 26
82 Ibid., pt. 2, p. 27
prevent the protection of certain stores who inflate their prices and to prevent such a public disaster from occurring.\textsuperscript{83}

Another issue, treated quite differently by Ali and the anonymous author, is that of the scribes. In Chapter 15 of his work, anonymous laments the condition of the public scribes who were tasked with presenting the complaints of citizens to the Sultan for review. He writes that scribes were not being adequately reciprocated for their service and the conditions in which they serve, remaining day and night, “[taking] care of the affairs [of the poor] from morning to evening” on days without the meeting of the Divan.\textsuperscript{84} The scribes go hungry, as soup is not served from the palace of the Sultan during the time without Divan, and therefore they return home in the evening with empty hands and stomachs.\textsuperscript{85} The author asks, “For this reason, how are the affairs of the poor seen with soul and heart?” implying that nothing is seen of their strife in this matter.\textsuperscript{86}

While the anonymous author almost defends the scribes, framing his discussion as a matter of gaining reciprocity for their service by being given food, Mustafa Ali claims that scribes were “maltreated by the petitioners, locked themselves in their tents and destroyed the existence of the

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Yucel, \textit{Osmanli Devlet}, p. 100
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
Muslims,” and they also engaged in “eating bersh and opium and every now and then choosing appetizers and wine for their daily bread.”\textsuperscript{87} Clearly, Ali takes a much more critical stance against the scribes and attributes them with the destruction of Muslims because of their improper behavior. The anonymous author paints a portrait of destitution for scribes with meager meals, while Ali describes a more decadent situation in which the scribes are not fulfilling their duties by hiding from petitioners and engaging in disreputable conduct.

While the scribes occupied positions in the lower echelons of Ottoman administration, they were discussed by both Ali and anonymous because of their importance as mediators between the public and the sultan as they transcribed complaints for the petitioners. It is interesting to note, however, that while the anonymous author seems to focus on these relatively low administrative positions in his work, Ali goes much further in discussing the roles of the Grand Vizier and Sultan.

In discussing the duties of the imperial administration, Ali places great emphasis on the role of Grand Vizier. It is “most important” for the Grand Vizier and also inherent in his duties to supervise the governance of Ottoman lands by knowing the administrators of provinces, and to “ensure the well-being

\textsuperscript{87} Tietze, \textit{Counsel}, pt. 2, p. 12
of all the subjects.”  

Similarly, Ali criticizes the practice of the sons of viziers becoming beglerbegis.  He says, “under the sultans of old and also under their worthy successors there was no such custom.”  

Ali recognizes the importance of the Grand Vizier, and perhaps reveals the executive power of the office, by quoting the following maxim which he argues applies to the veziers, “Justice means putting things in the places where they belong,” while also quoting the Qur’an in emphasizing the importance of justice for those who occupy this high position.

The most emphasis on the nature of administrative duty is assigned to the sultan, of which the “concern of the king is the wellbeing of the subjects and the prosperity of the victorious army.”  

Ali tends to criticize the Sultan as “following the orientation of his ancestors” by exhibiting reclusive characteristics and hiding his management of affairs, and subsequently, endowing in the veziers the responsibility of being the “safeguard against oppression,” to the extent that the population cannot petition him.  

Again, Mustafa Ali emphasizes the singular authority of the Sultan as the protector of the people by arguing that it is the king that is given such a duty, rather than the viziers.  

In a reference to the cycle of dynasties, Ali writes that the Sultans who love their subjects and ensure

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88 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 19  
89 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 79  
90 Ibid., pt. 2, p. 2  
91 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 19  
92 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 21  
93 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 22
their protection will be granted by God with the “inheritance of the kingdom from generation to generation,” quoting the Qur’an and as a part of this inheritance, Ali includes the caliphate. As is representative of the genre more broadly, Ali also emphasizes the need for the Sultan to surround himself with an educated entourage that is dedicated to loyalty and equity, while also employing “God-fearing spies and chaste experts and through them every hour and every moment explore the public affairs and investigate the doings of the officials.”

