CONTENTS

GÉZA DÁVID, In Memoriam: Győző Gerő (1924–2011) ................................................................. vii

HEBA MOSTAFA, The Early Mosque Revisited: Introduction of the Minbar and Maqṣūra ................. 1

DIANA ISAAC BAKHOUN, The Foundation of a Tabrizi Workshop in Cairo: A Case Study of Its Influence
on the Mosque of Emir Altunbugha al-Maridani ........................................................................ 17

SANDRA AUBE, The Uzun Hasan Mosque in Tabriz: New Perspectives on a Tabrizi Ceramic Tile
Workshop .................................................................................................................................. 33

ELOÏSE BRAC DE LA PERRIÈRE, Manuscripts in Bihari Calligraphy: Preliminary Remarks on a Little-Known
Corpus ....................................................................................................................................... 63

KEELAN OVERTON, Book Culture, Royal Libraries, and Persianate Painting in Bijapur, circa 1580–1630 .... 91

CHARLES MELVILLE, New Light on Shah ‘Abbas and the Construction of Isfahan ............................. 155

FARSHID EMAMI, Coffeehouses, Urban Spaces, and the Formation of a Public Sphere in Safavid Isfahan 177

CONRAD THAKE, Envisioning the Orient: The New Muslim Cemetery in Malta .............................. 221

NOTES AND SOURCES
ÜNVER RÜSTEM, The Spectacle of Legitimacy: The Dome-Closing Ceremony of the Sultan Ahmed
Mosque ...................................................................................................................................... 253

MOUNIA CHEKHAB-ABUDAYA, AMÉLIE COUVRA DESVERGNES, and DAVID J. ROXBURGH, Sayyid Yusuf’s
1433 Pilgrimage Scroll (Ziyāratnāma) in the Collection of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha ............. 345

HANS BARNARD, SNEHA SHAH, GREGORY E. ARESHIAN, and KYM F. FAULL, Chemical Insights into the
Function of Four Sphero-Conical Vessels from Medieval Dvin, Armenia ......................................... 409
Today one of the most popular and iconic monuments of Istanbul, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque had a famously unpromising start. Its young founder, the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603–17), embarked on the building in the face of considerable opposition from the empire’s religious authorities, for he had won no major victories in war with which to fund or justify the project. Not only did Ahmed choose to ignore his critics, but he pulled no punches in visually asserting his right to build: implanted into the very heart of the Ottoman capital, the mosque, with its six minarets and cascading tiers of domes, was designed as a transformative landmark, and continues to define modern impressions of the city (fig. 1). Though art historians have tended to view the result as overblown, this unbridled aesthetic magnificence must have played a large and deliberate role in quelling the controversy that surrounded the mosque, whose splendor allowed it to emerge from its inauspicious beginnings as a fitting monument to both Islam and the empire.

But it was not only through physical grandeur that Ahmed sought to win over his subjects. As soon as construction began in 1609, the mosque became the focus of an unusually high level of ceremonial activity, hosting numerous events—some singular, some recurring—that propelled the building into the public consciousness and cemented its status as a fruitful addition to Istanbul’s fabric. Among the most remarkable in this festive roster was a lavish ceremony to celebrate the closing of the central dome in June 1617, only two months before the building would be inaugurated. Marked by a grand procession from the Topkapı Palace and the raising of stately tents in the mosque’s courtyard, this ceremony appears to have been a unique experiment in Ottoman history, specifically intended to boost the profile of Ahmed’s endeavor and reassert its legitimacy in preparation for the official opening.

Basic details of the dome-closing ceremony have long been known from contemporary chronicles, but a far fuller and rarer source of information has hitherto escaped notice: an anonymous manuscript of nearly fifty folios written shortly after the event and devoted to its description. As unusual as the occasion itself, this text—the inspiration for the present article—sheds valuable new light on the ceremonial as well as discursive means by which the sultan and his backers strove to vindicate the new mosque. Of particular note is the account’s portrayal of the festivities as a triumph over the infidel, a characterization that suggests that the ceremony itself—with its prominent inclusion of an encampment—was aimed at glossing over Ahmed’s military deficiencies and presenting him in the guise of a victorious holy warrior. Staged against the symbolically charged act of closing the building’s dome, both the ceremony and its textual commemoration were telling responses to the challenge that the sultan had set himself, encapsulating the concerns that underlay his ultimately successful campaign to preserve his memory in stone.

DEFIANCE AND MAGNIFICENCE: THE CREATION OF AHMED’S MOSQUE

When Sultan Ahmed, still in his teens, resolved to build a new imperial mosque, he must have anticipated the resistance his plans would meet. It had been many years since a sultan had erected such a monument in the capital: the last had been that of Ahmed’s great-great-grandfather,
the mighty Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–66), whose prominent hilltop mosque complex was built by the architect Sinan (d. 1588) between 1550 and 1557 (fig. 2). This, the Süleymaniye Mosque, had been preceded by a number of other grand sultanic foundations, but the second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a lull in imperial construction that reflected growing anxieties about the decorousness of such lavish architecture. In a book of advice written in 1581 for Murad III (r. 1574–95), the historian Mustafa ʿĀli (d. 1600) asserts that sultans should refrain from building even charitable or religious institutions if they “have not enriched themselves with the spoils of Holy War and have not become owners of lands through gains of campaigns of the Faith.” The reason for this objection, ʿĀli explains, is that “the Divine Laws do not permit the building of charitable establishments with the means of the public treasury, neither do they allow the foundations of mosques and medreses that are not needed.”4 Voiced at a time when the Ottoman Empire was not expanding at the rate it had under earlier sultans, such views were further fueled by the effects of a global inflation. Süleyman had more than fulfilled the conditions set forth by Mustafa ʿĀli, but his less impressive successors duly chose not to follow in his architectural footsteps, with the exception of his son, Selim II (r. 1566–74), who used booty gained from his conquest of Cyprus in 1571 to finance the construction of the Selimiye Mosque, designed by Sinan and completed in 1574. Yet although widely regarded as Sinan’s masterpiece, the Selimiye still stopped short of challenging Süleyman’s legacy: it was built in Edirne, the empire’s second city, rather than the capital, in part because Selim, unlike his father, had not personally led his army.8

Such restraint evidently held little sway with Ahmed, who was keen to buck the trend by boldly presenting

Fig. 1. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, from the northeast. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Arnstein Rønning)
himself in Süleyman's image. The comparison was not well deserved, however: far from expanding the empire, Ahmed lost important territories to the Safavids in 1604–5, and was forced in 1606 to concede parity with the Habsburg emperor, who no longer had to pay the annual tribute that had been instituted in Süleyman's time. Nevertheless—and apparently driven by his well-known piety—the sultan made known his plans to found a mosque worthy of the empire's heyday. His advisers, perhaps seeking a middle way, initially recommended that he complete the sizeable mosque that his grandmother Safiye Sultan (d. 1618) had started to build in 1598 on the shore of Emine, one of the capital's busiest districts. But Ahmed, who disliked his grandmother intensely, had personally put a stop to her project upon his accession and had no desire to resume it, especially since its enviably conspicuous site was considered by many as having been illegally expropriated. It would take many years and another queen mother, Turhan Hâdice Sultan [d. 1683], to finish Safiye's mosque, which was finally opened in 1665 and is now known as the Yeni Cami. Preferring to start afresh rather than associate himself with his grandmother's failed enterprise, the sultan managed to acquire a site that was as prominent as it was licit, buying and demolishing two large sixteenth-century palaces that occupied a choice area of land next to the Hippodrome and opposite the Hagia Sophia.

The legality of the site did not, however, settle the questions raised by the construction itself. The grand mufti pointed out that the mosque would be needless in its intended setting, which lacked a large congregation, and the more serious issue of the sultan's military shortcomings still loomed. In a report dated 1612, Simon Contarini (d. 1633), who had just completed his tenure as Venetian bailo to Istanbul, noted that the mosque was deeply unpopular among those who would have preferred Ahmed to pour his resources into conquering Christian lands. How this controversy played out is described in an account written later in the seventeenth century by the French traveler Guillaume-Joseph Grelot (d. after 1680):

"[T]hough the Mufti, the Mulla's, the Cheiks, and other Doctors of the Law, laid before [Ahmed] the sin of undertaking..."
to erect such a costly fabric, since he had never been in any other Combats, than those which are daily to be seen for the exercise of the pages, and divertisement of the Prince, nevertheless he gave little heed to their admonitions, but carried on the work with a vigour answerable to his resolution; and when he had finish’d the Pile, because he had slighted his Chaplains exhortations, call’d it İmansız Gianisi [İmanıssz Câmi’si], or the Temple of the Incredulous.\textsuperscript{16}

A more complicated picture is painted by the English ambassador Sir Thomas Glover (d. 1625), who, in a dispatch sent in early 1610, links the mosque to a curious ailment of the throat that was weekly bringing the sultan to the verge of choking on his food. Fearing that the condition “happeneth rather by the permission of the Allmightie, then otherwise,” Ahmed

be[tok] himselfe to an extraordinary devotion, and whollie to have his conversation amongste Sofies [Sufis], and Dervishes, as much to syae, purytans . . .; and it is reported that this accident is the onlie cause of the buildinge of the sumptuous Mescht..., thinkinge that therby he shall, not onlie obtayne salvation of his soule, but that the Allmightie will withdrawe this dreadfull infirmitie from him, beinge therto counselled and assured, by all his above named Sofies, and his cheefe ministers, and inpticuller his Muftie; whose sayeth to have seene a vision, or a dreame, that unlesse this be performed \textsuperscript{w}ith. a good will and harte, without any sparinge of gould or sylver, or any mans laboure, (alsole with contynuall prayers to theire divill Mahoma, or Mahemet) the Gran Sig\textsuperscript{t}. is like to incurre a verie speedie danger of his life.\textsuperscript{17}

With its claim that Ahmed was being spurred on rather than discouraged, Glover’s account seems to contradict those of other observers, though even his version of events bespeaks an uneasy genesis for the mosque. The circumstances he describes are hardly flattering to the sultan, who acts not from a position of strength, but out of mortal fear in response to the admonishments of his clerics. Moreover, Glover goes on to say that those advising Ahmed, besides promising an end to his illness, also affirmed that construction of the mosque would bring “greate and incredible victories, againste all the Gran Sig\textsuperscript{t} enemies, whersoever he shall please to wage any warre.” In spite of its otherwise idiosyncratic content, then, the dispatch still ties the mosque to the hawkish rhetoric of conquest, and Glover is in broad agreement with other sources that tell us that the project was encouraged only inasmuch as it would oblige Ahmed to pursue a commensurate martial victory.

Attempts to retroactively legitimize the mosque indeed followed, though they came to nothing. Ahmed declared war against the Safavids in 1609, shortly after the mosque’s foundations were laid, but the conflict, which would end in the Safavids’ favor, was still ongoing when he died.\textsuperscript{18} The sultan’s clerics, meanwhile, urged him to invade Crete so that he might triumph over a Christian enemy, and while he seemed willing, he never undertook the task.\textsuperscript{19} One might wonder whether Ahmed’s desire to build was motivated in part because of, and not despite, his lack of military promise;\textsuperscript{20} perhaps he felt a great mosque gracing the capital would prove a meritorious enough legacy by which to compensate for his failure to win new territories.

Sure enough, the mosque was to emerge from its problematic gestation unscathed. If accounts such as Grelo’s reveal that Ahmed’s obstinacy was not forgotten, the monument itself was soon accepted as an integral and apparently uncontroversial fixture of the city: its usual name in the decades following its completion was Yeñi Câmi’, “New Mosque,” a neutral label that makes no reference to its founder’s transgression.\textsuperscript{21} Several factors contributed to the ultimately warm reception with which the finished building was greeted. Notwithstanding the project’s many detractors, the sultan was supported in his actions by various sympathetic voices that helped to balance the discourse in his favor. These individuals included two men who would play instrumental roles in the dome-closing ceremony. One was the highly revered Sufi shaykh Mahmud Hüdayi (d. 1628), who, acting as a spiritual adviser to the sultan, pushed for the Cretan campaign without questioning Ahmed’s overall right to build.\textsuperscript{22} The second of these important backers was the chief harem eunuch Haci Mustafa Agha (d. 1624), whom Ahmed appointed as superintendent (nâzîr) over the mosque’s construction,\textsuperscript{23} and who countered the grand mufti’s objections to the site by proposing that new houses be built to boost the population surrounding the mosque.\textsuperscript{24}

Haci Mustafa’s suggestion is recorded in a chronicle penned by the royal imam Mustafa Saﬁ (d. 1616), another ally to Ahmed.\textsuperscript{25} Describing the circumstances in which the mosque was conceived, Saﬁ recasts events to
present Ahmed’s 1606 treaty with the Habsburgs, which was largely a stalemate, as an unqualified Ottoman victory, and he also lauds the sultan’s suppression in 1608 of the Celalis, rebels in Anatolia who were often viewed as subscribing to a Qizilbash—that is Shi’i—ideology.26 Safi thus lays a religio-legal groundwork for the mosque, and some, at least, seem to have shared his view, as we learn from another of Glover’s dispatches, this time written as the monument’s foundations were being dug in late 1609:

[T]he Gran Sig, in respect of his victorie againste the [Celali] Rebels in Asia, or in that he hath, contrarie to all mens expectations, soe suddaynlie subdued and whollie rooted them out, hath commaunded to pull dowe many goodlie and sumptuous pallaces, belonginge to some of his vizereis, or vizereis soones (payinge them well for it) and insteade thereof to be built a vere sumptuous church or Meskite, which shall be bigger then any as yet in Constant:25e and to be named by his name, Sultan Acomat.27

Given the continuing calls for Ahmed to invade Crete, relatively few can have accepted the defeat of the Celalis as a valid pretext to build (and as we have seen, Glover himself would offer a quite different reason for the undertaking in a dispatch written only a few months later). But Safi’s extended defense of the mosque preempts further opposition by noting that the grand mufti, while objecting to certain aspects of the project, could cite nothing in religious law to forbid it.28 As well as defending Ahmed’s military record, Safi commends the mosque as evidence of the sultan’s atypical piety and fondness for good works,29 and he also reaffirms the suitability of the building’s location, declaring the Hippodrome to be “a magnet for the people of the world” that would draw enough worshippers to fill “many mosques like Ayasofya.”30

Safi’s praise for the chosen site is echoed by the author Cafer Efendi in his Risâlî-i mi‘mârîyye, an architectural treatise centered on the life and career of the chief imperial architect Sedefkar Mehmed Agha (d. 1617), who designed the Sultan Ahmed.31 Completed in 1614 as the mosque was being built, the Risâle, which devotes a whole chapter to the monument, presents it as a regenerative blessing to “one of the finest locations of the city,” for it replaced “aged palaces . . . filled with the nests of owls.”32 Cafer Efendi goes on to describe the numerous exemplary elements making up the edifice, claiming that “no other such high and solid building has been erected” before it.33

Hyperbolic as this statement may seem, Cafer Efendi is hardly exaggerating the mosque’s sheer visual impact. The advocacy of Ahmed’s backers, together with the written records of their support, would have amounted to little had the architecture itself been any less persuasive than it is. Writing at the same time as Cafer Efendi, Contarini reports that the “superbissima” mosque would resemble and compete with the Süleymaniyê,34 and he is right on both counts. The mosque, which comprises a domed prayer hall and porticoed courtyard, stands impressively in an expansive walled precinct, around which are scattered numerous dependencies that make up the remainder of the complex (figs. 3 and 4).35 Modern connoisseurs and art historians have frequently denigrated the building as a pretentious rehashing of Sinan’s style, but, as Emine Fetvaci has shown, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s dramatic design was carefully tailored to, and highly appreciated in, its own seventeenth-century context.36 A student of Sinan, the architect Mehmed Agha judiciously adapted the prestigious mode of his master with the aim of rivaling it. The plan of the prayer hall is thus an aggrandized reworking of that of Sinan’s first major work, the Şehzade Mosque (1543–48), which Süleyman the Magnificent had built to commemorate his favorite son, the deceased Mehmed (d. 1543).37 In this so-called quatrefoil plan, the main dome rests on four piers and is braced by four semi-domes, with cupolas filling the remaining corners (figs. 5 and 6). At the Sultan Ahmed, the scheme is on a much larger scale and further elaborated with the addition of exedrae flowing down from three of the semi-domes (figs. 1, 4, 7, and 8).38 By reviving the Şehzade’s plan, which Sinan himself had not returned to, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque posits its founder as a scion of Süleyman and preserver of his legacy. It is notable in this regard that Safiye Sultan’s abortive foundation at Eminönü had preceded the Sultan Ahmed in being designed on the Şehzade’s model;39 her grandson’s halting of that project and cooption of the quatrefoil plan for himself thus stressed his privileged status as Süleyman’s rightful heir.

