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Introduction

STEPPING ACROSS THE threshold into the literary salon, many an Ottoman gentleman must have felt the excitement and fear of the boxer entering the ring. To be sure, there were countless physical comforts: gold-threaded sofa spreads lined with velvet cushions; gilded platters loaded with honeyed sweets; marble walls rosied by the glow of candlelight. Such sensory pleasures could help to bring men into heady communion with one another, spurring spontaneous recitations of verse and impassioned expressions of love. But equally often, the mood was combative. In a rapidly expanding empire, the salon was a theater for fierce disputes over status and power whose echoes resounded across far-flung Ottoman lands. This was the Ottoman Empire on twenty square meters of carpet: the salon of empire in an empire of salons.

Informal gatherings of gentlemen were an indispensable part of Ottoman political, social, and intellectual life in the early modern period (c. 1400–1800 CE). In cities and towns stretching from Albania to Arabia, elite salons brought leading figures from diverse ethnic and geographical backgrounds into close contact. Part business, part pleasure, and highly flexible in their form, these gatherings yielded to whatever the needs of the era were. In times of plenty, they served an incorporative function, drawing outsiders in and helping knowledge to circulate. When belts were tightened, however, so too were the boundaries of the salon, keeping newcomers out and resources in. In either case, salons functioned as key institutions of empire, contributing substantially to the Ottoman system of governance.

Salons were especially important in the wake of the Ottoman expansion into the Arab Middle East in the early part of the sixteenth century. Since the medieval period, salons had offered a forum for socializing that was shared, at least in its roughest outlines, all across the Islamic

world.¹ With the Ottoman conquest of Greater Syria, Egypt, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula in 1516–7, such assemblies offered a venue in which encounters between the Turkish-speaking Ottoman ruling elite and local Arab notables could take place. Although in many ways the salon reproduced the asymmetrical relations between conqueror and conquered, in other key ways the imperatives of salon conversation generated their own social hierarchies, hierarchies that were a function not of political office but of eloquence, learning, and wit.

This book views the salon in this transformative era as it looked from the Syrian city of Damascus through the perspective of one Arab notable, Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1577). Born in Damascus in 1499 during the last decades of the expiring Mamluk Sultanate, Ghazzi adjusted quickly to the new imperial order; he became friendly with the Ottoman functionaries that now passed through his hometown and eventually developed into one of the city's leading scholars. Ghazzi possessed all of the traits required to shine in the salon, including a powerful intellect, a deep erudition, and a seemingly endless repertoire of anecdotes and poems. But he, too, had his weaknesses, especially his stutter, which thwarted his ability to partake in the kind of verbal acrobatics that were the hallmark of elite sociability. Though his knowledge and stature meant that few ever dared to oppose him, by the end of his life Ghazzi was fending off a growing number of challengers from home and afar.

Ottoman Salons

The most recognizable and widely studied forum for early modern Ottoman sociability is the coffeehouse. Ever since Jürgen Habermas made the coffeehouse a cornerstone of his theory of the public sphere, scholars eager to incorporate non-Western lands into histories of modernity have shown how this distinctly Ottoman invention promoted new, more public lifestyles and offered a more inclusive space for social and political action.² The most recognizable and widely-studied forum for Ottoman intellectual

1. Samer Ali argues that “one of the primary mechanisms for forming Abbasid society and literature was the literary gathering or salon”; Maria Subtelny describes the *majlis* as “the main forum for literary, particularly poetical, expression in the late Timūrid period”; and Dominic Brookshaw maintains that “it was largely within the framework of *majālis* that much of the intellectual, cultural and social life of medieval Muslims took place.” Ali, *Salons*, 13; Subtelny, “Scenes,” 144; Brookshaw, “Palaces,” 199. For more on medieval salons, see Lazarus-Yafeh et al., *The Majlis*; Kraemer, *Humanism*, 55–60; Madelung et al., “Maḍjlīs.”

2. Habermas, *Strukturwandel*, esp. 90–116. For Ottoman coffeehouses, see Kafadar, “Night”; Yaşar, *Osmanlı Kahvehaneleri*; Çaksu, “Coffee Houses”; Mikhail, “Desire”;

activity, in turn, is the classic Islamic institution of higher education, the madrasa (Tur. *medrese*). Primarily designed to train students in the religious sciences, madrasas were also dynamic social centers, since they were often attached to larger mosque complexes and offered accommodation to many pupils.³ Finally, the most recognizable and widely studied forum for sixteenth-century Ottoman state-building is the formal bureaucracy, with a strong sultan at the top and administrative support structures cascading down like so many domes and arches on an Ottoman imperial mosque.

The renown of these institutions is well deserved, especially in light of the markedly weaker institutionalization common amongst most of the empire's Eurasian contemporaries.⁴ However, historians' focus on these structures also reflects modern expectations of separation between state and society, work and leisure, as well as private and public spheres. In fact, these institutions coexisted with, and in part developed out of, another social form more difficult to classify according to such divisions: the salon. When the coffeehouse first emerged in the sixteenth century, it was viewed by many Ottoman elites as a competitor to, and indeed usurper of, domestic forms of hospitality. The madrasa was just one theater for a wider culture of instruction and intellectual debate that flourished equally in mosques or at home. As for the Ottoman bureaucratic system, much of the daily business of governing was performed in the houses of imperial officials. However institutionalized the Ottoman Empire became, loosely defined gatherings held in multifunctional spaces continued to play an important societal role.

All members of early modern Ottoman society had opportunities to socialize. Ottoman sultans conversed with courtiers in pavilions overlooking the Bosphorus or in royal tents while on campaign.⁵ Women congregated in bathhouses or in the family quarters of the home.⁶ Neither did religious

Özkoçak, "Coffeehouses"; Kömeçoğlu, "Publicness"; Işın, "Conversation"; Hattox, *Coffee*. A comprehensive overview of the historiography can be found in Yaşar, "Şehir Mekânları."

3. Atçıl, *Scholars*; Baltacı, *Osmanlı Medreseleri*; Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilatı*; Repp, *The Müfti of Istanbul*.

4. Coffeehouses did not spread to Europe until the seventeenth century, and states there were rarely able to exert the same kind of centralized control over higher education and administration. Sturmberger, "Vorbildhaftigkeit"; Çizakça, "Ottoman Government," esp. 241–52.

5. Ertuğ, "Entertaining the Sultan"; İnalçık, *Tarab*; Ertuğ, "Meclis"; İnalçık, "Klasik edebiyat menşei"; Necipoğlu, "Garden Culture"; Mahir, *Minyatür Sanatı*, 117–8.