It also the responsibility of the Sultan to treat the ulama kindly, who are the “pillars of the Threshold of Faith and Fatherland . . . and thus the fortification of Empire and Nation.”

Although Ali emphasizes the roles of Sultan and Grand Vizier, the most powerful positions in the Ottoman administration, perhaps representative of Ali’s own ambition and desire to prove his knowledge of the system in which he operated, he also mentions the beylerbeys (beglerbegis), while the anonymous author of the Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin has a chapter about sancak beys.

According to anonymous, the sancak beys must be brave and firm men who are not “of the part which is elegant and witty and from poets.” He goes on to say, “And the position of governorship, whether in scribal or financial sphere, is not appropriate to the kind of person who passes his life in writing, who has not seen

94 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 22
95 Ibid., pt. 1, pp. 41-43, 47
96 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 75
97 Yucel, Osmanli Devlet, p.96
Anonymous suggests that good governors come from those who have gained experience in battle and have a practical knowledge of battle and campaigns, rather than a more literary knowledge through which no understanding of the military has been reached. Such an assessment is likely due to the background of the author who was a part of the Ottoman military apparatus and therefore would naturally place more emphasis on this sort of knowledge over one of poetry and wit. Ali, however, would likely be at odds with this argument, as he dedicated a significant portion of his life to proving his literacy and learnedness in the art of literature and poetry by dedicating numerous qasidas and works to high officials in the administration. He hoped that such a display of his intellectual abilities, rather than experience in battle, would lead to advancement of rank or patronage. He laments, “in my lifetime, I have presented proofs of my learning and knowledge to the stirrups of three august kings but they have never shown me any kindness or munificence.”

In Ali’s discussion of the beglerbegis, his ideals of a centralized Ottoman state are elucidated, as he warns against the division of beglerbegiships into two separate provinces, citing the beglerbegiship of Yemen as an example of such folly, which resulted in “countless disturbances, expenses, and damages.” Ali concludes that a single beglerbegiship is best. He goes on to say that they should

98 Ibid.
99 Tietze, Counsel, pt. 2, pp. 72-73
100 Ibid., pt. 2, p. 91
101 Ibid., pt. 1, p. 71
not be inspectors of their provincial finances because their involvement has led to
the destruction of the imperial treasury. Using his personal experience as the
director of finances of Baghdad, in which he witnessed the bidding of governor
positions, Ali argues that if the supervision of the treasury were exclusively
under the protection of the directors of finance that the imperial treasury would
therefore increase, while the incentive for bribery would decline.\textsuperscript{102} He goes on
to argue that the position of \textit{beglerbegis} in the border areas were being filled by
unqualified people, namely judges; a problem that will result in the dejection of
the army, causing the loss of peace among the \textit{re’aya}.\textsuperscript{103} He goes on to
characterize these people as “enemies of Faith and Fatherland . . . ill-wishers of
kingdom and empire . . .”\textsuperscript{104}

The caliber of language employed by Ali, in his almost vehement
criticism of the \textit{beglerbegs} is a stark contrast to the relatively softer language of
anonymous, who offers advice as to what men should occupy the position of
\textit{sancak bey}, but does not necessarily explain why this practice should be
employed. This difference could be attributed to the discrepancy in personal
experience between Ali and anonymous, as the latter was much more at ease
discussing aspects of the Ottoman system pertaining to the military, while Ali
was uninhibited in his criticism of administration on both an imperial and

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pt. 1, p. 65
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., pt. 1, p. 69
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., pt. 1, p. 70
provincial level. These chapters that pertain to elements of Ottoman politics are relatively short compared to his chapters that engage the topic of the military, while Ali seems to approach both topics with equal ease and preoccupation. This may be representative of Ali’s more universal approach to describing and criticizing the Ottoman system, in that he views it as many parts that interact with one another – from the scribes and the beglerbegis, to the Grand Vizier and Sultan – and those who participate in this system occupy their own space of administrative duty in which one act of injustice of misconduct affects the wellbeing of the whole. Ali’s experience in the administration, although not at a high level position, endowed him with this perspective and perhaps confidence to make such assertions based on this experience and what he believed to be his extraordinary intelligence.
Chapter 4: Military