Mehmed Agha’s decision not to adopt the vaulting arrangement of the Süleymaniyê—which, like the Hagia...
Sophia, has only two semi-domes flanking its dome—might be construed as a decorous concession, but it also allowed the patron to distinguish his own monument from his ancestor’s. Comparison between the two buildings is rendered inevitable by their stylistic resemblance and the similarity of their dimensions, and the later mosque’s doubling of semi-domes and emphasis on pyramidal verticality arguably make for a more impressive effect. The same principle is at work in the use of minarets: the Sultan Ahmed replicates the Süleymaniye in placing four minarets of uneven height at the corners of its porticoed courtyard, but it also adds a further two to the qibla side of the prayer hall. The resultant total of six minarets was unprecedented in Ottoman mosque architecture and never to be repeated. Consciously avoiding a direct correspondence with any one model, then, Mehmed Agha opted for an augmented combination of Süleymanic references drawn from both the Şehzade and the Süleymaniye, creating a distinctive synthesis that stands in its own right even as it evokes the past.

This shrewd design also equips the Sultan Ahmed Mosque against its more immediate rival, the Hagia Sophia, which faces it directly across a large open square (fig. 9). The use of four semi-domes serves again—and still more clearly—to differentiate the newer structure, whose rhythmic cascade of domes presents a marked contrast to the rather ungainly exterior of the converted sixth-century church. The earlier Şehzade Mosque had already been credited in one of Sinan’s (auto)biographies with eclipsing the Hagia Sophia’s style, which “did not possess elegance.” Building on this trope, the Sultan Ahmed’s emphatically beautiful exterior is able to challenge the Hagia Sophia despite being smaller in size. Its unyielding visual appeal is once more bolstered by its six minarets, which on the one hand mirror the Hagia Sophia’s placement of four towers at the corners of the prayer hall, but on the other surpass their earlier counterparts in number as well as aesthetic coherence—the minarets of the Hagia Sophia are mismatched accretions of different periods. The overall effect of the Sultan Ahmed’s gracefully deployed mina-
Fig. 4. Plan of the surviving elements of the Sultan Ahmed Complex and the neighboring Hippodrome: 1) Mosque; 2) Madrasa; 3) Mausoleum; 4) Primary school; 5) Royal pavilion; 6) Hippodrome; 7) Garden platform; 8) Marketplace (arasta). (Drawing: Arben N. Arapi. Courtesy of Gülru Necipoğlu)

Fig. 5. Şehzade Mosque, from the southwest. (Photo: Reha Günay)

Fig. 6. Plan of the Şehzade Mosque. (Drawing: Arben N. Arapi. Courtesy of Gülru Necipoğlu)
rets is to conflate the arrangements of both the Hagia Sophia and the Süleymaniye, underscoring the new mosque’s competitive dialogue with these two venerable models.

Inside, too, the Sultan Ahmed sets itself apart from its prototypes. The four piers supporting the dome take the form of gigantic fluted cylinders that art historians have criticized as excessively bulky, though their heft can only have been an intentional departure from the leaner proportions employed in other monuments, as if to bear out Cafer Efendi’s assertion that no earlier building was as solid (figs. 10–12). The walls likewise strive for a fresh approach, eschewing the decorative reserve of Istanbul’s existing sultanic mosques in favor of a comprehensive coating of floral İznik tiles, whose rich hue is the reason the building is popularly known as the Blue Mosque (fig. 13).

Observers in the seventeenth century were duly impressed with what they saw. Grelot writes that the mosque “may be said to be the most beautiful in Constantinople, if not in all the East,” a sentiment shared by his Ottoman contemporary, the famous traveler Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682), who calls it “the most beautiful of all sultanic mosques in Istanbul.” Having ignored the dictates of tradition and pushed ahead with his plans, Ahmed had produced an architectural fait accompli, so striking and magnificent that any lingering objections to it were swiftly obviated. The success of this audacious artistic feat was not, however, due to its design alone: the sultan may have raised a splendid new edifice, but
Fig. 8. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, interior view of the domical superstructure. (Photo: iStock.com/wrangel)
only by enlivening it with activity could he prove that it was more than a needless extravagance.

CEREMONIAL AND SOCIABILITY: THE SULTAN AHMED MOSQUE IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Among the more novel elements of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is an L-shaped structure that is attached to its southern corner and entered by a ramp (figs. 1, 9, 14, and 15). Dwarfed by the adjacent prayer hall and easily missed by modern visitors, this building would not have escaped attention in Ottoman times, when it served as a pavilion to host the sultans during their ceremonial visits to the mosque. The upper story of the structure contained decorated and furnished rooms for the sovereign’s respite, while a corridor on the same floor gave direct access to the royal prayer loge that occupies the neighboring corner of the prayer hall. True to its function, and in order not to detract from the mosque proper, the pavilion follows the stylistic norms of residential building: its walls are of alternating courses of brick and stone, unlike the pure stone of the prayer hall, and its roof is externally hipped rather than domed. This palatial annex was the first structure of its kind in Ottoman mosque architecture, introducing a feature that would become canonical and increasingly prominent in later imperial mosques. The advent and subsequent development of this type of pavilion coincided with a larger shift whereby the sultans—no longer absent on distant campaigns—were becoming ever more visible on home turf. It was already routine for a sultan to ride in dazzling procession to one of the capital’s mosques.
Fig. 10. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, interior toward the west, showing the domical superstructure. (Photo: Ünver Rüstem)
Fig. 11. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, interior toward the qibla (southeast) wall. (Photo: Ünver Rüstem)

Fig. 12. Süleymaniye Mosque, interior toward the qibla (southeast) wall. (Photo: Reha Günay)
Fig. 13. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Iznik tilework in the upper gallery. (Photo: Ünver Rüstem)

Fig. 14. Sultan Ahmed Complex, royal pavilion viewed from the northwest toward its entrance side, with the attached mosque on the right. (Photo: Güven Erten)

Fig. 15. Sultan Ahmed Complex, royal pavilion viewed from the southeast, with the mosque on the left. (Photo: Güven Erten)
in order to perform the Friday prayer there (fig. 16); the placement of a pavilion at the culmination of this parade would only enhance the ceremony’s splendor and prominence, concretizing the royal visit even after its end.

That this move towards amplified spectacle began with the Sultan Ahmed should not surprise us. Both during and after its construction, the mosque witnessed a level of ceremonial activity that amounted to a relentless public-relations exercise, intended to reiterate the sultan’s devotion to the project while also exciting his subjects’ interest in it. The staging of festivities to mark the establishment of a new imperial mosque was, to be sure, a well-established practice, and two occasions in particular—the foundation-laying and the inauguration—were typically celebrated on a grand scale with processions, prayers, animal sacrifices, and the distribution of gifts. Even so, the ceremonies associated with the Sultan Ahmed Mosque stand out as extraordinary, not only in their elaboration, but also in their number. Ahmed’s supporters had promised a building that would buzz with new life, and it seems the sultan was anxious to deliver on their assurances with a series of events jointly implicating himself and his subjects in the mosque’s formation.

The tone was set from the very beginning. Indeed, the pavilion attached to the prayer hall is the adapted version of a structure that had been erected even before work on the mosque commenced. The purpose of this “exalted pavilion” was, according to Mustafa Safi, for the sultan to “view and observe the construction and investigate the conditions of the poor and weak,” a description that links Ahmed’s care for the mosque with his care for his people, who could in turn look to the structure as a constant symbol of their ruler’s beneficence. It was from this pavilion, Safi states, that Ahmed watched the groundbreaking ceremony, which was held at an auspicious hour on October 7, 1609, and entailed a packed gathering of courtiers, clerics, and officials.

Led by the grand mufti and by Mahmud Hüdayi, whom Evliya Çelebi dubs the “shaykh of the foundations” (temel şeyḫi), members of the assembly started to dig the ground. They then stopped and cleared the way for the sultan, who descended from the pavilion and himself began to dig using a silver-decorated mattock with a velvet-lined handle. In a dispatch sent a few weeks later, the English ambassador Glover, whose knowledge of the event may have been secondhand, gives a different order to the day’s proceedings while adding interesting details not found in Safi’s description:

[T]he Gran Sigz himselfe in persone, with the Muftie, and all his vizeres, and other ministers and officers, went to the [site of the mosque], and there first offered sacrifice (as they doe call it Curban) of 500. sheepe, and 140. oxen, this beinge devided amongste the people, they ioyntlie went to prayers wherein continued fower houres by the clocke, which allsoe beinge ended, the Gran Sigz tooke the matheooke or pickaxe, and soo himselfe for halfe a quarter of an hower, digged the grounde for to laye the foundation of...
the churche, and soe the Muftie, and all the vizeyres followed him, whose continued in diggings, for space of two good howers, and soe delivered their instrumentes unto the labourers."

Ahmed’s participation in the digging—a highly unusual step—harked back to certain fifteenth-century foundation ceremonies in which the sultan personally laid the first stone of his mosque as a vow before setting off on campaign. Besides demonstrating his pious humility, Ahmed’s comparable act many years later may thus have been intended as a pledge of his own ostensible commitment to a future (though never realized) holy war. The handing out of sacrificial animal meat, which is also mentioned by Safi, served to involve the wider public in the ceremony’s votive symbolism. On the days that followed, several groups tied to the state, from the janissaries to vizerial officers, took it in turns to continue digging, in each case being rewarded for their efforts with a feast. The care that went into organizing this activity is recounted in Glover’s next dispatch, written a month into construction:

"The see do verie earnestlie followe, w. th all forces, and celeritie they can, the buildinge of the Meskit...and all the vizereis of the Bench are commaunded, every day by turne, one of them to attend, and to oversee, all the day longe, the buildinge thereof, and soe they doe. And because the Gienisaries, of their owne voluntarie will, for the Gran Sig’s sake (as allsoe supposinge to be a charitable deed to further the same) have offered themselves inpersone, for the space of the wholl weeke, to worke in digginge of the foundations thereof, (as they have done) the Gran Sig. hath bestowed on them, five lode of mony for theire paynes, which is five thoswands Crownes."

Already more embellished and prolonged than other recorded groundbreakings, the initiation of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque was further heralded with a second foundation ceremony that took place on January 3, 1610, when another great assembly gathered to ritually lay the first stones of the qibla wall. The grand mufti and Mahmud Hûdayi again led the proceedings, which Ahmed once more watched from his pavilion before descending to lower a number of stones into the base of the mihrab using a sling specially made of silver rings and silken cord. Mustafa Safi’s lengthy description of the event tells us that some 150 individuals received robes of honor that day.

As work on the building progressed, the sultan continued to make himself present and visible at the site, which he could survey—and be seen surveying—from his pavilion. Glover, reporting in January 1610, notes that the mosque was “daylie verie diligentlie solicited, by the vizereis, and often visited (at leaste once a weeke) by the Gran Sig.’ himselfe.” A letter written seven months later by the French ambassador Jean de Gontaut-Biron (d. 1636) stresses Ahmed’s “marvelous diligence” in connection with the project, whose progress he personally urged on by “staying at the scene for seven or eight days”—presumably in the pavilion. Gontaut-Biron adds that many in Istanbul questioned whether the sultan would succeed in his ambitious enterprise, and it was surely in part to counteract these doubts and inspire confidence in the building that Ahmed made such a show of his dedication to it. Another kind of royal appearance during the mosque’s construction is recorded by Evliya Çelebi, who tells us that the sultan one day “pitched his tent on...the courtyard of the mosque...and gave a feast to all the Vezîrs and great men of the capital, which surpassed even that which was given at the feast of [his] circumcision.” After most of the assembly dispersed, Ahmed remained in his tent with a select group of men that included Mahmud Hûdayi, who exhorted the sultan to fulfil his plan to invade Crete. The gathered company then prayed, probably aware that the mosque would be completed whether or not the sultan ever delivered a victory against the infidel. Holding this supererogatory ceremonial feast in a tent—a structure as much associated with warfare as with festivities—may well have been an intentionally bold conceit, emblematically lending Ahmed the very martial credibility he lacked in life. A similar banquet, on this occasion hosted by Lala Mustafa Pasha (d. 1580) at an army camp outside Iznik, is depicted in the 1584 copy of Mustafa ‘Alî’s Nusratname, which commemorates the Ottomans’ successful campaign against the Safavids in the Caucasus (fig. 17). The semiotic potential that such military references offered the mosque would, as we shall see, be more overtly realized with the dome-closing ceremony.