6. For bathhouses, see Ergin, *Bathing Culture*; Boyar and Fleet, *Ottoman Istanbul*, chapter 7; Rafeq, "Diversion." For women socializing in the home in sixteenth-century Ottoman lands, see Peirce, *Morality Tales*, chapter 7; Necipoğlu, "Garden Culture," 40. Eighteenth-century Ottoman miniatures depict gatherings of women as well, and evidence





FIGURE 0.1. AND FIGURE 0.2. Figure 0.1 (*left*): The poet Baki, who sits on the right, converses with two Ottoman gentlemen in a reception area accessible by steps. From ‘Aşık Çelebi, *Meşa‘irü’s-şu‘ara’* (c. 1600). (Reproduced by permission from the Directorate of the Turkish Institution for Manuscripts, Millet Library Istanbul, MS Ali Emiri Tarih 772, 80.) Figure 0.2 (*above*): The Aleppo Chamber (c. 1600–1). Once owned by a Christian family in Aleppo, this wood-paneled chamber was part of a domed *qa’a* structure with three raised platforms for sitting, two of which are visible in the photograph. (Reproduced with permission. © bpk/Museum für Islamische Kunst, SMB / Georg Niedermeiser.)

minorities lack for social occasions nor, in prosperous circles, for magnificent chambers in which to hold them, to judge from the spectacular reception hall owned by a Christian merchant of Aleppo in the first years of the seventeenth century (see figure 0.2).⁷ Nonelites, too, cultivated rich

from the nineteenth century suggests that women cultivated similar forms of conversation to men. Phillips, *Everyday Luxuries*, 111–119; Atasoy, “Hayat sahnesi,” 19–22; Strauss, “La Conversation,” 263–5. For the Mamluk period, see Hirschler, *Written Word*, 45–6; Ibrahim, “Residential Architecture,” 52.

7. Gonnella and Kröger, *Fabulous Creatures*; Gonnella, *Wohnhaus*. For a later period, see Grehan, “Fun.”

social lives; in Anatolia and the Arab lands alike, artisans and peasants met to talk, play music, or even drink in private chambers, barbershops, or orchards.⁸ Although many of these occasions were no doubt enjoyable, calling on other people was not merely a pleasure, but an obligation. According to Ottoman etiquette writers, regular visits were owed by adult children to their parents; by members of Sufi orders to one another; and by all men regardless of status to their social superiors. The resulting social pressure was such that some people—our Ghazzi included—opted to withdraw from socializing altogether. Around the age of forty, Ghazzi moved into a chamber on the eastern side of the Great Mosque of Damascus, vowing a life of seclusion. And yet, even this did not free him from social obligations: he continued to host students, scholars, and state officials for learned debates and even banquets.

Although such socializing was common to all social groups, much of it occurred in parallel. In the sixteenth century, Ottoman writers began to show increasing discomfort with mixed company of all sorts, whether across the lines of gender, religion, or class. Whereas fifteenth-century elite gatherings sometimes featured female poets alongside their male counterparts, later biographers sought to explain away such practices, which were thought to compromise the honor of a lady.⁹ Likewise, few sixteenth-century writers documented the kind of interreligious dialogue that had flourished in the assemblies of earlier eras (and continued in other parts of the Islamic world).¹⁰ As for socializing across the lines of class, the defense of one Damascene scholar who was criticized for associating with men of modest means sums up the prevailing attitude: “I am poor, so I socialize with the poor.”¹¹ In point of fact, many gatherings were more heterogeneous than writers cared to admit. That judicial courts occasionally prosecuted unrelated men and women for mixing in private is indisputable

8. Yılmaz, “Fun,” 152–3; Sajdi, *Barber*, 64–6, 147.

9. Havlioğlu, *Mirî Hatun*, 44; Havlioğlu, “Margins.” High-ranking women could take part in Timurid and Uzbek salons and even drink wine there. Szuppe, “Intellectual Milieu,” esp. 130–3.

10. Heyberger, “Polemic Dialogues,” 496; Kafadar, “Self and Others,” 145. In fifteenth-century Mamluk Damascus, the scholar Ibn Tawq hosted Christians for meals in his home. Wollina, “*Ta’lîq*,” 357. For interreligious dialogue in earlier eras, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *The Majlis*. For the Mughal court, where such dialogue continued to take place, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations”; Maclean, “Real Men.” Strauss argues that gatherings became more religiously diverse in the second part of the seventeenth century; indeed, in the eighteenth, Greek Phanariots mingled with Muslim powerholders in palaces along the Bosphorus. Strauss, “La Conversation,” 260; Greene, *Greeks*, 200–1.

11. Ibn Ayyūb, *Rawḍ*, 202a. See also Sajdi, *Barber*, 75.

evidence that such mixing occurred.¹² Architectural remains suggest that Christians and Muslims mingled privately too: the Christian owner of the Aleppo Chamber selected the inscriptions of the reception hall to avoid offending the religious sensibility of his Muslim guests.¹³ Even at the gatherings of elite Muslim men, servants were omnipresent and women sometimes watched from the wings—Ghazzi himself was rarely seen without a following of enslaved Ethiopian women.¹⁴ However, such figures played subsidiary, supporting roles. Physically and discursively, women, Christians, and nonelites remained at the margins of that most celebrated of social spaces: the salon.

The salon was the domain of Muslim gentlemen par excellence. I define salons as exclusive gatherings held for the purpose of enlightened conversation and structured around the relationship between host and guest. Participating in such gatherings was one of the defining attributes of upper-class Muslim men, since doing so allowed them to practice many of the privileges particular to their caste. This included exercising hospitality and performing acts of generosity, pursuits that were impracticable for social groups with single-room dwellings and little disposable income. It also included utilizing refined speech and displaying bookish knowledge of the sort inaccessible to anyone without a higher education.¹⁵ Contemporary descriptions of polite conversation conceptualize it as a distinctly masculine sport, drawing on the martial language of swordsmanship or even the sexualized language of penetration.¹⁶ Nonetheless, as exclusionary as these gatherings were, they often did bring together men from different sectors of the Ottoman elite, including scholars, administrators, and military officials.

Ottoman writers had a variety of concepts to describe the gatherings I refer to as salons. One of the most common and generic of these was the Arabic *majlis*, *meclis* in Ottoman Turkish (pl. *majalis*, *mecalis*). Literally

12. Peirce, *Morality Tales*, 258–61. In 1583 men and women were caught in a drinking party (*içki meclisi*) in Üsküdar near Istanbul. *Üsküdar Kadi Sicilleri*, 9:98. Selim II liked to spend time with his former wet nurse. Necipoğlu, “Garden Culture,” 42–3.

13. Heyberger, “Inscripfen”; Ott, “Wer sich fürchtet.” Christians appear to have been more eager to highlight such relationships than Muslims were. Dursteler, *Venetians*, 173–80.

14. Ibn Ayyüb, *Kitāb*, 16. The scholar İdris Bidlisi (d. 1520) emphasized the value of conversing with the women of one’s household, if in moderation. İnalçık, *Tarab*, 223.