Many chapters in the *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* deal with the topic of the military, more specifically the conduct of Janissaries. The detail and length with which the anonymous author discusses military related issues makes it apparent that he was a former Janissary or at least involved with them to a great extent. He emphasizes the training of the conscripts to the Janissaries, the maintaining of discipline while on campaign, the *devshirme* system, and the best way to conquer the Kizilbash. Mustafa Ali, however, while mentioning the misconduct of the collectors of boys, mostly criticizes the field marshals, *serdars*, and focuses on the corruption of the military commanders. Although the topics broached by both authors are of a similar nature, anonymous emphasizes the issues pertaining to ordinary members of the Janissaries with few mentions of the officers, while Ali mostly aims his discussion at those in command. The same divergence in their discussion of Ottoman administration is present in their treatment of the military. It is apparent that the personal experiences of both authors affects how they view the military and which issues they believe to be most pressing in the context of their criticism.

In *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin*, anonymous dedicates a lengthy chapter to the *devshirme* system and the training of conscript boys. According to the author, “the custom became since olden times that the conscripts when they come
to Istanbul are distributed to Turks so that they may grow mature by plowing/tilling the land.”105 These boys, however, grew up in their native lands tilling the soil; therefore the author says it is a total loss to give such work back to the boys. 106 He advises that it is necessary to “give them a job in which they may be taught the science of being a janissary and sipahi, then they would be of use.”107 As soon as the conscripts are brought to Istanbul, they should at once be given to the cavalry troops and serve them in campaign in order to observe battle, becoming mature through this experience by the time they assume the post of janissary. The author then claims that servants of the sipahis who possess intelligence, understanding, and bravery are “better than their commanders.”108 With so many skilled and experienced men occupying these positions, it is not possible for the conscript boys to fulfill this service. Instead, they are relegated to tasks they are already familiar with, such as tilling land and do not learn the ways of the janissaries until much later, “not being useful for years.”109 Then because the conscripts would have not had the opportunity to be exposed to battle, they lack the basic skills of saddling a horse or wrapping their turban and learn only about the nature and function of the sipahis “until their beards turn

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105 Yucel, *Osmanli Devlet*, p. 93
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
gray.”¹¹⁰ The author argues by that time, they are old men and not useful to the sum property of the Sultan.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, the number of conscripts increases by half, and “when they become old men each one of the pashas are hit with stupidity.”¹¹² The author concludes his argument by suggesting that such training of the conscripts is both a waste of time and salary for those participating in such an absurd process and implores the Grand Vezir to distribute the conscripts to the cavalry troops upon their arrival to Istanbul. He justifies his advice by saying that this practice is not a law from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, therefore “there is no sin in the changing of it.”¹¹³ This reveals the author’s understanding of Ottoman kanun; since it is an Ottoman practice, it can be changed if it is no longer of value to the state and its people. The author refers to the time of Karagoz Pasha or Hersekoglu in the late 15th century, who “saw [this practice] reasonable in that case and it stayed.”¹¹⁴ While it might have been the best practice in the past, in the time of the author, it is no longer beneficial to those involved and therefore should be altered.

By the 17th century, the devshirme system had become more and more infrequent, as the number of janissaries increased due to Muslims infiltrating the

¹¹⁰ Ibid. ¹¹¹ Ibid. ¹¹² Ibid. ¹¹³ Ibid. ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
ranks.\textsuperscript{115} This appears to correlate with what anonymous wrote regarding the number of the recruits growing by half, however, he does not mention the cause of this being the infiltration of Muslims into the ranks of the janissaries. Instead, he discusses the devshirme system as fully functioning, which contradicts both modern scholarly and other Ottoman accounts in which the system was suggested as unimportant by the mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century. Writing from the time of 1660 in Istanbul, Paul Rycaut recorded in his work \textit{The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire},

\begin{quote}
The number of the Slaves brought yearly to Constantinople is uncertain; for sometimes it is more, and sometime less, according to the Wars and Successes of the Tartars; but as it is apparent in the Registers of the Customs at Constantinople only, one year with another at the least 200,000 are yearly imported . . . \textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