Beyond drawing attention to the project’s scale and development, the sultan was keen also to earn his mosque a rightful place in a city already teeming with religious foundations. The proximity of the Hagia...
ÜNVER RÜSTEM

1603), had already introduced the ritual at the Hagia Sophia. In 1599, however, the grand mufti put an end to this “ugly innovation,” which was criticized for, among other things, its exclusionary nature: those administering the ceremony distributed candies and sherbets to the grandees but not to the poor.73 By reviving the Mevlûd, Ahmed aimed to distinguish his mosque as the ritual’s new permanent venue, where his subjects might experience something that no other site offered.74 He learned from the mistakes of the ceremony’s failed past by stipulating a more lavish and inclusive affair at which the entire congregation, rich and poor alike, would be served food and drink, even coffee.75 A preliminary Mevlûd had already been held at the Sultan Ahmed’s building site in late 1610, not on the Prophet’s birthday, but to bring good luck to the fledgling project. Cushioned sofas and other temporary furnishings were installed for the ritual, which was attended by all the notable men of state and religion, including Mahmut Hüdayi, who delivered a sermon.76 The mosque was still being built when, in 1614, it hosted its first endowed Mevlûd, for which oil lamps were hung from the scaffolding. A contemporary account by the janissary scribe ʿAbdülkadir Efendi (d. 1644 [?]) describes a busy gathering of dignitaries and clerics engaged in “sociable conversation” (ṣohbet), evidence of Ahmed’s success in establishing a new and lively tradition even before the mosque was finished.77 The last Mevlûd to be celebrated during construction was in March 1617, when the monument was nearing its final form. Shaykh Mahmut Hüdayi was again prominent among the assembly, which, according to ʿAbdülkadir Efendi, was so large on this occasion that the mosque could not contain it.78 Incense burners wafted the scent of ambergris while the poem was recited, and the overflowing crowds “helped themselves to endless sherbets and candies.”79 The royal account books confirm that these refreshments were plentiful enough to satisfy all, “high and low.”80 Such vibrant scenes offered important proof that the mosque, once opened, would not struggle to attract and engage the public, and they also made a virtue of the mosque’s uncrowded setting: the open spaces bordering it rendered the building ideally suited for large-scale festivities that might overspill its walls.81 So remarkable was Ahmed’s achievement in giving his mosque a unique ritual and social identity that the

Fig. 17. Lala Mustafa Pasha Giving a Feast at a Military Encampment in Iznik. From Mustafa ʿĀli, Nusretname, Istanbul, 1584. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, H. 1365, fol. 34b. (Photo: courtesy of the Topkapı Palace Museum Library)
practice of celebrating the Mevlûd would continue there under his successors until the empire’s final years, surviving even into our own time (fig. 18). John Murray’s much-used nineteenth-century travel guide to Istanbul gives a vivid account of the mosque’s enduring—and indeed expanded—ceremonial function:

In consequence of the beautiful site of the Atmeidan, and its open and free communication on every side, the mosque of Sultan Ahmed is the theatre of the great ceremonies of religion and court processions. Aja Sofia may be termed, from its vicinity to the palace, the Court church, the Ahmedje, the State church, or cathedral of Constantinople; for it is hither that the Sultan generally repairs, accompanied by his

Fig. 18. François Denis Née after Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Celebration of the Mevlûd at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque*. Engraving from Ignatius Mouradjea d’Ohsson, *Tableau général de l’empire othoman*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1787), pl. 25. (Photo: courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University)
whole suite, on the two great festivals of the Bairam [Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha].\textsuperscript{83}

It is during the “
Mevl\=ud,” the book adds, that “
sultan appears in his greatest splendour” at the mosque, “sur-
rrounded by all the functionaries of the court and state, to assist in the praises of the prophet, which are sung by
the most melodious voices.”\textsuperscript{84}

But if the Mevl\=ud is the longest lived of the Sultan
Ahmed’s festive innovations, the most striking is surely
the dome-closing ceremony, which was held less than
three months after the nativity ritual of 1617 and would,
by contrast, remain a one-off extravaganza.\textsuperscript{85} No earlier or later mosque is known to have been the object of
such an event, and the closest recorded parallels—other
celebrations tied to constructional milestones—were
less grand affairs. The completion of the Süleymaniye’s
tympanum arches in 1555, for example, was marked with
the distribution of sherbet and gifts of money to the
workforce. Ottoman sources note the closing of its dome
the following year without making reference to any ac-
companying festivities, though a much later Venetian
dispatch, to be discussed below, states that for three
days the dome’s exterior was draped with fabrics that
were then presented as gifts to the workforce and su-
perintendents. Whether the dome was bedecked upon
its closing or for the later inauguration is not specified
by the dispatch, whose description is in any case uncor-
rborated. But even if, as seems plausible, the comple-
tion of the Süleymaniye’s dome was proclaimed in this
colorful manner, we still have nothing to rival the far
showier production that attended the same moment at
the Sultan Ahmed.\textsuperscript{86} The 1617 dome-closing ceremony
stands, then, as a singular event not only in the life of the
mosque, but also in Ottoman history. Already apparent
from the known sources, the unusualness of the festival
is substantiated by the equally exceptional monograph
that is its written outcome, and to which my discussion
now turns.

CAPPING IT ALL OFF: THE DOME-CLOSING
CEREMONY AND ITS TEXTUAL RECORD

The manuscript describing the Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s
dome-closing ceremony appears to be unknown in the
scholarship, and I discovered it quite by chance among
the digitized holdings of the Süleymaniye Library,
where it is listed with the title Tarih-i Bina-yi Cami-
i Sultan Ahmed-i Evvel (History of the Construction
of the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I) and the classmark
Fotokopi No. 294.\textsuperscript{87} As this classmark indicates, the
library houses only a black-and-white photocopy of the
book, whose actual location, as recorded by a modern
Arabic slip photocopied together with one of the end-
papers, is (or was) the Iraqi Academy of Sciences in
Baghdad. This slip gives the simpler title Sultan Ahmed
cami’[i] tarih\(i\) (History of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque)
in the Arabic/Ottoman script,\textsuperscript{88} which suggests that
the endpaper beneath it bears the same heading writ-
ten in late Ottoman times; the longer and more typically
Ottoman-sounding title found in the Süleymaniye’s rec-
ords may well be a modern cataloguer’s coinage. In the
absence of a more definitive alternative, I shall refer to
the work as the Tarih, an abbreviation of both available
titles. There is no mark of ownership on the manuscript,
at least as revealed by the photocopy; the Arabic slip,
which may be obscuring relevant information on the
endpaper itself, gives the book’s provenance only as the
National Center for the Preservation of Documents, part
of the Ministry of Information in Baghdad.

The book comprises forty-nine folios and, accord-
ing to the Arabic slip, measures 22 by 18 centimeters.
The text, which runs from fol. ob to fol. 45b,\textsuperscript{89} is written
in an elegant and large naskh that is extensively vocal-
ized, punctuated by rosettes and occasional rubrics, and
framed by ruled borders (see the reproduction of the
manuscript on pp. 300–324). It is apparent even from
the photocopy that the borders, rosettes, and rubrics
are gilt. There are seven lines of text to the page except
for a few easily explained exceptions, including the illu-
minated opening page, whose five lines start beneath a
colored and gilt headpiece that is filled with arabesques
and crowned by a lobed arch.\textsuperscript{90} Distinguished above all
by its beautifully inscribed and liberally voweled large-
scale text, this fine format is reminiscent of fair-copy im-
perial waqfiyyas—indeed, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s
own waqfiyya manuscript is almost identical in arrange-
ment (figs. 19 and 20)—and it therefore seems that we
are dealing with a presentation copy made for an elite

reader with close personal interest or involvement in the mosque. A likely candidate is the building superintendent, Hacı Mustafa Agha, whom the text singles out for lavish praise.91 That he was exiled to Cairo in 1620 before being recalled to the capital in 1623 may account for why the book left Istanbul and ended up in the Arab world.92 Even if catering to the agha, however, the text would also have been intended for wider circulation at the court, and, more specifically, to gratify the sultan himself, who is, as we might expect, its overall hero. Whether further copies were ever made or have survived remains to be investigated, but the text must in any case be reckoned an extremely rare product, a point to which I shall return.

Written in a florid courtly register of Ottoman Turkish, the Tarih is made up of a prose account of the ceremony followed by two related qasidas, the first composed for the sultan and the second for Mustafa Agha (see the appendix for a full transliteration and translation of the manuscript). The prose section, which constitutes about three-quarters of the total work, is itself peppered with poetic couplets, some of them drawn from the second qasida. At the end of the manuscript are two additional borderless folios inscribed in a different (and far more workaday) hand with an unrelated tract whose conclusion the photocopy omits.93 As for our text, there is no indication of an author for any of its components, all three of which are probably the work of the same man.94 Neither does the book give any details of its scribe or the circumstances of its copying, though it was very likely produced (and must certainly have been drafted) between August 18, 1617, which is the last date mentioned, and November 22, 1617, the death date of the sultan, who is nowhere referred to as deceased.

The prose account that forms the heart of the text opens with fulsome praise for God, for the Prophet and his family and companions, and for the sultan, who is termed the “protector of Muslims and Monotheists and slayer of pagans and heretics.”95 While eulogistic prefaces are typical of many categories of Ottoman literature, the introduction again exhibits notable similarities to Ahmed’s waqfiyya, particularly in the manuscripts’ shared use of gilding to highlight the first mention of the sultan’s name and titles (fig. 20 and the reproduction of fol. 7a on p. 303). Such typological overlaps, which build on the broader aesthetic resemblance between the Tarih and the waqfiyya, are partly a reflection of the former’s experimental character—it does not belong to an established genre of its own—but they also confirm the Tarih as part of the officially sanctioned discourse surrounding the mosque. This evocation of the waqfiyya format would, moreover, have been readily appreciated by Mustafa Agha, whose role as chief harem eunuch also entailed overseeing the endowments—and hence endowment deeds—of several major religious sites, including the sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina.

The text itself acknowledges Mustafa Agha’s role as “superintendent of the pious foundations of the Two Holy Places” in the section immediately following the introductory encomia, when the subject turns to the mosque.96 We are told that the sultan, upon embarking on the project, entrusted its superintendence to the agha, who is hailed as, among other things, “the trustee of kings and sultans.”97 The account then fast-forwards to the days leading up to the dome-closing ceremony, which was to be held on Thursday, June 8, 1617 (4 Jumāda II 1026).98 With completion of the dome imminent,

His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent—long may he live—was ordered to set up a place for the sultan of the seven climes in the mosque’s honorable courtyard [harem-i muhtereminde], whereupon the faithful superintendent, in accordance with the imperial command, pitched that heavenly tent—whose azure cupola reached the heavens and whose golden finial shone upon the word—in that graceful and noble location, as befitting Ottoman law and imperial custom; and he had curtains of cloth of gold and silver hung all around it, completing the imperial tent as well as one could wish.99 Whether the location of the tent was the mosque’s porticoed forecourt (the inner courtyard) or its surrounding precinct (the outer courtyard) is unclear from the account’s terminology, and the question is not settled by the shorter descriptions of the event found in other seventeenth-century sources, which include the chronicle of Abdülkadir Efendi and the Fegleke of Kathib Çelebi (d. 1657), whose entry on the ceremony is reproduced almost verbatim in the later official history of Mustafa Na’ima (d. 1716).100 These alternative sources do, however, note the presence of additional tents that are not mentioned in the Tarih, and though it would have been possible for several large tents to fit inside the mosque’s spacious inner courtyard (fig. 21), such an assemblage may have been better accommodated—not to mention more publicly visible—in the outer court (fig. 22), which
Fig. 21. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, porticoed inner courtyard and domed ablution fountain. (Photo: Güven Erten)

Fig. 22. Sultan Ahmed Mosque, outer courtyard from the northwest, with the mosque on the right and the royal pavilion in the distance. (Photo: Güven Erten)
bordered the vast open space of the Hippodrome. Either way, these histories make no reference to Mustafa Agha’s role in setting up the encampment, nor indeed in organizing any part of the ceremony. The *Tarih* in this regard is both a more complete and a more biased record.

Our text continues with the day of the ceremony itself, when the agha spent the morning furnishing “both sides of the sultanic road [from the Topkapi Palace to the mosque]...with variegated cloths of gold and silver and tricolor silk,” held in place by several hundred doorkeepers as the expectant crowds gathered. Such use of precious textiles to form decorative roadside barriers was customary for sultanic processions, and the practice is vividly attested—albeit with the spectators themselves shown holding the lengths of fabric—in a double-page manuscript illustration that depicts the victory parade of Sultan Ahmed’s father, Mehmed III, following his conquest of Eger in 1596 (fig. 23). Having thus prepared the route, Mustafa Agha returned to the palace with a gorgeously caparisoned horse for the sultan, who, meanwhile, sent the grand vizier, Halil Pasha (d. 1629), to the royal tent. There, accompanied by his retinue, the vizier “awaited a propitious hour to invite that cheer-spreading sultan and world-nourishing emperor,” and when the time came, he went back to
the palace to inform the sultan, receiving robes of honor in reward. The sultan then mounted the bejeweled steed prepared for him by Mustafa Agha, whereupon the grand vizier and other court dignitaries (who, Katib Çelebi tells us, were likewise invested with robes) set out from the palace on horseback in solemn procession, with Ahmed and two of his sons—“the apples of his imperial eye and the fruits of his prosperous lineage”—following on as the parade’s climax (figs. 24 and 25). As the cortege made the relatively short passage to the mosque, those lining the route “viewed [the sultan] avidly while praying for the continuance of His Majesty’s rule.” It is at this point that the text introduces us to the “ruthless”—that is foreign—ambassadors who are among the...
throng of spectators, whose presence on the day is, as we shall see, pivotal to explaining the event.

The parade almost certainly entered the precinct through one of the gates opening onto the Hippodrome, where thousands of onlookers would have been standing. Some sense of the scene is offered by a late eighteenth-century French watercolor of another procession to the mosque, though here, in an example of artistic license, the public is omitted from view and the Hippodrome widened in order to accommodate the sultan and his entourage, who snake their way to the mosque's pavilion through the gate at the northern corner of the precinct (fig. 26). In the case of the dome-closing ceremony, the cortege very likely proceeded in a more straightforward line and, since it was not heading for the pavilion, may well have entered through the more central northwestern gate, which had the advantage of aligning with the mosque's principal axis (fig. 27).