15. Sajdi, *Barber*, esp. 64–6; Grehan, “Words.” Described for a much earlier period in Ghazi, “Un groupe social.”

16. For the former, see Chamberlain, *Knowledge*, 153–4; for the latter, see Rouayheb, *Homosexuality*, esp. 21, 25–6.

meaning “sitting” or “session,” with the verb “to sit” at its root, the word—just like the French *salon*—could carry both the meaning of “assembly” and of the physical space in which such assemblies were held.¹⁷ However, unlike in the French case, the Arabic term designated an occasion long before it indicated an architectural feature, and indeed a *majlis* could be held almost anywhere: not only in a domestic interior, but also in a courtyard, garden, or even in a publicly accessible space like a madrasa or mosque.¹⁸ Nonetheless, privately owned reception areas played an especially important role in the lives of Ottoman elites, whose sprawling compounds housed many such spaces and acted as the center of operations for the large households that underpinned early modern Ottoman society and politics.¹⁹ That elites could gather in the privacy of the home was a fact of enormous significance since it shielded them from the long arm of the law.²⁰ However, the upper classes also had the luxury of utilizing a range of public spaces for their gatherings, and Ghazzi and many of his contemporaries received visitors in highly visible locations in urban mosques.²¹ Thanks to the retinues of servants that trailed most Ottoman elites wherever they went, such publicly staged hospitality mimicked many aspects of the kind practiced in private.²² Elite salon culture thus found its expression wherever a group of Ottoman gentlemen chose to sit.

17. The term *majlis* is variously rendered in English as, among other things, “entertainment,” “salon,” “session,” “social gathering,” and “symposium.” Gilliot, *Education*, xxxiii; Manz, *Power*, 197; Bray, “Adab,” 13–14; Kilpatrick, “Socializing,” 762–763; Lewis, “Reading,” 78. Because of the generic meaning of the term, it was also used to designate a whole range of gatherings quite different from those discussed here, e.g., class lessons, court sessions, or even devotional assemblies. Allen, “Night”; Makdisi, *Colleges*, 10–12; Dozy, “Majlis,” 208. Other terms used in the sixteenth century included *mujalasa* and *jam‘*. For the former, see Ghazzī, *Maṭāli‘*, 137; ‘Aṣīq Çelebi, *Dhayl*, 106; for the latter, Būrīnī, *Tarājim*, 2: 98. Samer Ali distinguishes between *majlis* and *mujalasa*, with the latter connoting more egalitarian interactions. Ali, *Salons*, 16–8.

18. Ertuğ, “Entertaining the Sultan,” 133; Necipoğlu, “Gaze,” 310. For the usage of *majlis* in Arabic to designate a space in the home, see Ghazzī, *Kawākib*, 2: 237. It seems that such usage was more common in Arabic than in Turkish, since Ca’fer Efendi, writing in early seventeenth-century Istanbul, translates the Arabic *majlis* into Turkish as *dernek yeri* (meeting place) and *oturacak yer* (sitting place), not suggesting (as he does with other terms) that its meaning is shared in the two languages. Ca’fer Efendi, *Risāle-i Mi’māriyye*, 89 (74r).

19. Kunt, “Households,” 103. Most work on Ottoman households has focused on a later period. See Bekar, “Köprülü Family,” chapter 4; Nizri, *Ulema Household*; Hathaway, *Households*; Salzmann, “Ancien Regime”; Abou-el-Haj, “Households.” For glimpses into sixteenth-century households, see Wilkins, “Masters”; Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants*, 53–4.

20. Stilt and Mottahedeh, “Public,” 737–8, 740–1.

21. Mosques were sites of sociability in the central lands as well. Țaşköprizāde, *Shaḡā’iq*, 177, 250.

22. Ibn Ayyūb, *Rawḍ*, 280a; Tietze, “Luxury.”

Part of the attraction of Ottoman salons was their flexibility. Depending on the needs of the host or his guests, salons could be put to a variety of different social ends. One of the most important was entertainment and leisure, as existing scholarship has shown. Many contemporaries reveled in the era's celebratory banquets (Ar. *diyafa*, Tur. *ziyafet*), lavish drinking parties (Tur. *bezm*, *meclis-i işret*), and elegant soirées (Ar. *mahfil*, Tur. *mehfil*).²³ These were the sorts of occasions to which a sultan would retire to hear music and watch dancing, or to which friends would flock to engage in friendly conversation (*sohbet*) or to gaze at handsome prepubescent boys.²⁴ Usually, a special role was reserved for poetry and literature, and contemporaries singled out the gatherings of poets or the literati (Ar. *majlis adab*, Tur. *meclis-i şu'ara*) for particular praise.²⁵

Yet, the pleasurable aspects of such occasions should not overshadow the hard work of Ottoman sociability. Initially conceptualized by Georg Simmel as a form of social interaction that was devoid of meaningful content and performed purely for its own sake, sociability has since been recast as something far more serious, as “work with a purpose.”²⁶ In Ottoman gatherings as elsewhere, many apparently superficial interactions relied on extensive training and considerable physical and mental labor. What is more, even the most humdrum of exchanges could serve the purpose of strengthening social cohesion within groups or upholding distinctions between them.²⁷

But participating in Ottoman salons also constituted work in a stricter sense. For scholars, salons were key arenas for exchanging ideas and building intellectual authority. Throughout the early modern period, not only poems, but also writings of a more academic nature were regularly conceived of and received in learned salons (Ar. *majlis ilm*, Tur.

23. For banquets, see Taşköprizade, *Şaqa'iq*, 130. For *bezm*, see Ertuğ, “Entertaining the Sultan,” 124; Kut, “Bezm.” For *meclis-i işret*, see İnalçık, “Klasik edebiyat menşei” and İnalçık, *Tarab*. For *mahfil/mehfil*, see Ibn Ayyüb, *Kitāb*, 89; Kınalı-zade, *Tezkiretü's-Şu'arā*, 670.

24. Ertuğ, “Entertaining the Sultan”; Uludağ, “Sohbet”; Ertuğ, “Meclis”; Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*, esp. 106–12; Strauss, “La Conversation,” 252–4.

25. This has been the best studied aspect of Ottoman salons. Havlioğlu, *Mihri Hatun*, chapter 2; İnalçık, *Tarab*, chapters 5–6; Andrews et al., *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, esp. 33–4; Çeltik, “Şairler Meclisi”; İnalçık, “Klasik Edebiyat menşei”; İpekten, *Edebî Muhitler*, esp. 227–37; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat*, 22–3.

26. Cowan, “Spaces,” 252. Simmel's original German term was *Geselligkeit*. Simmel, “Sociability”; Lilti, *Salons*, 5–7. For an appeal to take Ottoman sociability seriously and a template for how to study it, see Georgeon, “Présentation.”