While the numbers offered by Rycaut may be inflated, it suggests that the devshirme system was at least in some way still in practice throughout the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, as other sources corroborate.\textsuperscript{117}

The anonymous author addresses another issue regarding the devshirme system. The collection of boys was entrusted to a janissary officer, usually the

\textsuperscript{116} Rycaut, Paul. \textit{The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire}. Sixth Edition. London, 1686. p. 150. Almost paradoxically, however, Rycaut states at another point in his work that the devshirme system had fallen out of use during his time. See Ménage, V.L. "Devshirme." \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition}.
\textsuperscript{117} Ménage, “Devshirme”
yaya-bashi, who would arrive at the area in which the levy was to be made accompanied by a *katib* (scribe or clerk), a letter from the *aga* of the janissaries, and a “*berat* of authorization.”

According to anonymous, in Rumelia an “upright, old aged yaya-bashi is not sent to collect recruits, a corruptible fresh, young yaya-bashi is being sent by the request of important people.” In order to save their son, the *re’aya* “sell a pair of oxen and a vineyard and a meadow, and they give the bribe to this yaya-bashi . . . there is no longer a place to stay left for that infidel, he takes his son and daughter and his head and leaves (the land).”

Because these people abandon their property, taxes cannot be collected from them; this accounts for a portion of the escapees recorded in the tax registers, causing “a lot of damage to the state treasury because of this.” As a solution to this problem, anonymous advises the Grand Vizier to send only the aged yaya-bashis who will not be corrupted by the offering of a bribe and to mitigate such temptation an increase of salary should be given to the yaya-bashi. The author goes on to say that “Janissaries should not hurt the villages of the conscripts” while they travel from town to town. He claims they plunder these villages, taking food and small goods, while demanding lodging

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118 Ibid.
119 Yucel, *Osmanlı Devlet*, p. 94
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
and wagons for conscripts who have fallen ill. Meanwhile, the villagers beg the Janissaries to stay elsewhere, offering them what little money they have to do so. Therefore, the Janissaries take the money and go to a different village, repeating the process and earning akçes through this process. Because the villagers are poor and give the Janissaries all of their property, this in turn brings “deficit to the property of the Sultan” because these people are unable to be taxed.

In Counsel for Sultans, Mustafa Ali criticizes the collectors of boys as practicing “manifest tyranny and abject cruelty.” Like Ali, anonymous employs similar language when referring to them as “tyrants.” Ali discusses the following issue in regard to the conduct of the collectors:

Although the non-Muslim subjects who have only one son have the privilege of not being taken their son and also those with several sons are not to lose more than one at a time according to the sublime, gracious law, they grab everyone and they especially fall upon those, knowing that those who depend on a single son will pay more bribes [to retain him]. If he hides his son or has the audacity to say that it is against the law, they hang up the husband by his feet and the wife by her hair and force them with painful blows and much torture to produce their son.
Both authors mention bribery, although they offer different context as far as the conduct of the collectors. Elsewhere in his work, Ali equates bribery to tyranny, arguing that those who are “inclined toward justice begin to prefer [it],” accepting bribes in order to advance their own financial gain.\textsuperscript{130} This issue is the crux of Ali’s criticism throughout his discussion of the Janissaries. For instance, he criticizes the \textit{serdars}, field marshals, for accepting bribes and says they should hold themselves and their soldiers to absolute discipline. He advises them to “suppress all covetousness in [their] hearts, should not feign to be unaware of their abuses, and when people complain of them [they] should in no way refrain from hearing them . . . “\textsuperscript{131}