Upon reaching the royal tent, the sultan dismounted and was escorted by Mustafa Agha to "a splendid bejeweled throne—variegated with diverse gemstones—that had been placed inside the portico of the tent." Katib Çelebi's account adds that the two princes stood to their father's right. Ottoman paintings again allow us to visualize the scene with some confidence: a depiction from fifty years earlier of the enthronement of Selim II at Belgrade, for example, shows the newly ascended sultan seated in an encrusted gold throne that is flanked by standing figures and set under a canopy before the open entrance to a grand tent (fig. 28). Cutting the same sort of figure as his ancestor, Ahmed called into his presence Shaykh Mahmud Hüdayi, who was to reprise the privileged role he had played at earlier occasions related to the mosque. The sultan presented Mahmud and a number of other clerics with robes before commanding "that the said saint, together with all the viziers, distinguished ulema, and the building superintendent, should climb and close [bağla—, lit. “tie”] the lofty dome with prayer and eulogy."110

Exactly how this part of the ceremony was enacted is not explained, and we have to turn to other sources that are more informative in this regard. Abdülkadir Efendi tells us, somewhat ambiguously, that "the marble in [the dome's] center received a nail," and he also suggests...
Fig. 26. Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Procession of the Sultan through the Hippodrome to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque*. Unused watercolor design for d’Ohsson’s *Tableau général de l’empire othoman*, 1770s. (Photo: © Christie’s Images/Bridgeman Images)

Fig. 27. Sultan Ahmed Mosque and its precinct wall, from the Hippodrome toward the main entrance axis. (Photo: Guillaume Berggren [1835–1920], 1880. Courtesy of the Ljungström Foundation)
that the dome was already leaded and decorated.\textsuperscript{112} A more evocative account is offered by the Venetian bailo Almorò Nani (d. 1633), who, as I shall discuss below, viewed the ceremony firsthand and wrote an extremely valuable description of it in a dispatch dated June 13. Nani reports that after preliminary sacrifices, which are not mentioned in the other sources, “they placed the last stone of the cupola in position, and set a large gilt moon upon it.”\textsuperscript{113} This powerful image makes clear that the focus was on the summit of the dome, where a number of workmen must have secured some sort of stone before installing over it the giant crescent that crowns the mosque (fig. 29). Neither ‘Abdülkadir Efendi nor Nani mentions the party of supplicants whom Ahmed sent up the building, and whether all of them made it as high as the dome is doubtful—Shaykh Mahmud was seventy-six at the time. In theory, at least, these men could have climbed through passages and staircases to reach either the catwalk along the dome’s interior base or, for a more eye-catching effect, the dome’s exterior, where some scaffolding must have remained to enable the completion of work. It is likely that the men were spread across various levels and galleries of the mosque, with most perhaps standing on the interior catwalk and a few venturing onto the scaffolding outside the dome. Given that the dome was built of brick and, like the rest of the mosque, essentially complete by this point, the act of closing it as staged for the ceremony was evident-
ly more emblematic than it was substantive, involving the placement of a symbolic capstone and finial while Shaykh Mahmud and his companions looked on and offered their blessings. They were joined in this chorus by the watching crowds, who stood, according to the Tarih, both “inside and outside the mosque,” which tells us that the prayer hall too was filled with people. Many, if not most, of the mosque’s interior decorations and furnishings must already have been in place.

After the men descended, the sultan commanded that Shaykh Mahmud preach to those “present at the mosque,” and himself “witness[ed] the faithful words of the reverend saint.” The text is again unclear in locating the action or players, but if, as seems to be case, the sermon was delivered inside the prayer hall, the sultan must have moved from the tent to his private prayer loge within the mosque (figs. 30 and 31). Robes of honor were then distributed (still apparently inside the mosque) to the viziers, ulema, and other men of religion, after which the sultan “ascended the commanding throne that had been placed in the glorious pavilion adjoining his exalted mosque.” This relocation makes it still likelier that Ahmed had spent the preceding part of the ceremony in his prayer loge, which, as discussed, directly communicated with the neighboring royal pavilion. From this second throne, the sultan oversaw the granting of more robes of honor, this time to certain officials involved in building and staffing the mosque, including the chief imperial architect, Mehmed Agha, and the building supervisor (emin), İdris Agha. This is the only reference the text makes to Mehmed Agha, whose role as the building’s designer seems not to have been marked with any special distinction on the day.

The ceremony drew to an end with the sultan’s return to his tent, where he ordered his courtiers and ulema to kiss his hand. He and his retinue then processed back to the Topkapı Palace as they had come, and once there, Ahmed showered still more robes and other gifts on Mustafa Agha and his staff.

With the narrative description of the day over, the text turns to elaborating on the sultan’s munificence, which was such that “the people of the world sweated with embarrassment at the selfless favor that the mighty emperor had shown them.” (Katib Çelebi notes this
generosity in more prosaic terms, telling us that Ahmed conferred a thousand robes in all. Likewise lauded is the uncommon diligence of Mustafa Agha, whose service fully merited the rewards heaped on him. This excursus on the sultan’s largesse also includes an extraordinary subsection about the effect of the ceremony on the foreign ambassadors and other non-Muslim spectators, as further discussed below.

The Tarih ends its prose account with a brief epilogue concerning the mosque’s inauguration a few months later, on August 18, 1617 (16 Sha’ban 1026), when the building was formally opened with the performance of the Friday congregational prayer. Mahmud Hüdayi again had the job of preaching, and the sultan once more distributed gifts and honorific robes.

This conclusion is followed by the two qasidas, which are not known from other sources but are nonetheless fairly typical examples of their genre. Dedicated to the sultan, the first poem extols his virtues and admiringly enumerates the various parts of the mosque, whose “like or counterpart cannot be found,” and whose crowning dome is “unique, engulfed by mother-of-pearl.” The sentence introducing the qasida informs us that it was “composed for the completion of the noble mosque”
before being presented to Ahmed,126 and the poem itself describes the monument as if it were in its final state. This portrayal is in part imaginary, however, for it extends to ancillaries of the mosque that were a long way off from being finished.127 It is possible, then, that the qasida was given to the sultan as early as the day of the dome-closing ceremony, when work was far enough advanced that the finalized complex could be convincingly evoked. As with many such compositions, the poem’s final line is a chronogram, which is a feature often accompanied by a reference to the identity of the author, though none is provided here.

The second qasida, which lacks a chronogram, was prepared for Mustafa Agha and, we are told, given to him “upon the completion of the sultan’s mosque.”128 Because the poem in this case refers back to the events of the dome-closing ceremony, it cannot have been written until after that occasion. Several of its couplets are embedded into the Tarih’s prose narrative, whose arrangement and content are in turn mirrored by the poem. The latter, however, places even more emphasis on the agha’s excellent service, which now constitutes the main subject: “In truth,” one couplet asserts, “no one has trod this gentleman’s path, / He sacrificed his all with heart and soul.”129 As well as singing Mustafa’s praises, the qasida loudly applauds the sultan, and its final acclamations—spoken by the adulatory crowd—might well be directed at either man. These enthusiastic compliments bring the overall text of the Tarih to a fitting, if predictable, close.130

CLOSING THE DOME, WINNING THE DAY:
THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CEREMONY

The importance of the Tarih as a descriptive document of an unusual event is obvious enough, but the text’s most distinctive value lies in what it reveals about the motivations behind the ceremony, which are in turn bound up with the conceptualization of the mosque at large. The very existence of the manuscript confirms the exceptional nature of the ceremony and bespeaks the discursive excitement it must have generated. While the Ottomans produced numerous sūrnāmes (festival books) to commemorate royal births, circumcisions, and marriages,131 and although the state’s protocol registers included brief accounts of a range of official ceremonies,132 the Tarih appears to be the only example thus far uncovered of an Ottoman monograph that describes a ceremony centered on architecture. It belongs, furthermore, to a select handful of Ottoman texts devoted to particular buildings, among them a late fifteenth-century history of the Hagia Sophia and a mid-eighteenth-century account of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque (built 1748–55).133 These works are too few and dissimilar to constitute a cohesive category, but all of them concern high-ranking religious monuments that excited particular attention from their observers. Indeed, the Sultan Ahmed had, as noted, already helped to inspire another kind of rare architectural text, the Risāle of Cafer Efendi, whose chapter on the mosque was written even as it was being built, when construction had reached the level of the dome.134 Picking up where the Risāle left off, then, the Tarih amplifies Cafer Efendi’s verbal celebration of the monument against the background of a ceremony that was itself designed to glorify the building.

But what specific functions was this ceremony intended to perform that the official opening could not? After all, there was much that both events shared, including a grand parade from the palace and the distribution of sultanic gifts, and the two were sufficiently close in date that one might well overshadow the other. Sure enough, the seventeenth-century chronicles record only the dome-closing ceremony without mentioning the later inauguration, an omission that has led modern scholars invariably to misdate the mosque’s opening.135 That the dome-closing ceremony took place on a Thursday shows that it was never meant to be conflated with the actual inauguration, which coincided, as tradition required, with the Friday prayer. Nevertheless, the shared elements of the two events, together with their chronological proximity, would have made comparison between them unavoidable, with the earlier ceremony emerging as the more memorable of the two. The Tarih reveals as much in its cursory treatment of the opening, which is discussed almost as a muted replay of what had occurred two months previously.136 What set the precursor event apart—and explains why it was devised in the first place—was that it allowed Ahmed to announce the completion of his mosque in a far more original manner than was possible with the more codified form of an official inauguration. This is not to say that real
inaugurations were lacking in their own flourishes: at the opening of the Süleymaniye, for example, the sultan handed the mosque’s golden key to Sinan, an unusual gesture that reflected the architect’s unparalleled status (Mehmed Agha, as we have seen, would not receive the same honor). But such festive embellishments were eclipsed by the altogether inventive celebration created for the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. Much like the building itself, the dome-closing ceremony was an exercise in circumventing custom, and the sultan took full advantage of the opportunity to trumpet his project with a level of spectacle that would inevitably (and deliberately) outdo the subsequent opening. The desired effect was not mere fanfare, however, nor was the end result to the inauguration’s detriment. On the contrary, the ceremony amounted to a ritual absolution that, by proclaiming the unimpeachable character of the mosque, paved the way for as auspicious an opening as possible. The extravagant theatricality of the event was, in other words, crucial to its efficacy as a legitimizing rite of passage for the monument.

Of the features that distinguished the ceremony, one of the most striking was its ostensible raison d’être: the very act of closing the dome. The choice of this moment for the ceremony’s backdrop brought with it obvious dramatic impact, giving spectators “live” visual access to the capping of Istanbul’s newest public and imperial landmark. As well as emphasizing the scale and beauty of Ahmed’s architectural achievement, the closing of the dome carried multiple layers of symbolism. There was, of course, the age-old trope of the dome as heavenly sphere, and although a commonplace, the idea would have taken on real charge when framed by a ceremony in which a group of supplicants scaled the building to bless the vault as it was being closed. The Tarih gives literary expression to the conceit with a couplet inserted into this point of the narrative: “When devotions were performed in the mosque of the heavens, / The [celestial] lotus tree opened the hand of supplication in prayer.”

But the dome’s symbolic message went much further than a generalized reference to paradise; it also argued for the mosque’s impeccable merit by once again evoking flattering parallels with the great dome of the Hagia Sophia opposite. As admired and influential as it was, the vaulting scheme of the converted church proved famously unstable: the central dome, which was originally built too shallow, had to be reconstructed after collapsing in 558, and its shape was manifestly uneven by the time the Ottomans inherited it. Several Ottoman architects undertook the monument’s repair, including Sinan, one of whose (auto)biographies frankly records that the first “flat” dome had caved in. Other Ottoman texts recast the facts as a fanciful legend about the east semi-dome, which, they claim, fell down on the night of the Prophet’s birth and could not be successfully repaired until the Byzantines sent an embassy to the adult Muhammad many years later. Against this real and mythologized awareness of the Hagia Sophia’s troubled structural history, Ahmed’s new mosque—synecdochically represented by its dome—would appear perfect from the outset, its completion, to quote the Tarih, “facilitated and ensured by the aid of the Lord Almighty.” Ahmed, who had renovated the Hagia Sophia and released its dome almost ten years earlier, was now unveiling its faultless counterpart in a carefully directed ceremony that underscored the mosque’s freedom both from structural defect and from the taint of a Christian past.

Such triumphalism also extended to the dome’s more immediate pendant, the imperial tent. It is this temporary structure rather than the mosque’s actual dome that the Tarih most insistently describes in celestial terms, calling it a “heavenly tent...whose azure cupola reached the heavens and whose golden finial shone upon the word.” Here, as elsewhere in the text, the Ottoman word for tent, otak (also otaq), is punningly rendered as tâk, “vault,” intentionally blurring the distinction between the sultan’s ceremonial stage and the architecture of his mosque. The comparison is not entirely rhetorical: though we lack a detailed verbal description of it, the tent, in keeping with other examples that have survived or are known from paintings, must have been a truly substantial structure, with high walls and a steeply pitched vault-like roof, all made of richly colored and patterned fabric (figs. 32 and 33). As with the neighboring mosque, more was at play than a paradisiacal metaphor. The inclusion of this tent, along with the others that we know surrounded it, arguably constituted the ceremony’s most outstanding feature. To be sure, the use of tents for ceremonial or festive occasions was not especially rare in Ottoman contexts (fig. 34), and,
Fig. 32. Ottoman military tent with a protruding canopy, seventeenth century. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Rüstkammer, inv. no. Y 364. (Photo: Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut. Courtesy of Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden)

Fig. 33. Interior of an Ottoman military tent, seventeenth century. Krakow, Wawel Royal Castle, inv. no. 896. (Photo: Stanisław Michta. Courtesy of Wawel Royal Castle)
as noted above, Ahmed had already pitched a tent on his mosque’s construction site some years earlier when giving a feast. The adjacent Hippodrome hosted tents on numerous occasions throughout the Ottoman period (fig. 35), including the marriage celebrations in 1524 of the grand vizier İbrahim Pasha (d. 1536), whose palace stood opposite where the Sultan Ahmed would be built. Even in view of this broader tradition, however, the setting up of multiple tents in the courtyard of an essentially complete mosque would have been remarkably novel, unlike anything seen during an inauguration proper. While no doubt augmenting the festive mood of the day, this encampment cannot have been divorced from the tent’s longstanding association with warfare, especially in light of the mosque’s own uneasy relationship with the theme. Earlier events had already embraced the martial link—the tents erected for İbrahim Pasha boasted examples captured from the Aq Qoyunlu, Mamluks, and Safavids—and Ahmed and his advisers must have planned the dome-closing ceremony with such precedents in mind. What may appear as a risky and potentially counterproductive evocation—one that might remind the public of the sultan’s meagre military record—makes far more sense if understood as a defiant statement by which Ahmed could address his critics head on. Not only did the mosque’s encampment keep alive the promise of a future Cretan campaign, but it also—and more importantly—cast the
sultan as a victor already entitled to memorialize his name.

This seemingly farfetched assertion rested on several related ideas that must have been circulating in the courtly and public spheres and that are articulated in the Tarih. Ahmed’s main claim to legitimacy was his well-known piety, a trait that the manuscript hails from the start and reiterates throughout. Conventional as such praise was in the Ottoman panegyric tradition, the portrayal of Ahmed as an unrivaled paragon of religiosity capitalized on specific acts that distinguished him from other sultans. He funded a number of important renovations to the pilgrimage sites of Mecca and Medina, sending the architect Mehmed Agha to oversee the repairs. The Ka’ba in particular was in urgent need of attention when Ahmed restored it in 1611, and it was also during his reign—specifically in 1609, when work commenced on the Sultan Ahmed—that the Ka’ba’s annually renewed fabric covering, the kiswa, began to be produced on special occasions in Istanbul instead of its usual place of manufacture, Cairo. These achievements are cited in the Tarih’s first qasida, which likens Ahmed’s legacy to that of the Prophet himself:

Because, O Large-Hearted Sultan, you have modeled yourself on [Muhammad],
You have truly executed the rule of holy law in the world.