27. Hellman, “Furniture.”

meclis-i 'ilm).²⁸ For the unemployed, salons were key stops on the way to new patrons: job seekers began their work by paying courtesy visits to Istanbul's power holders or securing invitations to their soirées. Political decisions, too, were often made in informal contexts; for ambassadors, a visit to the Topkapı Palace was the culmination of numerous private meetings with the sultan's advisors.²⁹ Even judicial verdicts were often the result of negotiations that occurred outside of the Islamic court, with many formal hearings taking place only after decisions had been reached privately.³⁰

Contemporaries did attempt to separate out the various functions of informal gatherings and to differentiate work from leisure. Etiquette manuals stressed that drinking parties should only be held in the evenings and discouraged the sultan from involving his boon companions (Ar. *nadim*, Tur. *nedim*) in the affairs of the state.³¹ Some men of stature reserved mornings for private sessions and afternoons for more public audiences (or vice versa).³² However, in practice these lines were often blurry. Pleas for patronage were best couched in polite banter or rhetorical flourish and, at the assemblies held in Damascus when a new judge arrived from Istanbul, a particularly clever repartee could win a man a job.³³ Scholarly discussions gave way to poetry exchanges.³⁴ Paperwork catalyzed disputes over grammar.³⁵ A meeting Ghazzi had with a leader of a Sufi religious order and the latter's brothers in the Syrian town of Hama was typical of the different modes of interaction that coexisted in a single gathering. In a magnificent chamber in the order's lodge overlooking the Orontes river, the men spoke about what they had seen and done since they had last met. They discussed scholarly topics, both religious and secular. Ghazzi inspected the Sufi shaykh's appointment deed, jotting down an approving note in response. He issued the shaykh an academic license (*ijaza*). At one

28. Pfeifer, "Encounter"; Sievert, "Salon"; Brömer, "Scientific Practice"; Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, 72–6; Öztürk, "Okunan Kitaplar." For the importance of reading sessions for nonelites, see Değirmenci, "Gözlemler"; Öztürk, "Halk Kitapları."

29. Muslu, *Ottomans*, 47, 52; Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities*, chapter 3.

30. Gradeva, "Kadi Court," 62, 66.

31. Kafadar, "Night"; İnalçık, "Klasik edebiyat menşei," 228, 230–1; Strauss, "La Conversation," 254–6. For boon companions in earlier periods, see Yıldız, "*Nadim*"; Chejne, "Boon-Companion."

32. The North African traveler Ibn Battuta (d. 1368/9) observed this practice in Kastamonu in the fourteenth century, and the Scottish physician Alexander Russell in Aleppo in the eighteenth. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Travels*, 2:462–3; Mollenhauer, "Private," 75–6.

33. Ibn Ayyūb, *Kitāb*, 84.

34. Ibn al-Ḥanbalī, *Durr*, 1: 997.

35. Ḥamawī, *Hādī*, 93–4; Ḥamawī, *Bawādī*, 154b–5a; Elger, *Glaube*, 100.

point, a man from the shaykh's entourage asked Ghazzi for a legal opinion, which he provided on the spot. And, when the sun disappeared over the horizon and the black dust of the night settled into the eyes of the lands, the men performed the sunset prayer together. Since it was the month of Ramadan, they broke their fast with a sumptuous buffet. Only then did Ghazzi take his leave of the gentlemen.³⁶ Diverse as Ottoman gatherings were, this book uses the word "salon" as an umbrella term designating the whole spectrum of elite assemblies. It is used interchangeably with the generic "gathering" and "assembly," and supplemented by more specific designations whenever possible (e.g., banquet, scholarly gathering, soirée).

The importance of salons is confirmed by their ubiquity in the Ottoman written record. They feature in travel narratives, biographical compendia, chronicles, etiquette manuals, paintings, and poems. Arabic travel accounts (*rihla*) were often more concerned with the social landscape of a given locale than with the mosques or monuments that preoccupied better-known Ottoman travelers like Evliya Çelebi or many European visitors to the empire. The descriptions of leading figures compiled in both Arabic and Turkish-language biographical anthologies (*tarajim*, *tezkiye*) also often dwelled on social gatherings. To give an extreme, but not atypical, example, a four-thousand-word biography of a fifteenth-century Ottoman scholar chronicled a banquet he hosted to honor his father; a feast followed by a lesson he held for a Persian traveler; the scholar's visit, in the company of some of his students, to the home of a vizier; a learned disputation in front of the sultan; and another debate that soured when a guest refused to take his assigned seat.³⁷ Prescriptive sources devote no less attention to social gatherings, and Ghazzi wrote books of etiquette (*adab*) on sharing meals, joking, and interacting with fellow members of a Sufi order, to name only a few.³⁸ Though these prescriptive sources should not be confused with descriptions of actual fact, the substantial overlap between theory and practice suggests how seriously prescriptions were taken.³⁹ Finally, paintings and poems often put salons center stage. Illustrated manuscripts regularly depicted elite gatherings, their painters supplementing textual cues with first-hand observations of Ottoman

36. Ghazzī, *Maṭāliʿ*, 50–2.

37. The scholar in question is Hocasade (d. 1488). Țaşköprizade, *Şhaqāʿiq*, 126–39. For biographical dictionaries as reflections of particular social circles, see Niyazioğlu, *Dreams*, chapter 1; Sajdi, *Barber*, 50–2; El-Rouayheb, "al-Būrīnī," 2; Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*.

38. Ghazzī, *Ādāb al-muʾākala*; Ghazzī, *Muzāḥ*; Ghazzī, *ʿIshra*.

39. See the cautionary remarks in Lewicka, *Food*, 392.

social life.⁴⁰ Contemporary poetry likewise dwelt on convivial themes, with much of its stock imagery—candles, goblets, blossoms—evoking the trappings of elite sociability. Indeed, however concerned poets were with literary form, they crafted their verses from the stuff of daily life, not least from the poetic séances where those verses were so often performed.⁴¹ Poems should thus be seen less as reflections of Ottoman salons than as participants within them.

What is the wisdom of referring to this distinctly Ottoman social form using the French term *salon*? Doing so may seem at best imprecise and at worst misleading. Few institutions have been laden with more world-historical meaning. French salons have variously been credited with incubating gender equality, the Enlightenment, democratic politics, and the bourgeois public sphere, thus taking a leading role not only in French national history but in the rise of Western modernity itself.⁴² And yet, recent historiography has cut French salons down to size, rejecting some of their exalted associations in favor of a more sober account rooted in distinctly early modern conceptions of etiquette and social hierarchy. Women, it seems, played more circumscribed, more gendered roles than was once believed; if salons helped to engender egalitarian thought, then they were also vehicles of royal patronage and dominated by aristocratic notions of civility; and the public sphere that developed around these and other spaces had close ties to, indeed relied upon, state networks.⁴³ Even the term *salon* has come to seem anachronistic, since its use to designate a polite gathering developed only in the nineteenth century when what was left of the culture it denoted was heavily cloaked in nostalgia. Before that, contemporaries spoke of a larger culture of elite hospitality built around “houses,” “circles,” and, above all, “societies.”⁴⁴

This reinterpretation of the French salon clears the way for a less loaded usage of the term in other historical contexts.⁴⁵ To speak of Ottoman salons is not to imply that Ottoman sociability was just like French

40. Ertuğ, “Entertaining the Sultan”; İnalçık, *Tarab*; Ertuğ, “Ceremonies”; Tamnđi, “Transformation”; Kütükođlu, “Divân-ı Hümâyûn.”

41. Andrews and Kalpaklı argue forcefully for the value of Ottoman poetry in reconstructing the past. Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*; Andrews, *Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Song*, esp. chapter 7.

42. Rouget, “Academies”; Goodman, *Republic*; Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty*; Habermas, *Strukturwandel*.