Beyond this, Ali addresses the “high-ranking generals and lofty army-leaders,” saying the must be intelligent and insightful and vigilant of those in their service “who in our times are usually infected with the habit of \textit{bersh} and opium and whose ill behavior and forbidden actions in the clerical and other services are inscribed in the pages of the times.”\textsuperscript{132} While the anonymous author does not discuss the conduct of those in high-ranking positions as participating in such substance abuse, he does mention “immoral” Janissary troops who spend their salaries at taverns.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., pt. 1, p. 66; pt. 2, p. 20
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., pt. 2, p. 11
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., pt. 2, pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{133} Yucel, \textit{Osmanli Devlet}, pp.100-101
The Ottoman military and the treatment of Christians in Ottoman lands at the hands of the Janissaries entrusted with collecting recruits was a rather common subject in the writings of Europeans. While Rycaut wrote in the 17th century during the time of the anonymous author of *Kitabu Mesalihi ’l Muslimin*, Theodore Spandounes and Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq wrote their accounts of the Ottoman Empire, as they perceived it, during the 16th century when Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans* was written. Spandounes, writing in the early 1500s, laments the conditions of the “miserable Christians in Turkey,” who are inclined to “marry off their sons in childhood, as a means of evading the five-yearly round-up of boys for the Janissaries, since marriage made them exempt; although sometimes Selim broke this rule.”¹³⁴ This appears to have been a common practice among Christian peasants, although the intervals in which boys were collected is debatable; boys were likely collected on the basis of need, rather than according to predetermined timeline.¹³⁵ That so many European accounts, however, record the collection as occurring annually or every five years, is likely a literary device or means of exaggerating the dire conditions of Christians living in the Ottoman Empire, as Spandounes and others from his time were motivated by a desire to appeal to European kings and religious leaders to unite against the threat of Ottoman domination.

¹³⁵ Ménage, “Devshirme”
Unlike Spandounes, however, Busbecq writing in the 1550s, emphasizes the “patience, sobriety, and economy” of the Turks, in particular their “resources of a mighty empire, strength unimpaired, experience and practice in fighting, a veteran soldiery, habituation in victory, endurance of toil, unity, order, discipline, frugality, and watchfulness.” Busbecq paints a contrasting portrait of the Janissaries especially when contextualized with the content of the nasihatnames, in which the behavior of officers and soldiers is often viewed as morally reprehensible. He was not, however, as familiar with the everyday occurrences in the Janissary camp and their conduct in campaign or during the process of collection, while someone like the anonymous author who was a part of military society has witnessed aspects of the Janissaries that may not be immediately made public. Similarly, Ali would have become familiar with the military while stationed in Van in 1581.

Beyond this, Busbecq was merely an observer of the Ottoman military during the reign of Suleyman, and wrote his account based on the specific instances in which he saw them in action. Although Busbecq and other European authors were more concerned with the effectiveness and importance of the Ottoman military apparatus, both Ali and the anonymous

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137 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, p. 95
author were more interested in the system as a whole and its functioning from conscription and training to the conduct of officers in campaign. The fact that the janissaries remained the most important part of the Ottoman military is evident when analyzing this body of textual production, as it was a major subject in these works from the time of Suleyman’s reign to the 17th century, increasing in power during this period.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Establishing Consciousness in Genre

An intertextual examination of Mustafa Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans* and the anonymous *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin* in the context of two major subjects, the administrative and military apparatus of the Ottoman Empire, reveals both convergences and divergences in the texts. These can be attributed, however, to the motivation of the authors, as their own subjectivities permeate the narrative from choosing which topics to address in their works to engaging personal experience as a means of legitimizing their advice or criticism. Throughout his work, Mustafa Ali claims his allegations of administrative mismanagement were either witnessed firsthand or reiterated by reliable sources who themselves saw the misconduct. The anonymous author suggests his own personal experience as a member of the military through his authentic account.