[...]

Fig. 35. Sultan Ahmed Complex and the Hippodrome, historical view with tents in the Hippodrome. (Photo: Sébah & Joaillier, ca. 1870. Courtesy of Middle East Photograph Archive, University of Chicago Collections)
Above all, the Flourishing House [Ka’ba] and the city of God’s Prophet [Medina]

Have been reanimated in your time, given honor and new life.155

The poem goes on to call the new mosque an “Exalted Ka’ba” for the poor who could not perform the pilgrimage,156 and though this same concept was applied to other mosques over the centuries (among them the Hagia Sophia),157 Ahmed’s patronage of Mecca rendered more convincing the idea of his own foundation as an alternative shrine. Its hosting of the Mevlâd ritual must have enhanced the Sultan Ahmed’s cultic significance and strengthened its relationship to the Two Holy Places, and Ahmed cemented these ties by sending hundreds of gifts and honorific robes to the notables of Mecca and Medina upon the mosque’s completion.158 In the late eighteenth century, küswas were actually being embroidered at the Sultan Ahmed,159 and by the mid-nineteenth, the mosque was the starting point of the annual pilgrimage caravan to Mecca, with the previous year’s küswa being returned to the building and hung on one of its walls.160

Ahmed’s mosque could thus be vindicated with reference to his exemplary and generous piety, which served the religion of Islam as much as any great conquest. Already invoked at the start of the project as a complement to other—more aspirational—motives, the sultan’s charitable purpose was now in itself an unassailable justification for the monument. Indeed, the impact of such righteous beneficence was not limited to the Muslim community; even the faithless could be moved by it, as explained in what is the most arresting and arguably most revealing section of the Tarih:

Furthermore, the sultan was watched that day by the ruthless [foreign] ambassadors who were present at the assembly, and when they—despite having not a trace of faith in their hardened hearts, wherein the devil and rebellion resided—saw the selfless favor that the magnanimous sultan conferred on the people of the world, together with the good works and pious deeds done in the path of God and the effort and labor exerted in the course of the religion of Muhammad, countless infidels could not help but come to Islam, wherewith they were honored with the glory of Islam and decked in royal favor. And even the remaining wicked infidels could not help but say countless prayers for the life and state of the mighty and exalted sultan, that he should remain secure and stable on his throne of glory; and so they confirmed as was right the glory and power pertaining to the religion of Muhammad and to the emperor of Islam, while seeing for certain the ignominy and vengefulness of their [own] false rites; and whether the ambassador of the reprobate Qizilbash or whether Venetian, Fleming, or Frank—they are one scourge alike—all of them were frustrated and confounded, their heads hung in vexation and sadness, and each of them was plunged into utter disgrace.161

Like other passages of the manuscript, the narrative here is tantalizingly incomplete in its details, but the implication is that foreign ambassadors were in some way officially present at the ceremony. This impression is confirmed by the above-mentioned dispatch of Almorô Nani, who considered the event important enough to send a long description of it to the Venetian Senate a few days after it took place. Although long ago published in an abridged English translation, the document seems to have gone unnoticed by subsequent scholars. It is, however, a source of unusual significance, and a rich supplement to the Tarih. The relevant passages are here quoted in full:

Last Tuesday, the 6th inst. [June], the Pasha [Halil, the grand vizier] sent a chias [çavuş, messenger] to all the houses of the ambassadors as well as to mine asking us to send our chief dragoman, as he wished to speak to them. He told them that His Majesty was going on the following Thursday to perform the first sacrifices in the new mosque, and he invited the ambassadors and the bailo of Venice to attend the festivities, when a suitable place would be assigned to them to view His Majesty and the concourse of people, which would be great. The dragomans accepted the invitation, adding that we had received a singular honor, and on the dragomans’ return the ambassadors of France, England, and Flanders, and I discussed what we should do, as by the Turkish custom when a building is finished all the neighbors send presents, as a gesture of goodwill and of gladness, and we ought to do something. In the time of Sultan Suliman, the last of the Ottoman Emperors to have built a mosque in Constantinople, the French ambassador and the Venetian bailo at that time made gifts to the mosque, and all the viziers and grandees of the Ottoman Porte also did the same, in competition with one another. And in truth, for three days in succession, the dome of this mosque was seen to be draped on the outside with a great quantity of cloths of various kinds, which were removed each evening and replaced by new ones. Afterwards these
were all distributed by order of the Chilaragasi [ḳızlar ağası, the chief harem eunuch] among the head of the mosque and various other superintendents and workmen, who are infinite [in number]. We therefore decided to send to the [current] Chilaragasi [Mustafa Agha] twelve cloths each. These were immediately sent by him to the mosque and placed around its dome along with many others, which made a fine show. The Imperial [Habsburg] ambassador was last to be invited, because of which he thought he might be excluded from this ceremony, and he too sent twelve cloths, all of silk. This expense was necessary and could not be avoided . . . . The Grand Signor’s mosque is built on one side of the square of the Hippodrome, where they usually hold public spectacles for the marriage of the sultan and the circumcision of the princes. Opposite this mosque stood a large covered corridor for the four ambassadors and myself, divided into compartments by flags, leaving a place for each. I laughingly remarked to the ambassador of Flanders that as our rulers were joined in friendly relations it was not proper that we should be separated, and I ordered the cloth to be removed. Soon afterwards England did the same, and then France and the Emperor’s ambassador, so that the five compartments were made one, with all assembling nearer to the Imperial ambassador’s section, which was the one that more directly faced the gate where the sultan entered the mosque’s courtyard. Here they sacrificed a number of sheep in honor of the Prophet. Then, at a certain hour determined by them to be auspicious, they undertook the ceremony to place the last stone in the summit of the mosque’s main cupola, and, in accordance with their custom, set a large gilt moon upon it. After, as it was reported, one of their principal holy men [Mahmut Hūdayi] preached a long sermon, praising the sultan’s goodness and then reproving the general injustice and rapacity of [his] enemies. His Majesty then came out of the mosque into its courtyard and placed himself under a small tent, where not only the viziers, muftis, and cadıleshcers [ḳadı’askers, military judges], but countless other officials went to kiss his hand, wishing him happiness; and most of them were invested with a robe, but the Grand Vizier received three, two of them sable, and he wore all three despite the season, without feeling any discomfort. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the sultan came out on a horse of singular beauty entirely adorned with gems—valuing, they say, 50 thousand zecchini—which had been donated that day by the Chilaragasi. Then proceeded on horseback the two princes, all the viziers, and other grandees of the Porte, and also the janissary guards and spahıs [sipâhıs, cavalry], who, though small in number, were sufficient for the great concourse of people who had stopped on the square to see [the sultan] and loudly greet him as he passed.

While we were waiting for the crush of people to stop, the Imperial ambassador . . . said it was high time that the war [between Venice and the Habsburgs] ceased, because in the end we are all Christians, and there is nothing these Turks enjoy more than to see us bloody our hands among ourselves.

We all subsequently left together, on horseback . . . . As soon as I had reached home the Pasha sent me a most noble golden raiment as a present, and he did the same to all the other ambassadors; in fact, his chief preoccupation is to find some means of showing honor to the ministers of the powers, just as the late Caimecam [ḳaymakam, the grand vizier’s deputy] was never so happy as when he could insult them, but, praise God, everything has turned out to the greater glory of the princes whom we represent.162

Fleshing out the sketchy picture provided by the Tarih, this fascinating report reveals the deliberateness with which foreign representatives were made a feature of the ceremony. The bailo and his fellow ambassadors could hardly refuse the grand vizier’s invitation, and their presence on the day itself was closely stage-managed by their hosts. Foreign participation in Ottoman state festivities was, in itself, nothing new, and Nani’s description of a viewing “corridor” erected opposite the mosque recalls the wooden loggia that had accommodated European spectators at the circumcision festival of the future Mehmed III in 1582 (fig. 36).163 Known from pictorial and written sources, this earlier loggia anticipated even the location of its later counterpart: it stood opposite the Sultan Ahmed’s eventual site on the Hippodrome next to the Palace of İbrahim Pasha, probably on or near the spot where Nani’s “corridor” would be erected. But whereas the structure of 1582 had been integrated into a series of galleries filled mainly with Ottoman viewers, that of 1617 seems to have stood alone, at a suitable distance from the sacred precinct where the Muslim elite were gathered.

This was not the only way in which the ambassadorial presence at the dome-closing ceremony was distinctive. For while foreign representatives could be found in numerous Ottoman festive contexts, there is very little evidence that the Christians among them attended religious ceremonies centered on mosques. Many Westerners, including diplomats, would have witnessed such events at a remove along with the general crowds,164 but this is a different matter from being officially invited participants. The case of the Süleymaniye, which Nani’s
there was in the festivities surrounding the Süleymaniye thus appears to have been limited and unorchestrated, quite in contrast to the obligatory arrangement under which all the principal foreign representatives attended the dome-closing ceremony of 1617.

The coordinated gifting of textiles by the ambassadors was a judicious move that capitalized on a shared appreciation among Ottomans and Westerners for luxury fabrics. In a ceremony already richly articulated with textiles, this collection of cloths must have made a powerful impression, particularly if exhibited, as Nani tells us, with a multitude of others around the dome. It is curious that the Ottoman sources do not refer to this festive bedecking, and Nani’s description leaves some
ambiguity as to whether the cloths were draped over the dome’s surface or otherwise hung from its exterior (or even interior) base. Either way, such adornment of the dome would only have emphasized its visual and conceptual relationship to the sultanic tent. The very real meaning with which fabrics were imbued on such occasions is also apparent from the ambassadors’ decision to remove the cloths that divided their viewing compartments. Yet messages were not always understood as intended. Nani’s claim that all turned out to the glory of the European states perhaps belies a certain intimidation felt by the vastly outnumbered Westerners, a reaction that would explain why they were so anxious to present a united front at the ceremony. While the Ottomans may have been suitably impressed with what they were given and returned the favor by sending textile gifts of their own, they surely viewed the ambassadors’ far grander offering as a form of collective tribute. Such an interpretation—unsurprisingly sidestepped by Nani’s account—is very much consistent with the tone of the Tarih, which, though no less subjective than the bailo’s dispatch, is a better indicator of what the ceremony’s organizers intended by inviting the Christian representatives.

There is, however, one particular in which the Tarih certainly misrepresents the ambassadors’ experience, and that is its suggestion that some of them renounced their faith in favor of Islam. No conversion of the sort took place, nor is it likely that the text is referring to members of the ambassadors’ retinues. If the claim has any truth to it, the Tarih appears to be conflating the foreign diplomats with Istanbul’s own communities of non-Muslims, who must have been among the general crowds gathered around the mosque precinct, and whose numbers may have included some on-the-spot converts. A still more interesting conflation in the text is that between the Western representatives and the ambassador of the Qizilbash, by which is meant the Shi‘i Safavids, treated as infidels on a par with the Christians. The Safavid ambassador finds no mention in Nani’s dispatch and must have attended the ceremony separately from his Christian peers. For all the Ottomans’ anti-Shi‘i bluster, he may even have been allowed to join the other Muslim dignitaries inside the complex, as happened on previous occasions when Safavid ambassadors visited Ottoman mosques. But such ecumenism has no place in the textual record of the Tarih, whose ideological rigor sees the Safavids and Europeans treated with equal disdain. This blanket stigmatization conveniently bolsters Ahmed’s flimsy claims to a ghazi status: his greatest military success had been against the Celali rebels, who were, as noted above, tarred with the brush of Shi‘ism, and he was at war with the Safavids at the time of the mosque’s opening.

What makes the Tarih’s triumphal conceit so effective, however, is that it does not ultimately rely on any martial corroboration for its force. The very realization of the mosque is itself presented as an overwhelming blow to the empire’s non-Sunni enemies, who, in spite of themselves, are inwardly won over by the feat. Victory in warfare may yet follow, but whether or not it does, Ahmed has, according to the manuscript, already conquered multitudes of nonbelievers through his pious act of patronage. Far from being a mere literary fancy, this audacious redemption of the sultan is the textual imprint of the ceremony’s own potent imagery, which, as Nani indicates, received its verbal affirmation in Shaykh Mahmud’s sermon. The faithful masses who witnessed the mosque’s spectacular consecration were surely convinced that God was on their sovereign’s side, and the limited contingent of foreign ambassadors must have appeared humbled and subjugated by what was happening around them, particularly if any non-Muslims were indeed inspired to convert. The Westerners themselves evidently picked up on the martial mood: it is no wonder that Nani and the Habsburg ambassador turned to talk of war and Turkish hostility even as the crowds were dispersing. The ceremony’s charged inclusion of these elite “infidel” spectators again helps to explain why it was staged in the first place: as we have seen, a true inauguration would probably not have afforded the leeway to accommodate non-Muslims in such a prominent and formalized manner. Their presence at the event completed its dramatis personae and fulfilled the symbolism of Ahmed’s splendid encampment, positing him as a Muslim conqueror within his own capital.

But it was not only over the unbelievers that Ahmed triumphed that day. The emblematic battle that played out in the mosque’s courtyard was a defeat also for those
Sunni Ottomans who had questioned the sultan’s right to build. By metaphorically enacting the conquest that his critics had long called for to him to attain, the sultan was signaling once and for all the lawfulness of his enterprise. The accompanying rhetoric presumably tackled the related issue of how the mosque was financed, for the Tarih reassures the reader that “[not] a penny from the imperial treasury” was spent on the project other than what Mustafa Agha had legally earmarked in his capacity as superintendent. That the very clerics who had disapproved of the mosque were now obliged to celebrate its completion implicated them as reformed supporters of a blameless endeavor. Ahmed, for his part, wished to underline his rapprochement with his onetime opponents, and it is significant that the Tarih’s brief description of the official opening—termed *feth,* which also means conquest—mentions only the ulama as receiving royal gifts. Such benevolence showed the sultan to be a merciful vanquisher, just as the dome’s ceremonial capping proved that the mosque had won the hearts even of its detractors, whether skeptical clerics or foreign infidels.

The later history of the mosque would reiterate how thoroughly its reputation had been consolidated. In June 1826, when the reformist Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) launched his own battle in Istanbul by resolving to extinguish the unruly janissary corps, it was to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque that his supporters were called. They gathered there under the Prophet’s Sacred Standard, which had been temporarily brought from the Topkapi Palace and raised inside the prayer hall on the minbar. In a practical replaying of the dome-closing ceremony, tents were pitched in the mosque’s outer court, as well as on the Hippodrome, and from this encampment the sultan’s loyal officers and subjects mounted their fatal attack against the janissaries, who were branded heretics and crypto-Christians. Though in part determined by the building’s advantageous location and open surroundings, the use of the mosque as a loyalist headquarters also reflected the extent to which it had come to embody religio-imperial authority. Those who set up the 1826 encampment are unlikely to have done so with any knowledge of its festive precedent, but their militarization of the site nonetheless instantiated, and thereby endorsed, what the dome-closing ceremony had so impressively visualized over two centuries earlier.