43. Lilti, “Politesse,” 9–11; Lilti, *Salons*; Cowan, “Spaces,” 255, 259–61; Roche, *Siècle*; Blanning, *Culture*, 13.

44. Lilti, *Salons*, 6; Rouget, “Academies”; Lilti, “Politesse,” 2.

45. Cowan, “Spaces,” 260–2.

sociability, real or imagined. Not only did Ottoman salon culture by and large exclude women, but its forms of association were self-consciously Islamic and developed around substantial differences in material culture and social practice.⁴⁶ The division between “polite” and “scholarly” culture, so salient in eighteenth-century France, never operated in Ottoman circles, where self-respecting gentlemen were expected to master both. And yet, Ottoman salons did have notable similarities to elite gatherings across early modern Eurasia, including the importance of poetry, the role of patronage, and the concern with physical expressions of social hierarchies.⁴⁷ Although this book emphasizes the distinctiveness of Ottoman sociability, it uses the term salon to evoke a social form that was commensurable across coeval elite cultures.

The Incorporation of Arab Lands

At no point were salons more important than after the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1516–7. This conquest was one of the most consequential events to occur across six hundred years of Ottoman history. In the course of just six months, Ottoman armies advanced from the Orontes to the Nile, trouncing the Mamluk forces and wresting from them some of the wealthiest and most sacred sites of the Islamic world: Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina. The defeat brought a large Muslim and Arabic-speaking population under the authority of the ethnically diverse but linguistically Turcophone Ottoman ruling elite. It also enabled further conquest and, within just a few decades, the Ottomans would go on to claim territories in modern Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria as well (see figure 0.3).⁴⁸ Thus began four hundred years of Ottoman control over large parts of the Arab world.

Spectacular though the 1516–7 conquest was, it has often been overshadowed in historical memory by the 1453 capture of Constantinople. To be sure, historians routinely state that the events of 1516–7 helped to make the empire more Islamic as it became the warden of the holy lands and its population skewed more Muslim. However, this transformation has more often been asserted than examined. Indeed, modern scholarship on Ottoman Arab lands has often focused on the later centuries, when local actors

46. Pfeifer, “Gulper.” In the nineteenth century, European observers often took issue with the exclusion of women from Ottoman salons. Strauss, “La Conversation,” 262–3.

47. For the former two, see Rouget, “Academies”; Tarte, *Places*. For the latter, see Sternberg, *Status Interaction*, esp. 1–2.

48. Hathaway, *Arab Lands*, chapter 2; Rafeq, *Arab*, 58–80.

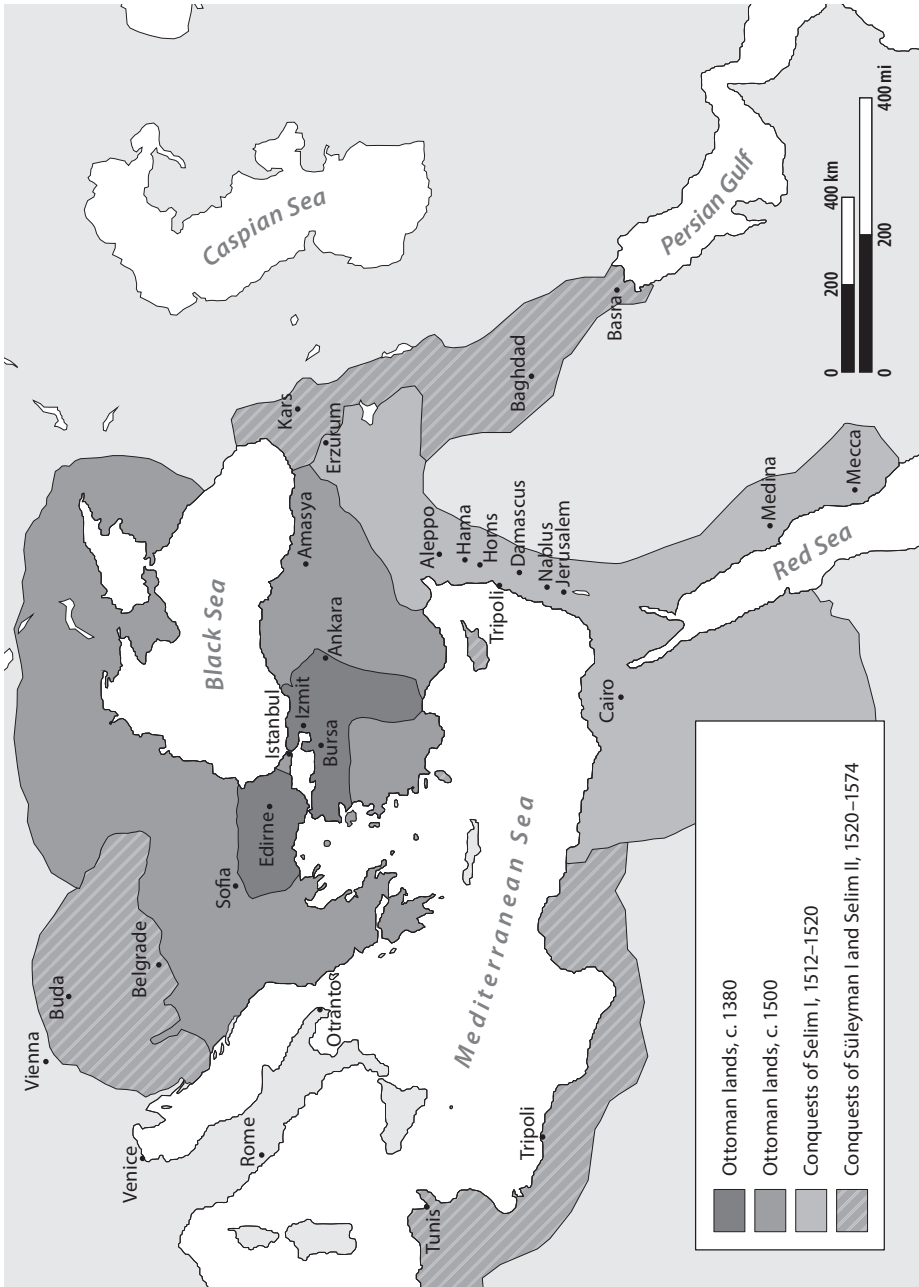


FIGURE 0.3. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire through the third quarter of the sixteenth century.

gained more visibility.⁴⁹ Those who have studied the first century of interactions have usually foregrounded legal, institutional, and administrative aspects.⁵⁰ Integration is not just an administrative affair, however.⁵¹ This book examines the incorporation of Arab lands into the Ottoman Empire as a social and cultural process. It argues that the first decades after the conquest constitute a distinct period in Ottoman-Arab relations, one in which economic prosperity and a still emergent imperial culture afforded Arabs a prominent place in the social and intellectual landscape of the empire.⁵²

When Turkish speakers and Arabic speakers met in the wake of the conquest, they did not begin with a blank slate. Theirs was a long history of encounter stretching back to the Arab expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries. What is more, since 1250, Syria and Egypt had been ruled by Turkish speakers, namely the elite slaves known as *mamluks* that were imported from Central Asia and the Caucasus and gave the sultanate its modern name. This continuous history of interaction between the two groups gave rise to a variety of ready-made stereotypes about each, for whom the same ethnonyms existed in Arabic and in Turkish: Arabs (Ar., Tur. *‘arab*) were generous and eloquent, while Turks (Ar. *atrak*, Tur. *etrak*) were courageous and warlike.⁵³ However, actual relationships varied

49. Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment*, 16. There are too many such works to mention, but see for example Baldwin, *Islamic Law*; Mikhail, *Nature*; Grehan, *Everyday Life*; Reilly, *Small Town*; Raymond, *Arab Cities*; Raymond, *Artisans*; Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*; Hanna, *Big Money*; Hathaway, *Households*; Khoury, *Provincial Society*; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*; Marcus, *Middle East*; Abu Husayn, *Provincial Leaderships*; Rafeq, *Province of Damascus*. The literature on the nineteenth century is even more expansive.