The purpose of analyzing Ali and an anonymous text written several decades later that did not receive nearly as much attention as the *Counsel for Sultans*, is to first establish Ali’s work as a seminal moment in Ottoman political literature that represented the first *nasihatname*, and secondly, to map the parameters of the genre from the perspective of the authors who participate in the *nasihatname* framework. A part of this process is to establish the consciousness of the authors as producing a *nasihatname* as they understood it. Therefore, while placing this literature in its historical environments is certainly a significant
process, it is just as important to consider *nasihatnames* as a genre in which there were expectations of style and subject matter that in some ways transcends a particular historical moment. For instance, the conceptualization of a circle of justice and the dichotomy of order and disorder, although used to frame a specific criticism or piece of advice in the author’s time, were enduring themes in *nasihatnames*, whether written in 1581 or in the 19th century.

When attempting to understand the meaning of genre in *nasihatname* literature from the perspective of the authors, it is important to extract the moral framework in which they operated as influencing the ways in which they wrote about various subjects. While one’s morality is a part of their individual being and their subjectivity as an author, in the context of genre, it becomes a mode of analysis that is inseparable from not only the author and his work, but from the body of literature. The authors of *nasihatnames* all had the following in common: they were Ottoman, Muslim, and participated in the administrative apparatus of the empire. Their experiences shaped their worldviews, and their worldviews were affected by their education and intellectual lives. These aspects were a part their consciousness of participating in the *nasihatname* genre, but how is it possible to locate such consciousness when the authors are not explicating their work as a *nasihatname*? Authors contribute to genres, but do not explicate them. Thus, when Ottoman authors do not explicate their works as a part of the *nasihatname* genre, in addition to an intertextual reading of these
works, it is necessary to locate the discursive tropes present as a common thread that binds these works together in a genre that goes beyond coincidence. The most prevalent example of this would be the influence of *akhlak*, ethics literature, as an analytical scope through which notions of morality were shaped in the intellectual sphere. As such, it permeated the *nasihatname* genre in that it influenced how various authors perceived good government in an Islamic context. Although the boundaries between *akhlak* and *nasihatname* were porous in certain respects, the *nasihatname* occupied its own space in Ottoman literary production and as I argue, the authors were aware of this.

According to Cornell Fleischer, Mustafa Ali stated that the *Counsel for Sultans* was an original work and “he had intentionally chosen contemporary examples in order to display his knowledge of Ottoman *kanun.*” Even though Ali’s motivation for writing the *Counsel for Sultans* is undoubtedly personal, this illustrates consciousness on the part of Ali that he was endeavoring in a work that would be pioneering in Ottoman political literature. Before Ali, advice literature was usually a part of either the “mirrors for princes” genre or *akhlak.* As was previously mentioned, the *nasihat al-muluk* genre was largely theoretical and dealt with the subjects of etiquette and rule in the paradigm of Persian kingship, while *akhlak* works were penned by members of the religious class, informed by

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138 Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 96
139 Ibid., p.100
“religious-legal perspective of the medreses and by the philosophical ethics tradition form which they ultimately derived.” While innovative works of both categories preceded Ali’s *Counsel for Sultans* in the 16th century, they remained grounded in a highly theoretical framework and divorced from contemporaneous context, employing examples from the distant past. Ali, on the other hand, used contemporary examples that illustrated the functioning of the Ottoman system and the problems he perceived based on personal experience in great detail that was “unmatched in the works of his predecessors.” While it may not have been Ali’s intention to establish a new genre in Ottoman political literature, he was aware of his work’s significance in regard to its unique form and content. Traces of *akhlak* or at least an understanding of practical ethics as it pertains to good government persist in his work. Ali’s mentor, Kinalizade Ali Celebi penned what is considered the most significant work of *akhlak* in the 16th century, *Akhlak-i Ala‘i*, so perhaps this is not too surprising given his intellectual environment.