CONCLUSION

Ahmed died of typhus at the age of twenty-seven on November 22, 1617, barely three months after his mosque was inaugurated. It is tempting to wonder if fears for his health were an additional reason why the monument was unveiled with such pomp before its actual opening. Indeed, most of the mosque’s ancillaries—including the madrasa, public kitchen, and marketplace—were as yet unfinished upon the sultan’s death, and the complex as a whole would not be completed until 1620. The last element to be built was Ahmed’s own tomb, a substantial single-domed structure with a porticoed entrance (figs. 3, 4, and 37). Unlike its counterparts at other sultanic foundations, this tomb is located not in the garden behind the mosque’s qibla wall, but in a more visible spot outside the precinct at the northernmost end of the complex, from where it faces—and competes with—the dynastic mausolea of the Hagia Sophia (fig. 9). It is adjacent, moreover, to the Sultan Ahmed’s madrasa, identifying the patron in perpetuity as a friend to the ulama. The tomb thus acts as a satellite of the mosque to which it pertains, redoubling in miniaturized form the architectural glorification and legitimation of its founder. In this it recalls another vaulted dependency that had been erected on the grounds of the mosque for much the same purpose: the tent of the dome-closing ceremony. The relationship between the two structures is all the more palpable given that sultanic mausolea were often preceded by tents that served as temporary grave coverings. Although this custom seems not to have been followed in Ahmed’s case, his tomb already had its formal and symbolic forerunner in the tent of the 1617 festival.

This event was, as I have demonstrated, among the most extraordinary ever held in the Ottoman Empire, and the highpoint of a ceremonial campaign already unparalleled in richness and extent. Ahmed’s readiness to lavish such attention on his mosque was an astute and effective strategy by which to stir wider enthusiasm for the building and secure its place in the public eye. No moment in the mosque’s festive history could have been more compelling in this regard than when the sultan processed to an encampment in its precinct and sent his clerics to close its dome with their prayers. Against
the odds, and making full use of the power of ceremony, Ahmed succeeded that day in staking his claim to the monument that he was never entitled to build.

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NOTES

Author’s note: In addition to the individuals named in the notes and credited in the captions, I should like to thank Gülnur Necipoğlu and Emine Fetcî for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article; Ashley Dimmig for sharing her valuable knowledge of Ottoman tents; Deborah Howard and Vittorio Mandelli for their kind help with a Venetian dispatch; Reha Günay and Bo Ljungström for generously providing me with images; Güven Erten for his excellent photographs and site plan; and Karen Leal for her sensitive and expert editing. I am grateful also to Kate Fleet and Ebru Boyar for inviting me to present a version of this paper at the conference “The Ottomans and Entertainment” (June 29–July 2, 2016, Newnham College, Cambridge), where I received helpful feedback. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own (see the note at the start of the appendix).


2. Typical in this regard is Godfrey Goodwin (History of Ottoman Architecture, 344), who writes, “The mosque is a marriage of other men’s ideas in most but not all particulars, and where it is not inspired by previous masterpieces it is often ungainly or monotonous since the dominant ideas were size and splendour.”


4. Quoted and translated ibid., 60. The origins and development of this viewpoint, which seems not to have been codified until the late sixteenth century, are the subject of promising new research by Samet Budak, a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan. I am grateful to him for sharing his findings with me.

5. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 510.


7. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 238–56.

8. Ibid., 65–66.


13. The palaces had been built by Sultan for two princess-vizier couples—Mehrihmah Sultan (d. 1578) and Rüstem Pasha (d. 1561), and Ismihan Sultan (d. 1585) and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579)—and were bought from their descendants. For the purchase of this and other land for the complex, see Bilge, “Sultanahmed Cami ve Külliyesi,” 529–41; Fetcavi, “Music, Light and Flowers,” 233–34; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 514.


17. Dispatch dated January 27, 1610 (1609 old style), The National Archives, UK (henceforth TNA), SP 97/6, fol. 150a–50b, copied also on fol. 151a–51b.

18. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 514; and Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire, 1:288–89. A quasia written in praise of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque no later than 1614 calls on God to render “the Shah of the [Safavid] Heretics...powerless before” Ahmed, and to let the sultan “be triumphant and victorious, and a vanquisher and a taker of spoils”; see Cafer Efendi, Risale-i Mi’âriyye: An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture, trans. and ed. Howard Crane (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 75–76.

19. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 514, 516.

20. I am grateful to Fariba Zarinebaf for discussing this idea with me.


22. Mahmud Hüdayi’s involvement with the Sultan Ahmed Mosque will be discussed below. For an overview of his life and career, see Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz, “Aziz Mahmûd Hüdayî,” in Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (İstanbul: Türkçe Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013).


25. For a critical edition of his chronicle, see Muştafa Şafi, Zübdetett-Tevârîh.

26. See Muştafa Şafi, Zübdetett-Tevârîh, 1:48; and Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire, 1:288. Avcilloğlu (“Ahmed I and the Allegories of Tyranny,” 219) writes that Ahmed used his victory over the Celalis “as an excuse to build a new royal mosque bearing his name.”

27. Dispatch dated October 22, 1609, TNA, SP 97/6, fol. 139a.


31. See Ca’fer Efendi, Rısadı.
32. Ibid., 66.
33. Ibid., 67.
35. Apart from the royal pavilion to be discussed below, these dependencies originally included a madrasa, Koran school, primary school, marketplace (arasta), bathhouse, public kitchen, hospital, tomb, drinking fountains, and various associated dwellings, shops, and storehouses: see Nayir, Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi, 44–88. Today, only the madrasa, primary school, tomb, bathhouse, and arasta survive: see Kuban, Ottoman Architecture, 369.
36. See Fettvaci, “Music, Light and Flowers.”
37. Fettvaci, “Music, Light and Flowers,” 224; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 517. For the Şehzade Mosque, see Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 191–207.
38. See Fettvaci, “Music, Light and Flowers,” 226; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 517.
39. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 512.
40. This is the view held by Necipoğlu (Age of Sinan, 517), who writes that “[t]he decision to reinterpret the scheme of the Şehzade mosque, rather than of the Sûleymaniye or Selimiye, tactily admits the forbidding perfections of the chief architect’s two supreme masterpieces.”
41. Though the Sûleymaniye is higher than the Sultan Ahmed (their domes reach 53 and 43 meters respectively), the two mosques are of comparable width and length, both covering an area of about 114 by 65 meters.
42. Suitably struck by this distinction, Grelot (Late Voyage to Constantinople, 210) describes the Sultan Ahmed Mosque as “being the only Temple of all that ever [he] saw in the East, which has six Towers, whereas the rest have not above Two or Four at most.” The still widespread belief that the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca had only six minarets when the Sultan Ahmed was built and that the sultan—criticized for rivaling this number—was compelled to add a seventh is apocryphal: see Goodwin, History of Ottoman Architecture, 343.
45. See Fettvaci, “Music, Light and Flowers,” 235; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 517–18.
47. Goodwin (History of Ottoman Architecture, 346), for example, calls them “oppressively big” and “damaging to the proportions of the dome.”
48. Though somewhat ambivalent in its appraisal, a well-known nineteenth-century travel guide describes these “enormous columns, whose thickness bears no proportion to their height,” as the Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s “most remarkable feature.” See A Hand-Book for Travellers in the Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, and Constantinople: Being a Guide to the Principal Routes in Those Countries, Including a Description of Malta, with Maxims and Hints for Travellers in the East (London: John Murray, 1840), 177.
49. So many tiles were needed that some had to be reused from earlier buildings. See Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, İznil: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey, ed. Yann Petropoulos (London: Alexandria Press, 1986), 274, 278; Goodwin, History of Ottoman Architecture, 349; and Öz, “Sultan Ahmed Camii,” 26–27.
50. Grelot, Late Voyage to Constantinople, 211–12. Similarly, the French diplomat Louis Deshayes (d. 1632) considered it “[t]he most beautiful of all the mosques that the Ottoman Princes have had built”: see Deshayes, Voyage de Levant, 104, as translated into English in Avcioglu, “Ahmed I and the Allegories of Tyranny,” 220.
51. Quoted and translated in Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 518 (see 557n86 for the Ottoman). For Evliya’s more complete assessment of the mosque, see Evliya Celebi, Evliya Celebi Seyahatnâmesi: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 303 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu, ed. Orhan Šak Gökşay et al., 10 vols. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996–2007), 187–88. For an analysis of Evliya’s responses to the building, see Fettvaci, “Music, Light and Flowers,” passim.
52. For this pavilion, see Kuban, Ottoman Architecture, 365–69; and Nayir, Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi, 78–79.
53. See Atpullah Kuran, “The Evolution of the Sultan’s Pavilion in Ottoman Imperial Mosques,” Islamic Art 4 (1990–91): 281–301; and Ünver Rüstem, “Architecture for a New Age: Imperial Ottoman Mosques in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 176–202, 329–50. Citing the association between elite Ottoman women and waterside kiosks, Lucienne Thys-Şenocak proposes that the idea of the mosque pavilion may have originated with the Yeni Cami, whose own pavilion was, she argues, probably being built when Ahmed halted the project. There is, however, no evidence to substantiate this hypothesis, which is based on Thys-Şenocak’s assertion that the early seventeenth century witnessed no significant ceremonial changes to bring about such a pavilion type. On the contrary—and as I argue in this article—the Sultan Ahmed Mosque was from the outset associated with highly augmented ceremonial practices, and this alone would convincingly account for why its pavilion stands as the earliest example of its kind. See Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, “The Yeni Valide Mosque Complex of Eminönü, İstanbul (1597–1665): Gender and Vision in Ottoman Architecture,” in Women, Patronage, and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies, ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 69–89, esp. 74–77.

57. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516.

58. Seyr ü temâşa-yi binâ ve tefakkûd-i ahval-i fukarâ yâ zu’âfâ itmek için ihdâs oלוan kaşr-i ‘âli... Muṣṭafâ Şâfî, Zübdetü’t-Tevarîh, 152.

59. Muṣṭafâ Şâfî, Zübdetü’t-Tevarîh, 151–52; Evliya Celebi, Seyahatnâme, 2:84; Kâtîb Şâfî, Fezleke-i Kâtîb Şâfî, 2 vols. ([İstanbul]: Ceride-i Hâvâdîs Matba’a, 1286–87 [1869–70]), 1321, repeated almost verbatim in Muṣṭafâ Şâfî, Zübdetü’sa, türk-i Na’îmâ, Târîh-i Na’îmâ, Râzvatâ’i hüsây nam âlusati Akhârî’t-Hâfi-kayn, ed. Mehmet İpsilli, 4 vols. (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dîl ve Tevhit Yüksek Kurumu, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2007), 2378; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516. Evliya’s reference to Shaghây Mahmud occurs in his description of the second foundation ceremony (to be discussed presently in the main text) rather than of the groundbreaking. The sultan’s mattock, which is sometimes mistakenly described as being of gold, was later used by Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–30, d. 1736) to dig the foundations of his library (built 1719) at the Topkapı Palace. It is now preserved in the palace museum. See Orhan Saâk Gökyay, “Risâle-i Mima-rîyeye—Mimar Mehmet Ağa—Eserleri,” in İsmail Hakki Ogunakan’ya Armağan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976), 161; and Öz, “Sultan Ahmed Camii,” 26.

60. Dispatch dated October 22, 1609, TNA, SP 97/6, fol. 139a. Glover adds that the mosque, “(for all there are extraordinary diligence therein) cannot be ended, by all means judgment, not in twelve yeeres, of such greatness, importance and worth, this Moskite shall be.”

61. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 60. Cafer Efendi’s gasida in praise of the mosque (Risâle, 75–76) lends itself to this votive invocation by calling on God’s help in Ahmed’s conflict with the Safavids.

62. Muṣṭafâ Şâfî, Zübdetü’t-Tevarîh, 152.

63. Ibid., 152–53.

64. Dispatch dated November 10, 1609, TNA, SP 97/6, fol. 141b–41b.

65. Take, for example, the foundation ceremony of the Süleymaniye: though undoubtedly a magnificent and charged affair—the cornerstone was laid by the revered grand mufti Ebussu’ud Efendi (d. 1574) as the sultan watched—the ceremony is surely outdone in scale and nature by the multiple events held to celebrate the initiation of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. See Bates, “Patronage of Süleyman,” 67; and Cantay, Süleymaniye Camii, 18.


67. Dispatch dated January 27, 1610 (1609 old style), TNA, SP 97/6, fol. 150a.


69. Evliya Celebi, Narrative of Travels, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 84. The translation is Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s; for the original Ottoman, see the following note.

70. See Evliya Celebi, Seyahatnâme, 2:84–85, paraphrased into English in Narrative of Travels, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 84–85. The feast is conflated with the earlier foundation ceremony in Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516.

71. As Necipoğlu (Age of Sinan, 515) notes, “[t]he closeness of Hagia Sophia must surely have made the ‘New Mosque’ appear superfluous to its critics.”

72. İstanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library, E. H. 3036, fols. 67b–68a, as discussed in Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516. The mosque hosted another recitation of the poem each year to celebrate the safe arrival of the pilgrimage caravan to Mecca: see Bilge, Sultanahmet Camii ve Külliyesi, 525.

73. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516, from where the translated quotation is taken.


75. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516, where the inclusion of coffee at the ritual is linked to “the expansion of the public sphere during the seventeenth century, an epoch of urban ‘mass’ culture.” It is notable in this regard—and further proof of the drive to turn the mosque into a locus of sociability—that the complex originally included a coffeehouse: see Nayir, Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi, 46.

76. See Muṣṭafâ Şâfî, Zübdetü’t-Tevarîh, i:xxxii, 104–9.

77. See ‘Abdül-Kâdir Efendi, Topçular Kâtibi Tarihi, 629; and Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516, from where the translated quotation is taken.

78. ‘Abdül-Kâdir Efendi, Topçular Kâtibi Tarihi, 651. See also Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516. Owing to the somewhat unclear timeline in ‘Abdulkadir Efendi’s account, Necipoğlu mistakenly states that this Mevlâd coincided with the dome-closing ceremony.


80.See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 516, from where the translated quotation is taken.
81. As noted by Fetvaci ("Music, Light and Flowers," 239), who refers to the same observation made by Ignatius Mourad-ge d’Ohsson, for whose descriptions of the mosque’s ceremonial functions see the following two notes.


83. Hand-Book for Travellers, 177. The edition cited here (see n. 48 above for the full reference) was published in 1840; later versions of the book, published until the end of the nineteenth century, give the same information. The two Eids were being celebrated at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque already by the late eighteenth century: see d’Ohsson, Tableau général, 2:358 and 451, rendered into English in d’Ohsson, Oriental Antiquities, 478, 530.