50. For monographs focusing on Greater Syria, see Winter, *Shiites of Lebanon*; Singer, *Ottoman Beneficence*; Singer, *Palestinian Peasants*; Bakhit, *Ottoman Province*. For Egypt, see Lellouch and Michel, *Conquête ottomane*; Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment*. For studies treating both, see Mutawalli, *Fath*; Stripling, *Ottoman Turks*. For legal aspects, see Ayoub, *Law*; Burak, *Islamic Law*; Meshal, "Antagonistic Sharī'as"; Fitzgerald, "Methods of Conquest"; Peirce, *Morality Tales*. A handful of studies straddle the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods: Conermann and Şen, *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition*; Fitzgerald, "Methods of Conquest."

51. More recently, scholars have begun to focus more on cultural aspects of provincial integration, including Taner, *Caught in a Whirlwind*; Emre, *Ibrahim-i Gulshani*; Lellouch, *Les Ottomans en Égypte*; Winter, *Society and Religion*. See also some of the contributions in Conermann and Şen, *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition*.

52. Most studies of the two groups' mutual perceptions have examined a later period, when a sharper ethnic consciousness began to develop. Tamari, "National Consciousness"; Rafeq, "al-Nabulsi"; Winter, "Polemical Treatise"; Baer, "Egyptian Attitudes."

53. Karmi, *Masbūk al-Dhahab*, 40; Haarman, "Ideology"; Şeşen, "Eski Arablara Göre Türkler," esp. 14–5.

much more than such conventions let on, not only depending on political circumstance, but also due to the enormous diversity within each group.

Indeed, few contemporaries understood the sixteenth-century encounter as one between “Turks” and “Arabs.” For one, contemporaries rarely used the word “Turk” to refer to those who resided in Anatolia and the Balkans, the region where Ottoman control had been concentrated before the 1516–7 conquest. Rather, both residents themselves and their Arabic-speaking neighbors preferred the word “Rumi” (*rumi*, pl. *arwam*).⁵⁴ The name literally meant “Roman,” referring to the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire—called *Rum*—whose lands Turkish speakers had by and by taken until the Ottomans delivered the final deathblow in 1453. The term suited the Ottomans just fine, since they took pride in this imperial heritage and associated “Rumi” with an urbanized population distinct from the more pastoral “Turk.”⁵⁵ The label also accommodated the ethnic diversity of the Ottoman elite. Though Rumis were speakers of Turkish, one could become a Rumi if one was born into a Greek, Serbo-Croatian, or German family, as long as one went on to embrace a Turkish, Muslim habitus.⁵⁶ As such, the category was as much an ethnic as a sociocultural one.⁵⁷

The word “Arab” was indeed employed by contemporaries, but in ways that fail to map neatly onto modern usages. *Arab*, not unlike *atrak*, had a tribal tinge, and was often used to refer to the nomadic Bedouin who inhabited deserts from North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. Instead of “Arabs,” contemporaries often used the term “the sons of the Arabs” (Ar., *awlad al-‘arab*, Tur. *evlad-i ‘arab*) to refer to the settled, Arabic-speaking population of the region.⁵⁸ However, even this was not a purely ethnic category. As Jane Hathaway has shown, in some usages it could include people of Persian and Central Asian origin, and thus have a more generic

54. This should be distinguished from the noun *Rum*, which was used to designate Christian Orthodox populations, though there was slippage between the two terms. Although *Rumi* predominates in my sources, Arab commentators used others as well, including *‘ajam* (non-Arab) or, rarely, *‘uthmāniyya* (Ottoman). Lellouch, “Turc”; Masters, *Arabs*, 13–4; Kafadar, “Rome”; Özbaran, *Bir Osmanlı Kimliği*; Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt’s Adjustment*, 134.

55. Kafadar, “Rome,” 11; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat*, chapter 10.

56. Arabic sources sometimes referred to Turkish as the “Rumi language” (*al-lughā al-Rumiyya*). Ghazzī, *Lutf*, 358.

57. Kafadar, “Rome,” 13.

58. This term was used already in the late Mamluk period. Blecher, *Prophet*, 85. For examples from the sixteenth century, see Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Quḍāt*, 311; Ibn Ayyūb, *Kitāb*, 43, 50; Ḥamawī, *Ḥādī*, 70; Emre, *Ibrahim-i Gulshani*, 218, 312; 3 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, 418; 7 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* 3:120.

meaning akin to “Easterner.”⁵⁹ Be that as it may, authors writing in both Turkish and Arabic often referred to “Arabs” as a collective, especially when paired with other groupings. Ghazzi was representative when he praised Istanbul as the meeting place of learned men from amongst the “Arabs, Persians, and Rumis.”⁶⁰ As such, this book is framed as one about encounters between “Rumis” and “Arabs.”

These were messy categories whose nuances and inconsistencies deserve greater scholarly attention. They were further complicated by contemporaries’ keen class consciousness. Most educated, well-to-do Arabs would have believed themselves to have more in common with Rumi elites than with the Arabic-speaking cobblers who mended their shoes. Nevertheless, even within the elite, ethnic affiliation corresponded to concrete and sometimes intensely felt differences. In the Arab provinces, Rumis were identifiable not only by their language and distinctive clothing, but also by their monopoly on leading political offices. Such patterns inevitably saturated old concepts with new meaning. They also meant that, however internally variable Rumis or Arabs may have been, identification with them was a fact not only of significance, but also of consequence.

This book begins in the decades preceding the conquest, when Syria and Egypt were under the rule of the Turkish-speaking Mamluks and Ottoman power was concentrated in Southeastern Europe and Anatolia (see figure 1.1). Despite this political division, the two empires harbored a similar salon culture, as Chapter One shows. The travels of ‘Abd al-Rahim al-‘Abbasi (d. 1555), a Cairene scholar and Ghazzi family friend, and Mü’eyyadzade ‘Abdurrahman (d. 1516), an influential Ottoman official, show how salons furthered social and intellectual exchanges between the two neighboring polities. Yet differences remained. Though scholars working in Mamluk lands perceived themselves to be at the center of global Sunni Islamic learning, many of their Ottoman contemporaries felt a greater affinity to the Persian world. Likewise, while gentlemanly conversation in Mamluk lands revolved mostly around Arabic, in Ottoman elite circles Turkish and Persian played far more important roles. As such, salon culture in the two regions had marked differences on the eve of the conquest.