The influence of *akhlak* can be seen when the author discusses particular groups in accordance with their moral obligation and position in society and the importance of reciprocity between *re’aya* and ruler. Inherent to this discussion is the definition of “corruption,” as understood by these authors in an Islamic

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140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
context. According to Lawrence Rosen, the common and traditional understanding of corruption, which is also widely shared among the contemporary Muslim community is that “to be corrupt is to fail to share in whatever comes one’s way with those with whom you have forged bonds of interdependence.”\textsuperscript{144} This conceptualization encompasses a broad spectrum from causing public harm to specific relationships of reciprocity in which “‘to eat’ things yourself is not merely self-serving, but it is itself corrupting of the whole body of believers.”\textsuperscript{145} The anonymous author, for instance, employs the term \textit{rüşvethör}, meaning bribe-eater, as well as the phrase \textit{rüşvet yemek}, which literally means to eat a bribe. In the context of corruption, this means when those who take bribes do so as a means of exclusively preferring one group over another are corrupt and as such, “eat.”\textsuperscript{146}

The obvious importance of the discussion of administrative and military structures and their functioning may obscure the ethical aspects of advice literature. Such emphasis on corruption and “decline” as observed within these important elements of the Ottoman system by \textit{nasihatname} authors may be mistaken for a mere discussion of these structures and their malfunctions. The practical ethics of these works, however, informs all of the subjects engaged by \textit{nasihatname} authors. I will proceed with a final comparison between Ali and

\textsuperscript{144} Rosen, \textit{Justice in Islam}, p. 163
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
anonymous as a means of elucidating the *akhlak* influence that engages the
discussion of opium in both works. In the *Counsel for Sultans*, Mustafa Ali
mentions the usage of opium by scribes and members of the military. The latter,
“are usually infected with the habit of *bersh* and opium,”\(^{147}\) while scribes have
“locked themselves in their tents and destroyed the existence of the Muslims,
eating *bersh* and opium.”\(^{148}\) Ali makes no mention of opium use being a sinful
behavior that is not accordance with the Qur’an. He criticizes this conduct,
however, he stops short of deeming it a sin. This is likely because Ali recognizes
that to do so would be beyond the purpose of his work and should be left to
members of the *ulama* to discuss such an issue in religious terms. Inherent to
Ali’s discussion, however, is that by engaging in opium use, members of the
military and of the scribal class are prevented from fulfilling their duties to the
community. While under the influence of opium, the *askeri* are not adequately
protecting the *re’aya*, and the scribes are avoiding the petitioners by hiding in
tents abusing opium. They are therefore unfit to provide service to the people
and as such, are breaking the reciprocal relationship between those who are a part
of the Ottoman administration and those subjected to its governance. Although
the moral framework is present in determining this corruption, the author refrains

\(^{147}\) Tietze, *Counsel*, pt. 2, pp. 9-10
\(^{148}\) Ibid., pt. 2, p. 12
from judging the behavior as sinful, again, because it is not appropriate for Men of the Pen to do so.

In *Kitabu Mesalihi’l Muslimin*, anonymous discusses opium usage among muezzins, judges, and imams. While Ali mentions opium usage as a detail that illustrates corrupt behavior, anonymous dedicates a full chapter to the matter. He argues that for people of these positions who use opium, “this kind of appointment is not allowed.”\(^{149}\) He goes on to compare an opium addict to a drunkard, arguing that a drunkard “takes care of his business” when he does not drink, but an “out-of-control opium addict is always intoxicated.”\(^{150}\) The opium addicts cannot be trusted and as a whole, they are a class that offers no benefit to society. He argues

If such fundamental offices [of muezzin, imam, judge] were not given to people like these, [and] if something else is given to them where they could only harm themselves and not [all] Muslim that would be *sevab*.\(^{151}\)

According to the anonymous author, those who occupy other positions, such as craftsmen, addiction is not “disgraceful” because their mastership increases along with their intoxication.\(^{152}\) Again, like Ali, the author does not accuse the opium addicts of committing a sin that is well defined in Scripture. Instead, he frames his discussion in the context of a group’s moral obligation to the community. For

\(^{149}\) Yücel, *Osmanlı Devlet*, p. 95
\(^{150}\) Ibid.
\(^{151}\) Ibid.
\(^{152}\) Ibid.
those with a religious appointment, opium addiction affects not only the individual using it, but those who are intended to benefit from their services, namely the Muslim community. Again, the relationship of reciprocity is invalidated and by causing public harm, the users are corrupt. Others, however, who use opium, drunkards, or those who are otherwise intoxicated and perform services that are not dependent upon their cognizance, are not corrupt. While opium addiction may have been a widespread problem in the Ottoman Empire during this time, it is only mentioned by anonymous and Ali when it negatively impacts the relationship between a specific group and the populace.