85. See n. 78 above.

86. See Barkan, Süleymaniye Cami ve İmaretı, 161–62, where additional celebrations marking other stages of the mosque’s construction are also discussed. A much later example of such an event is the ceremony held at the Nusretiya Mosque in 1825 to signal the start of the raising of its dome, the supporting piers of which were festively decked with rich textile hangings: see Es’ad Efendi, Vaḵa’nūvīs Es’ad Efend’i Tarihi (Bahir Efend’inin Zeyt ve Hâveleriyâle), 1237–1247/1821–1826, ed. Ziya Yılmazer (İstanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000), 460–61. Es’ad describes the event as following “ancient exalted royal custom [aḏet-i dīrīn-i sultanat-i seniyye],” though I have not found any comparable instances other than the festivities related to the Süleymaniye. Regardless of its pedigree, the ceremony was nowhere near as elaborate as what took place at the Sultan Ahmed: for one thing, it was presided over by the grand vizier rather than the mosque’s founder, the great reformist sultan Mahmud II. Mahmud was nevertheless deeply invested in the Nusretiya and wished, like Ahmed before him, to create a monument redolent of triumph and suitable as a venue for royal ceremonial: see Rüstem, “Victory in the Making,” 92–115.

87. With Ottoman diacritics, this title would be written Târih-i bīnā-yi cāmi’-i Sultan Ahmed-i evvel, though, as I shall presently discuss, it is far from certain that this name was historically valid for the book. I am extremely grateful to Samet Budak for checking the Süleymaniye Library’s catalogue to confirm the details of its entry for the work. He also inquired into how and when the photocopy of the manuscript was acquired; neither the library’s staff nor its paper records could offer any answers.

88. The omission of the Turkish possessive suffix from the word cāmi’ suggests that the title was copied by a speaker of Arabic unfamiliar with Turkish grammar.

89. The first folio is not numbered and so is here reckoned as o. The foliation for the rest of the manuscript often appears extremely indistinct in the photocopy, though there seem to be two folios counted as 28, the second of which I have called 28.1 (see n. 55 of the appendix). The book must have been rebound at some point, as the folios now numbered 2–4 have erroneously been moved out of sequence, exchanging their place with for what are now fols. 5–7.

90. The other exceptions are the final folio, which has only three lines, and fol. 39a, which has an additional line to correct a scribal oversight (see n. 73 of the appendix).

91. As suggested to me by Tim Stanley, it is also possible that Mustafa Agha himself commissioned the work for presentation to the sultan. The text’s unabated flattery of the agha is, however, more appropriate to the recipient of such a gift rather than its originator.

92. See Şüreyya, Sicili-i Osmanî, 4136; and Uluçay, Harem, 122.

93. See n. 82 of the appendix.

94. The three parts of the text are closely related: the second qasida is liberally quoted in the prose narrative, while the latter shares with the first qasida an apparent indebtedness to the work of the sixteenth-century soldier and poet Taşçıcah Yahya (d. ca. 1582): see nn. 14 and 65 of the appendix. The Süleymaniye Library’s catalogue misleadingly identifies Mustafa Agha as the Târih’s author.

95. Târih, fols. 6b–1b, 5a–7b, 2a. All references to the manuscript refer to the images reproduced on pp. 300–324 and to my transliteration and translation in the appendix. See also n. 89 above.

96. Târih, fols. 2a–3b.

97. Ibid., fol. 3a.

98. Ibid., fol. 4a.

99. Ibid., fols. 4b, 8a–8b.

100. Âbdüll-Kâdir Efendi, Topçuvar Kâtibi Tarihi, 651–52; Kâtib Çelebi, Feẕleke, 1383; and Na’imâ, Târih, 2:378. Like the Târih, the first source uses the term harem, while the second and third use sâha. Both terms are ambiguous and could denote either the mosque’s porticoed forecourt or its outer precinct.

101. Târih, fols. 8b–9b.


103. Târih, fols. 10a–12b.

104. Kâtib Çelebi, Feẕleke, 1383; repeated in Na’imâ, Târih, 2378.

105. Târih, fols. 13a–14b.

106. Ibid., fol. 14a.

107. Ibid., fols. 16a–17a.

108. Kâtib Çelebi, Feẕleke, 1383; repeated in Na’imâ, Târih, 2378.

109. See Emine Fetvaci, Picturing History at the Ottoman Court (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,
114. with sultanic tents, see Nurhan Atasoy, Otağ-i Hümâyün: Ottoman Imperial Tent Complex, trans. Joyce Matthews (İstanbul: Ayyaz, 2000), 95. 135–38, and figs. 7, 44–47.

115. Tarih, fols. 17a–19b.


117. Ibid., 653.

118. See n. 162 below.

119. Tarih, fol. 18b.

120. Ibid., fols. 19b–21a.

121. Ibid., fols. 21a–22b.

122. Ibid., fols. 22b–23b. Idris Agha was the third project head; his predecessors were Kalender Agha (later Kalender Pasha), who died in 1616, and Hüseyin Agha. See ‘Abdu’l-Kâdir Efendi, Topçular Kâtihi Tarihi, 647–48; and Bilge, "Sultanahmed Cami ve Külliyesi," 541–42.

123. Tarih, fols. 23b–25b.

124. Indeed, the first qasida seems to have been composed with reference to Taşçalı Yahya’s sixteenth-century encomium on the Hagia Sophia: see n. 65 of the appendix. It is interesting to note that this qasida has far less in common with its counterpart by Cafer Efendi, for which see n. 127 below.

125. Tarih, fols. 30a and 37a.

126. Ibid., fol. 34b.

127. Similarly, a qasida written by Cafer Efendi no later than 1614 describes the mosque as if it were complete. The author in this case had seen the architect’s designs, which no doubt proved helpful in envisaging the final work. See Cafer Efendi, Risale, 65, 73–76.

128. Tarih, fol. 40a.

129. Ibid., fol. 41b.

130. Ibid., fols. 45a–45b.


133. The first three, the Tarihi-i binâ-i Aya Şofya, was composed during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444–46, 1451–81) on the basis of earlier Byzantine accounts; the second, Tarihi-i cami-i şerif-i Nâr-i Osmâni, was written between 1756 and 1757 by the mosque’s building secretary, Ahmed Efendi. See Stefanos Yerasimos, La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: Légendes d’empire (İstanbul: Institut français d’études anatoliennes; Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1990); and Rüstem, “Architecture for a New Age,” 381–512, where the second source is fully transliterated and translated. For overviews of Ottoman architectural texts and further references on the topic, see Selen B. Morkoç, A Study of Ottoman Narratives on Architecture: Text, Context and Hermeneutics (Bethesda, Dublin, and Palo Alto: Academica Press, 2010); and Rüstem, “Architecture for a New Age,” 167–68.

134. Cafer Efendi, Risale, 64–76, esp. 65.

135. Most scholars give the date of the mosque’s inauguration as (or close to) June 8, 1617, and several treat the dome-closing ceremony itself as the official opening: see, for example, Bilge, “Sultanahmed Cami ve Külliyesi,” 542; Nayar, Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi, 46; and Öz, “Sultan Ahmed Camii,” 26. Other than the Tarih, the only source, historical or otherwise, that I have encountered with the correct month for the mosque’s opening (no day is specified) is a description of Istanbul written by the Ottoman-Armenian historian and teacher Sargs Hovhanissyan (d. 1805), who was a native of the city: see Sargs Hovhanissyan [Sarks Sarraf Hovhannesyan], Payitaht Istanbul’un Tarihçesi, trans. Elmon Hanger (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Tophusals Tarih Vakfı, 1996), 3. A similar confusion once pertained to the Süleymaniye, for the chronicler Celalzade Mustafa Celebi (d. 1567), in his description of the mosque, gives the date on which its dome was closed—August 16, 1556—but not that of its inauguration, which took place over a year later in October 1557. Until the chronology was settled by Barkan, many historians mistook the date provided by Celalzade as referring to the mosque’s completion or opening. Celalzade’s celebratory reference to the closing of the Süleymaniye’s dome shows that the Sultan Ahmed was not the first mosque to have this milestone recognized. As discussed above in the main text, however, there is no definitive evidence that the Süleymaniye’s dome-closing occasioned any festivities, and certainly nothing on the scale of the 1617 ceremony. SeeCelalzade Muṣṭafa Çelebi, Geschichte Sultan Süleyman’s Kàmmunàn von 1520 bis 1557, oder, Tabaḵāt ill-Memàlik ve Derécet al-Mesālik, ed. Petra Kappert (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), fol. 521a of the facsimile, rendered into modern Turkish in Celalzade [Celâlgölu Mustafa], Tabakatı Memalik ve Derécet al-Mesalik: Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Yükselme Devrinde Türk Ordusunun Savaşılar ve Devletin Kurumu, İce ve Dış Stýyasý, trans. Sadettin Tokdémir (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1937), 254; and Barkan, Süleymaniye Cami ve İmaretli, 154–56.

136. See Tarih, fols. 32b–34b.

137. See Sâ‘ī, Sinân’s Autobiographies, 7, 126.

138. Tarih, fols. 18b–19a. For the celestial lotus tree, see n. 104 of the appendix.


142. Tarih, fol. 4a.

143. For Ahmed’s extensive renovation, which took place between 1607 and 1609, see Necipoğlu, “Life of an Imperial Monument,” 211–219. It seems that some of the figural
mosaics that had been left unobscured until the seventeenth century, including the image of Christ Pantokrator in the dome, were painted over during this campaign.

144. Fetvaci ("Music, Light and Flowers," 235) also argues that the Hagia Sophia’s Christian past may have acted as a foil to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. It is interesting to note that the Sultan Ahmed Mosque’s other great forerunner—the Suleymaniye—had been the subject of malicious rumors questioning the stability of its dome during construction. Sinan would, of course, prove the skeptics wrong, but the history of his dome nevertheless adds to the context in which to understand the proud showcasing of its later counterpart at the Sultan Ahmed. See Sâ’t, Sinan’s Autobiographies, 124; and Nécipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 143.

145. Tarih, fols. 4b, 8a.

146. For illustrations and descriptions of such tents, see Atasoy, Otağ-i Hümayun.

147. For other instances, see Atasoy, Otağ-i Hümayun, esp. 60–63, 67–75; Nurhan Atasoy, "Ottoman Garden Pavilions and Tents," Muqarnas 21 (2004): 15–19; and Atl, "Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival," esp. 184, 185, 190, and figs. 4–6, 8, 13. For the use of tents to further the increasingly visible image of the sultan in the late Ottoman period, see Ashley Dimmig, "Fabricating a New Image: Imperial Tents in the Late Ottoman Period," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 3, no. 2 (2014): 341–72.


149. For Ottoman tents in martial contexts, see Atasoy, Otağ-i Hümayun, esp. 64–67. It is an interesting coincidence that the corps of imperial tentmakers had its headquarters close to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in the sixteenth-century Palace of Ibrahim Pasha: ibid., 23–30.


154. The sultan is recorded as having worn a representation of the Prophet’s footprint on the aigrette of his turban: see Bilge, "Sultanahmet Cami ve Külliyesi," 525.

155. Tarih, fols. 35a–35b. Cafer Efendi (Risâle, 75), in his gasida on the mosque, likewise praises the sultan’s patronage of the Ka’ba.

156. Tarih, fol. 36a. Similarly, Cafer Efendi (Risâle, 73) writes, "The world set out on a pilgrimage to it as they do to the Ka’ba / The pilgrims strove to circumambulate it." See also Fetvaci, "Music, Light and Flowers," 224–26.

157. See n. 68 of the appendix, and Nécipoğlu, “Life of an Imperial Monument,” 201. Eighteenth-century sources compare several imperial mosques of the period—including the Nuruosmaniye, Ayazma (1755–60), and Laleli (1760–63)—to the Ka’ba or its heavenly prototype, though they do not explicitly discuss these mosques as substitute pilgrimage sites: see Rüstem, "Architecture for a New Age," 226, 259, 278.


che ne anco si può sciffare di presentar questi nuovi mini-
stri, et massime à tempi presenti, ne quali ricerca il servizio
pubblico, che non si habbia à restringer la mano; mi duole
in estremo queste frequenti mutationi de Bassà et altri del
governo di questa Porta, conoscendo l’interesse, che da ciò
ne riceve la Serenità vostra per rispetto della spesa. Ma dove
vi concorre la necessità il dispiacere non serve di rimedio. La
moschea del Gran Signore è fabbricata da un lato della piazza
dell’ipodromo, nella quale si sogliono fare li spettacoli publici
in tempo di noce [sic, nozze] del Sultan de retaglì de Principi.
In questa all’incontro di detta moschea fu un largo coridore
coperto alli, 4. Ambasciatori, et a me, assegnato un luoco à
ciascheduno diviso in forma di stanza con le ale de padiglioni,
onde io dissi all’Ambasciatore de Fiamandra sorridendo, che non
havese pur bene, che essendo noi uniti insieme con li nostri
Principi di anoimo, et di volontà, questi ci volessero dividere,
però comandassimo, che fusse levata la tela, che ci separava,
et il medesimo poco appresso fece Inghilterra, et di mano in
mano Franza, et l’Ambasciatore dell’Imperatore di modo che di
cinque stanche [sic, stanz] ne fu fatta una sola, riducendosi
tutti verso il [sic] [213a] luogo dell’Ambasciatore Cesareo, come
quello, che era più a fronte della Porta per dove entrava il
Rè nel cortile de la moschea. In questa sacrificio separeronsi
due strati in honor del Profeta, et imitiando lo la guardia de’
gianizzeri, et spahi, ma in poco
gioie, per quanto dicono di valori di 50 mila cechini, che le ha
il Rè sopra un cavallo di singolar bellezza guarnito tutto di
luna tutta dorata. Dopo per quanto ci fu rifferto predicò
da loro in quel giorno per felice, fecero la cirimonia de metter
da gli in honor del Profeta, poi ad una certa hora osservata
Rè nel cortile della moschea. In questa sacrifico diversi
in tempo di noce [sic], stanze ne fu fatta una sola, riducendosi
luogo dell’Ambasciatore Cesareo, come
Partimmo poi tutti insieme à cavallo, et dopo caminato un
pezzo di strada l’Ambasciatore Cesareo si licentiò per andar

dispatch dated June 1617, State Archives of Venice,
Senato, Distraccio Constantinopoli, filza 83, 15/II, fols.
211a–211b. I discovered this document through a partial
English translation published in Allen B. Hinds, ed., Cal-
endar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English
Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice,
and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy, vol. 14, 1615–1617
(London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1908), 523–24
(alternatively under “795. Almoro Nani, Venetian Ambas-
sador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” http://
www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol14/
p513-525). Deborah Howard kindly located the original
Italian document, which contains much information omit-
ted from the State Papers translation, and Vittorio Mand-
delli very generously provided the meticulous transcrip-
tion given above. My English rendering adapts where possible
the existing State Papers version, and the remaining pas-
sages have been translated with the help and advice of
Deborah Howard, Thomas Newbold, Lavinia Puccetti,
and Andrew Halladay, to all of whom I am extremely grateful. It
is interesting to note that the dispatch as sent from Istanbul
was largely written in cypher.