If salons had always been important in spreading ideas across the region, they acquired new political functions in the wake of the conquest, as Chapter 2 explains. The new rulers knew they lacked the fine-grained

59. Hathaway, “*Evlâd-i ‘Arab*”; Hathaway, *Arab Lands*, 74. See also Chapter 6 of this book.

60. Ghazzî, *Matâli‘*, 122. For such pairings in a Turkish-language work, see ‘Âşik Çelebi, *Meşâ’irü’s-Şu‘arâ*, 610, 792.

knowledge of the new provinces required to successfully incorporate them. Whom to trust? Whom to appoint? These questions became a matter of state security in the early 1520s, when rebellious holdovers from the former Mamluk administration tried to seize power and restore the old order. Informal encounters between Rumi and Arab elites played an important part in addressing these concerns and in helping the Ottoman system take root. Much of this impetus came from locals themselves. Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi and his father Radi al-Din lost no time in reaching out to the Ottoman elites now passing through Damascus with greater frequency, including leading members of the provincial administration like governors and judges. The informality of salons allowed them to act as sites for the exchange of unlike things: locals supplied information and legitimacy in return for appointments and patronage. What is more, the relationships established within salons often lasted decades, long after salongoers had parted ways.

However, by no means were salons places of trust and collaboration alone; competition was one of the cornerstones of elite sociability. One of the most pressing concerns of sixteenth-century Ottoman high society was to clarify social hierarchies. The conquests had introduced a new group of elites into the imperial system, elites that had to be accounted for, their specific position within the social order ascertained. Salons acted as theaters for this process because they materialized status in highly visible ways. Seating arrangements were especially charged, since where someone sat in a gentlemanly circle was a function of his social standing. In Damascus, Ottoman officials took the head at many a polite assembly, presiding over local magnates by virtue of their office. And yet, as Chapter 3 shows, what made the transactional world of the salon so complex was that it recognized many different, and often competing, social currencies. As a gathering in the residence of the Damascene chief judge Hasan Bey (d. 1576) reveals, different claims to high social status—office, age, wealth, learning, lineage—had to be weighed against one another. As salongoers negotiated their particular place in the salon, they also negotiated their place in the Ottoman social order.

Yet external factors alone did not determine status in the salon. Chapter 4 demonstrates that gentlemanly gatherings helped to shape social hierarchies by virtue of the pursuit that Ottoman gentlemen valued most: polite conversation. In both Turkish-language circles at the Ottoman center and Arabic assemblies in the provinces, it was expected that participants would be not only paragons of gallantry and social comity, but also wellsprings of learning and masters of improvised verse. However,

when Turkish-speaking Ottoman elites entered Arabic-language circles, with little choice but to speak Arabic and to draw from the Arabic literary canon, they did not always perform at levels they were accustomed to in Turkish-language gatherings and that reflected their intellectual stature. The imperfect performances that sometimes resulted would have been easier to brush off were it not for the scholarly and religious cachet Arabic enjoyed in Islamic societies the world over. For the local Arab literati, though, this represented an opportunity; they were able to use their skills to acquire considerable respect and authority.

Chapter 5 explains how salons allowed Arab scholars to pass their cultural and intellectual authority to their Rumi colleagues. Informal gatherings were important vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. By aiding the circulation of books and ideas across the Ottoman imperial domain, salons accelerated Rumis' engagement with Arabic-language intellectual traditions. Some of Ghazzi's closest Rumi contacts in Damascus were its chief judges (*qadi al-qudat*). These men, who were appointed from Istanbul, represented some of the most powerful figures of the provincial administration. Most of them were also active scholars. As such, many of them took advantage of their time in Damascus to benefit from its intellectual riches; not only did they avidly collect books, many of them even studied with Ghazzi, showing special interest in his knowledge of hadiths (Ar. *hadith*, Tur. *hadis*), as the narrations about the life, deeds, and words of the Prophet Muhammad were called. Rumi interest in local scholarly traditions culminated in the figure of Kinalzade 'Ali (d. 1572), a chief judge and extraordinary scholar with whom Ghazzi had especially intense exchanges.

Cumulatively, the interactions salons permitted bore considerable results. By the 1570s, Ghazzi's student Muhibb al-Din al-Hamawi (d. 1608) could depict the empire as unified by a shared elite culture. As Chapter 6 shows, the Ottoman policy of rotating officials, coupled with Arab efforts to seek support in Istanbul, had created a truly empire-wide network of patronage. Still, just as these relationships were solidifying, other aspects of the relationship between Arabs and Rumis shifted. As the economy slowed and competition for positions skyrocketed, Arabs, like other provincial scholars, found their access to the imperial elite to be increasingly restricted. Younger scholars no longer enjoyed the same independence and admiration that Ghazzi did. Whereas Ghazzi taught Çivizade Mehmed (d. 1587), an Ottoman official from an esteemed Istanbul family, Ghazzi's student Hamawi joined the official's household as a scribe. Broader cultural shifts also led Arabs to lose some of their influence. Ottoman Turkish

had gained in importance over the century, as had poetic and literary traditions in that language. Learned Arabs with only a basic knowledge of Turkish increasingly found themselves excluded from the salons in which those traditions were performed. Coupled with the increasing mastery of Arabic letters by Rumi elites, the visibility that Arabs in Ghazzi's generation had enjoyed began to fade.

Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi's life and writings act as the central archive from which I reconstruct the world of Ottoman salons. However, he is not always center stage. Much more, the book proceeds by following Ghazzi's network: his family members, his friends, his students, and his acquaintances. Many of the key narrative sources for sixteenth-century Damascus were written by members of his inner circle: the chronicler Ibn Tulun (d. 1546) attended his banquets; the travel writer Muhibb al-Din al-Hamawi took his classes; the biographer Hasan al-Burini (d. 1615) spent four years as his apprentice; and Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1651), one of the city's most important historians and author of the oft-cited biographical compilation of sixteenth-century notables, was his son. The price of this kind of proximity is that most of these accounts were far from impartial. Ghazzi's son was borderline hagiographic, but even those authors with less panegyric tendencies tended to exaggerate Ghazzi's influence, whether out of a sense of duty or local pride.⁶¹ I have sought to counteract such tendencies by triangulating Damascene accounts with Turkish-language sources from the imperial center; indeed, one of the book's fundamental premises is that central and provincial sources can be fruitfully combined. Nevertheless, the narrative of this book no doubt reflects a distinctly Arab perspective, and as such occasionally a challenge to the view from Istanbul.