The treatment of the topic of opium elucidates the influence of *akhlak* on the moral framework through which *nasihatname* writers, in particular Ali and anonymous, gauged the functioning of the Ottoman system and the extent problems that obstructed the pursuit of good governance and order. Both texts treat similar topics and offer converging details from the issue of Ottoman coinage and the abuse of Janissary collectors of conscript boys to the problem of bribery. Of course, specific aspects of both texts correspond with the author’s subjectivity and personal experience and as such, can expect to diverge from one another in conjunction with the historical context in which the author wrote. It was, however, the nature of the *nasihatname* genre as established by Mustafa Ali, that provided a framework that future authors followed and adjusted to fit their particular experience, advice, and criticism. The *nasihatname* was a divergence
from its intellectual predecessors of both the Persian nasihat al-muluk and akhlak literature, although traces of the latter persisted in part as a way of perceiving the world that was inherent to the author’s understanding of both good government and corruption.

In order to establish consciousness on the part of authors as participating in a specific genre, it requires an intertextual reading of these works. While using only two nasihatnames as means of arguing in favor of this phenomenon only scratches the surface of the volume of literary production, the contrast between Ali and anonymous – the former a sophisticated text of monumental influence that was quoted by subsequent authors and the latter, a more modest work with only one extent manuscript copy – allows for the following conclusions to be made. Mustafa Ali was the first author of the distinctively Ottoman advice for kings genre. While this work was influenced by akhlak literature, the elements of akhlak were employed in such a way that served as a mode of analysis in the context of discussions of morality and corruption in the Ottoman system. The intellectual influence of akhlak was inherent to the authors, as it was either a body of literature they were familiar with that shaped their worldview and values system and/or they followed the format put forth by Mustafa Ali in the 16th century. The Ottoman nasihatname genre, however, differed from its predecessors in akhlak literature as the latter was far more theoretical and drew from examples in the distant past, while nasihatnames
discussed practical issues and addressed the system that was temporally relevant at the time of the author’s writing. I argued that by locating the commonalities in nasihatnames, such as the moral framework influenced by akhlak and the apparent reservations of both Ali and anonymous to expand their discussion of corruption into the territory of “sin,” as that is a topic reserved for the ulama and therefore a different genre, both writers were conscious of participating in the nasihatname genre. Beyond this, both authors address similar subjects, and while Ali was influenced by other examples of literary production while writing the Counsel for Sultans, the anonymous author was clearly influenced, directly or indirectly, by Ali’s work. Perhaps for this author and Ali’s successors in the genre, following the framework established by the Counsel for Sultans gave their work certain legitimacy in addition to situating their work within the nasihatname genre. For a potential reader, whether it was to whom the work was addressed – the Grand Vizier, for instance – or a fellow member of the Ottoman administration, their ability to recognize the work as a nasihatname was likely an important consideration for the author. It is important to locate the authorial consciousness in this genre because it nuances established conceptualizations of Ottoman political literature and thought, while providing insight into how those who participated in the Ottoman system perceived the world in which they worked, lived, and ultimately, hoped to affect in a significant way. This is perhaps what is most extraordinary about the nasihatname genre, that men who
held relatively low posts in the administration perpetuated these works.\textsuperscript{153} The \textit{nasihatname} genre was representative of a burgeoning discursive space in which ordinary members of the bureaucracy were able to express themselves among a literate Ottoman society in a way that was previously inaccessible, and as such, the \textit{nasihatname} genre occupies its own significance in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

\textsuperscript{153} Unlike, for instance, Lutfi Pasha the former Grand Vezir, who penned the \textit{Asafname}, a \textit{nasihat al-muluk} work in the Persian tradition.