Ghazzi was not representative of all provincial notables, not to speak of his less privileged contemporaries. His influence came from having been born into a distinguished family and to a father who cleverly navigated the political transition to Ottoman rule; while the Ghazzis survived the conquest or even improved their standing as a result of it, other notable families would experience those years as the beginning of a nosedive into irrelevance. In important ways, Ghazzi's experience was also very Damascene. Not only did the city enjoy a less traumatic transition into the new

61. Some of these authors, like Burini and Najm al-Din, wrote decades after Ghazzi's death. As such, discursively they—Najm al-Din in particular—belong to a different era. However, both relied on sources from Ghazzi's lifetime. Najm al-Din consulted the register of students Ghazzi himself kept (now lost), and Burini built on his four-year apprenticeship with Ghazzi. Both also made use of oral traditions.

order than did Cairo, which had to lay down its imperial crown, it was also host to more frequent exchanges between Rumis and Arabs, since the Rumi community was smaller and better integrated into local social life.⁶² Finally, Ghazzi did not take part in the full breadth of salon culture that existed in the Ottoman Empire. He appears not to have attended the parties at which men drank wine and admired the beauty of young boys—indeed, he lambasted those who did.⁶³

Nevertheless, the salons described here do illuminate important aspects of the relations between Arabs and Rumis. Cultural exchange between the two groups is often assumed to have begun in earnest in the eighteenth century, when Arab elites, no longer attached to Istanbul through a strong centralized state, were drawn in instead by a soft cultural “Ottomanization.”⁶⁴ Salons show that such exchange began much earlier, gaining steam immediately after the conquest of 1516–7 and intensifying in the decades to follow. However, the Ottomanization of the sixteenth century did not primarily entail provincial elites emulating the culture of the imperial center; this book shows the myriad ways in which central elites learned from their colleagues in the provinces. Indeed, salons allow us to complicate the seemingly straightforward hierarchy placing conqueror over the conquered. To be sure, serving the Ottoman sultan and dispensing favors on his behalf conferred an immediate and formidable sort of power on Rumi officials, one keenly felt in the Ottoman salon. However, learned Arabs wielded forms of cultural capital that afforded them influence in these settings as well. In a society that ascribed great value to eloquence and erudition, political power constituted only one form of authority. The peculiar demands of elite sociability did much to determine the nature of the interaction between these two groups in the decades after the 1516–7 conquest.

Salons also suggest the role that Islam played in configuring the relationship between Rumis and Arabs. Much of the recent research on early modern cross-cultural encounters has focused on exchanges across religious divides, especially across the fraught Christian-Muslim boundary.⁶⁵ Interactions within the Muslim community have more rarely been

62. Winter, “Syria,” 47–8.

63. Burini, *Tarājim*, 1: 251–2.

64. Khoury, “Ottoman Centre,” 155; Fahmy, *All the Pasha’s Men*; Khoury, *Provincial Society*.

65. To name only a few: Bevilacqua, *Arabic Letters*; Graf, *The Sultan’s Renegades*; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*; Davis, *Trickster Travels*; Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*; Greene, *A Shared World*.

subjected to the same kind of analysis, in part because of an underlying belief that a shared religion made them less complicated. This book suggests that, in part, it did; relations between Rumis and Arabs were greatly simplified by the fact that the two groups privileged the same sacred texts and shared a basic epistemological framework. And yet, in other ways this affinity also made the encounter more complicated. Historically, there had been a great diversity in the ways in which Sunni Muslims practiced their faith and in the peculiar textual emphases they set; the legal schools (*madhhabs*) that set apart the Hanafi Ottomans from the majority Shafi'i and Maliki Arabs were only the very tip of the iceberg.⁶⁶ As legitimate as this diversity was to contemporaries, it did not stop them from making normative judgments about the ways in which Muslims from other regions behaved. In the wake of the 1516–7 conquest, Arab scholars regularly judged Ottomans on their interpretation of Islamic law or adherence to Muhammad's example. Many of the tensions of the postconquest encounter between Arabs and Rumis thus emerged not in spite of, but rather because of, their shared religion.

While this book focuses on salons in Damascus and Istanbul, it also offers insight into the role informal gatherings had in shaping Ottoman society, culture, and governance more broadly. More research must be done on salons in different parts of the empire, not least in the European provinces where the predominance of Christian populations made for very different social dynamics. Nonetheless, it seems that all across Ottoman lands, salons played certain key roles.⁶⁷ First, salons were crucial sites for defining and policing the boundaries of the Ottoman elite. The astronomically high standards of gentlemanly conversation were unachievable for men lacking a madrasa education, thus barring the vast majority of the population from participation. In times of economic prosperity—such as the decades immediately after the conquest—elite circles were permeable to well-educated men with less distinguished family pedigrees. Yet, as soon as there was a perceived social imperative to exclude, access to salons was restricted, hindering newcomers from benefiting from the favors distributed within them.

66. Burak, *Islamic Law*; Terzioğlu, "Sunnitization"; Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*; Meshal, "Antagonistic Shari'as."

67. Ottoman territories formerly under Byzantine control were inheritors to the *theatron*, an institution similar to the Islamic salon. Marciniak, "Byzantine *Theatron*." Samer Ali argues that the origins of Islamic salons lay in, among other things, Greek symposia, gatherings associated with wine-drinking, music, eating, and poetry. Ali, *Salons*, 13–32. For Ottoman-era salons in Southeastern Europe, see İpekten, *Edebi Muhitler*, 221–223.

Second, salons facilitated the circulation of culture across the empire. Informal gatherings of elites offered valuable opportunities for showcasing objects, ideas, and values. One of the key ways in which this occurred was through the presentation of gifts, physical or verbal, an act whose impact was heightened by the audiences that often bore witness to the spectacle. But more subtle forms of influence were at work as well, as salongoers spotted books they had never read or made note of the other guests' sartorial choices. Transfers in these contexts were especially successful because they were mediated through human relationships—the affection of a friend or the authority of an esteemed scholar. Rather than circulating in an impersonal marketplace, objects and ideas traveled saturated with additional, more personal layers of meaning.

Finally, the intense and repeated interactions that took place in Ottoman salons played an important role in imperial governance. Traditionally, modern scholars have looked to the formal bureaucracy to understand the way in which the empire was governed in the sixteenth century, and rightly so, given how well oiled and functional that bureaucracy was. However, as Christine Philliou has suggested, to focus instead on a broader notion of governance is to recognize the range of relationships that helped to uphold a political order; such relationships were limited not only to the state apparatus but also comprised networks, customs, and beliefs.⁶⁸ In the sixteenth century as in later centuries, formal mechanisms of rule were inextricably intertwined with, and indeed relied upon, a more informal substrate of Ottoman salons. Recent studies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have suggested just how important informal structures could be in promoting imperial cohesion at a time when central power was more limited.⁶⁹ This book shows that even in the sixteenth century, when centralized power was at its height, the Ottoman imperial machinery ran in part on informal relationships and on a sense of common culture. The secret to Ottoman state success lay in part in the development of a sense of community that encouraged cooperation and identification with the imperial project. The sociability that salons enabled was a key ingredient of the glue that held the Ottoman Empire together.

68. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, xxiii.

69. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*; Khoury, "Ottoman Centre"; Hathaway, *Households*.

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