163. See Atıl, “Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festi-
vale,” 182, 190, and Figs. 1, 8, and Terzioglu, “Imperial Circum-
cision Festival,” 85.

164. The well-known woodcut of the Suleymaniye by the Dan-
ish-German artist Melchior Lorck (d. after 1583), who lived
in Istanbul between 1555 and 1559 as part of the Habsburg
embassy, was published together with a brief reference to
the inauguration. Another sixteenth-century European
view of the mosque—an anonymous pen-and-ink drawing
now in Berlin—is similarly inscribed with details of the
opening. While these depictions do not show the ceremony
itself, their accompanying texts are indicative of Westerners’
interest in and awareness of such events, and there is
every reason to suppose that both artists, along with other
Europeans resident in Istanbul, joined the crowds that
watched the festivities. See Erik Fischer, with Ernst Jonas
Bencard, Mikael Bogh Rasmussen, and Marco Iuliano,
Melchior Lorck, trans. Dan Marmorstein, 5 vols. (Copenhagen:
The Royal Library and Vandkunsten Publishers, 2009–)
vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 31–35, no. 3; Semavi Eyice, “Avrupa’lı bir
Ressamın Gözü ile Kanuni Sultan Süleyman: İstanbul’dan bir
Safevi Elçisi ve Süleymaniye Camii,” in Kanuni Armağani
Rogers et al., Schätze aus dem Topkapi Sarail: Das Zeita-
ter Süleymans des Prächtigen, exh. cat. (Berlin: Staatliche
Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz and Museum für islami-
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For use by the Author only | © 2016 Koninklijke Brill NV
tur aus osmanischer Zeit, exh. cat., 2 vols. (Recklinghausen: A. Bongers, 1985), 1:233, no. 1/55. The inauguration of the mid-eighteenth-century Nuruosmaniye Mosque was also recorded in writing by a Western observer: see Rüstem, “Architecture for a New Age,” 159, 178–79.

165. Shah Tahmasp's sending of gifts and letters is well attested, but a sixteenth-century Ottoman chronicle now in Vienna (cited below) indicates that these were presented in June mid-eighteenth-century. Whether the Safavid envoy stayed on for the inauguration is unclear; he is not mentioned in the known accounts of the event. See Matarık Naşılı (?), formerly misattributed to Rüstem Pasha, Tarih-i Âl-i ʿOsmân, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Mxt. 339, fol. 282a (available at http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/Alo0465234), summarized in Ludwig Forrer, trans., Die osmanische Chronik des Rustom Pascha (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1913), 89–90; Ferit H. Beg, Mecmâ-i müneş'tâti’s-selâtin, 2 vols. (İstanbul, 1264–65 [1848–49]), 1:234–29, summarized and partially translated in Hammer-Purgstall, Geschichte, 3345–48; Bates, “Patronage of Süleyman,” 79; Eyice, “Avrupa’l bir Ressamın Gözü ile Kanuni Sultan Süleyman,” 159–67; and M. Teyyib Gökbilgin, “Süleyman I,” in İslâm Ansiklopedisi (İstanbul, 1940–48), 139. I am grateful to Sinem Casale for sharing references with me on this topic.

166. To be sure, certain members of the Safavid delegation present at the 1582 circumcision festival are recorded as having converted to Sunnism, but this was only after the ambassador was expelled or imprisoned when news reached Istanbul that the Safavids had broken their truce with the Ottomans: see Terzioglu, “Imperial Circumcision Festival,” 86. Such political defections are very unlikely to have occurred at the far shorter dome-closing ceremony, which did not coincide with any major diplomatic developments or crises. As I shall discuss presently in the main text, the conversions mentioned by the Tari̇h probably pertain to the sultan's own non-Muslim (or non-Sunni) subjects.

167. It was not unusual for non-Muslims to convert to Islam during princely circumcision festivities, including the famous celebrations of 1582. The English chaplain Dr. John Covel (d. 1722) witnessed such an event in Edirne in 1675, noting in his travel account that at least two hundred non-Muslims, “many of riper yeares,” spontaneously indicated their desire to convert during the thirteen-day festivities and were led away to a tent to be circumcised. The magnificence of the ceremony itself must have played an important role in wooing people to the faith; as Covel observes, “the Turkes would be so farre from hindering your seeing, as they would make way for you.” Outside such festive contexts, other would-be converts announced their intentions at the imperial council, where they were richly rewarded in a ceremony that became increasingly codified in the seventeenth century: the first recorded instance of new Muslims being gifted clothes occurred in 1609, the year that work began on the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. See Terzioglu, “Imperial Circumcision Festival,” 85; J. Theodore Bent, ed., Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant (London: Hakluity Society, 1893), 209–10; Finkel, Osman’s Dream, 276–77; Marc David Baer, Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 179–203, 293n10; and Tijana Krstić, “Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 51, no. 1 (January 2009): 35–63, esp. 58. For the staging of the 1675 festival, see Atasoy, Otaŋ-i Hümâyun, 68–69.

168. Such denigration of the Safavids was not new. At the circumcision festival of 1582, the Habsburg ambassador is supposed to have complained at having to be seated with his Safavid counterpart, whom he considered inferior. He cited as proof the grand mufti’s fatwa that it was better to kill one Qizilbash than seventy infidels (i.e., Christians). Regardless of the truth of this story, the Western diplomat were indeed provided with their own tribune. The Safavids, though seated with other foreign Muslim dignitaries, were taunted throughout the festival, and more bitingly than the Christians. See Terzioglu, “Imperial Circumcision Festival,” 85–87.

169. The Safavid ambassador was separately accommodated at other festivals also: see the preceding note.


171. Tari̇h, fol. 28a.

172. Ibid., fols. 34a–34b.


174. Tellingly, perhaps, a dispatch from the English ambassador reporting the sultan’s death states that “it had been falsile rumored he was dead 40. dais before.” Dispatch dated November 28, 1617, TNA, SP 97/7, fol. 174a.

175. See Kuban, Ottoman Architecture, 369; and Nayır, Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi, 46.


177. See Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, 517.


179. See Yazar, “Osmanlı Defin Merasimlerinde Otaŋ Kurma Geleṇiği,” 115. A report from the English ambassador states that the sultan’s coffin was “laid in his tombe, nott yett fullie finished in his new Mosckca” (dispatch dated November 28, 1617, TNA, SP 97/7, fol. 176b), which strongly suggests that the building was far enough along not to require a tent.
REPRODUCTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Fotokopi No. 294 (facsimile of a manuscript in Baghdad, Iraqi Academy of Sciences).
(Photos: courtesy of the Süleymaniye Library)
THE DOME-CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SULTAN AHMED MOSQUE

9b–10a.

10b–11a.
THE DOME-CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SULTAN AHMED MOSQUE

32b–33a.

33b–34a.
46b–47a.
APPENDIX

Transliteration and Translation of Tarih-i binâ-yı cami'-i Sultan Ahmed-i evvel / Sultan Ahmed cami’i tarihi,
Istanbul, 1617. Istanbul, Süleymanıye Library, Fotokopi No. 294
(facsimile of a manuscript in Baghdad, Iraqi Academy of Sciences).

Author's note: I have followed the archaizing "pre-1700" system of Ottoman transliteration, which faithfully reflects Turkish orthography. The Tarih contains numerous misspellings: those that are (or appear to be) merely accidental are corrected in the transliteration and indicated in the footnotes; those that are recurrent or constitute non-standard variants are transliterated as written. Words and sentences inscribed in gold appear or constitute non-standard variants are transliterated as such if the closed form is attested in the modern Arabic (as suggested also by the placement of a rosette after the word). Words and fragments of words of this form are frequently spelled with a ye rather than the requisite hemze in Ottoman, as is the case throughout the manuscript. Subsequent instances of this error will be indicated only by their transliteration.

1. For details of the manuscript, including its speculative title, see pp. 270–72 of the main article.
2. Because it precedes the folio numbered 1, this page is here counted as fol. ob.

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1 Tarih-i binâ-yı cami'-i Sultan Ahmed-i evvel / Sultan Ahmed cami’i tarihi


3. Erroneous for fâʿîk. Arabic words of this form are frequently spelled with a ye rather than the requisite hemze in Ottoman, as is the case throughout the manuscript. Subsequent instances of this error will be indicated only by their transliteration.
4. Erroneous for meşîcê.
5. Unattested in the dictionaries, mekâşif is apparently a nonce form coined on analogy with mevâkıf and related in meaning to mûkâyef, defined in Redhouse’s Lexicon as “God’s openly manifesting himself to a saint; spiritual communion with God.”
6. The manuscript has evidently been rebound at some point in its history, as the folios now numbered 2–4 have mistakenly been placed where those numbered 5–7 belong, and vice versa. My transliteration and translation restore the correct order while retaining the modern foliation.
7. Spelled rather than the correct [ ] , perhaps reflecting a pausal pronunciation of the Arabic (as suggested also by the placement of a rosette after the word).
8. Spelled rather than the correct ; the scribe has erroneously written  for  and vice versa. See also the preceding note.
Ma‘ruf bir cay-ı ferah-fezâr ve makâm-ı dilkişada biî on-
szekin Şevvâl-ı şerifinîn [3a]¹⁵ sekizinci gününde binânsa
mubaheret buyurur hâlâ harem-i muhterem-i pâdişâhi
ber [?]¹⁶ sarây-ı lafiﬂ-ı şehinşahide şâhîbîl’-îzzi ve’s-
sa’âdeti’l-latîfe Dûrî-ı Sai’sa’âdeti’ş-şerife aşâsı olan
iﬁtîhâr-ı ahsâbi’l-izzi ve’t-temkidîn, mu’temedîl-mülikû
ve’s-selâtiin, enisii [3b] l-ḥâzetir-ı-aliyeti’l-ḥâkaniyye,
cesiili’-s-a’sa’âdeti’-s-senîyeti’-s-sermedîyîe, en-nâzir’-lâ
avkâfîl-Haremeynîl-muhteremeynî, a’ni semeyî beni’ş-
şâkaleyni ¹⁷ el-Ḥâc Muṣṭafâ Ağa —edama’llâhîl-Melikîl-
’a-lâ — ḥâzetirleri binâ-ı camii’-ı mezbûr¹⁸ üzere nazar
ta’în buyurulduklarından sonra [4a] camii’-i pîr-lami‘iûn
biî yiğimî alt su sesini Cumâzîl-’ahire’siniîn dördüncü
günü — ki yevmü’l-Ḥamîs’-dûr — “Bâreka’l-İlâyhi’-Sêbte
ve’l-Ḥamîs”¹⁹ ḥadîs-ı muḳtażâsînca bi-’inayeti’llâhîl-Melikî’-l-
akder âyetlari ittâmâm mûyesser ü mukadder olub kubbê-ı ʿuliyası bağlamak lazîm [4b]
geldikde nazar-ı müşîrûn ileyhî — zâle müsüren
iley — ḥâzetirleri bîrkac gün mükaddemce camii’-ı
şerîfîn harem-i muhtereminde sulîtan-ı heft-kişver içün
bir makâm u makar ihmârî emr-ı²⁰ mukarrer olmân
nâzir-ı sâdakât-nâmîni ber-ı mucebîl emr-i imâyînîn ol
tank-ı gerdûn — [8a] niţâkî — ki kubbê-ı minâfâmî âmsana
hemser ve ‘alem-i zerrin-peykeri ‘aleme ziya-güster-

see Ağâh Sûrî Levend, Türk Edebiyatında Şehr-ergizer ve Şehr-ergizlerde İstanbul (İstanbul: İstanbul Fethi Derneği, İstanbul Enstitüsü Yayınları [Baha Matbaası], 1958), 104.

This is probably more than a coincidence, for the Tarîh’s author seems to benefit in other ways from Yahya’s poem: see n. 65 below.

A line of text—evidently a later addition—is written down the left margin of the page. Though not entirely legible, it appears to be a nonsensical instance of calligraphic practice or doodling. Prominent among the inscribed forms are four successive variations of a word resembling bism (in the name of).

The word is hard to make out in the darkened photocopy: der (in) rather than ber (on) would be the more logical preposition for this Persianate construction, though the calligraphy, as far as it can be discerned, does not support such a reading.

Beni is erroneously written with a şedde over the nûn.

Despite being here described as mezûrî, “afroesaid,” the mosque has not been explicitly mentioned before this point, though the earlier words binânsa mubaheret buyurûb do make implicit reference to it. The sentence is long and convoluted, and it is not surprising that the author or scribe has muddled the details.

See n. 93 below.

The word has been superscribed.
The couplet is taken from the manuscript's second qasida (fols. 42b–43a), though the first word of the second hemistich is here written dü“ı rather than dü”ı. This changes the verb (dü”emek, "furnish," here translated as "line") from the passive voice to the active, emphasizing Mustafa Agha's role in making the arrangements. The passive version found in the qasida is grammatically incompatible with the yol“ım that follows it.

22. The word has been superscribed.

23. This compound appears to be a variant, if not a misspell- ing, of başıamba’. 

24. Properly spelled sesper.

25. Rikāb is erroneously marked with a sûkān.

26. The three couplets are taken from the second qasida (fols. 42b–43a), but with olmusıldı replacing olmusıldı. Dürr has here been incorrectly vocalized as derr, a careless error that does not recur in the manuscript, and the ol of the second hemistich is superscribed, as if added after the rest of the line was written.

27. The dot of the ā has accidentally been omitted.

28. The word talaq (Arabic talaq) is not attested in the Turkish dictionaries, and its normal Arabic senses (which include “race” and “shot”) do not fit the context. Steingass, however, records the compound talaqı’l-vahj, “of an open countenance; cheerful, smiling,” and this overlaps with the Ottoman usage of the related word talaqat, defined in Redhouse’s Lexicon as “a day’s being mild and bright” and “a countenance’s being cheerful.” Such a meaning is clearly intended by the questionably formed talaqat, which the Tarih’s author may have coined by confusing talaqat with talaqat and replacing the Arabic plural suffix with its Turkish equivalent.

29. İcabet is erroneously marked with a sûkān.

30. The two couplets are taken from the second qasida (fols. 42b, 43a), where, however, they are not contiguous.

Ba’dêzân Ĥâzîr-ı sultân-ı cîhân tâk-ı hûmâyûn-ı sa’âdet-nûmûne iki şezhadê-ı cûvîn-[16b] baṭhlârâyla vâsîl olub dâhil olmâk murâd buyûrûqûndan evvel iki şezhadê-ı cûvûn-baṭhlûrî nûzûl buyûrû nûzûr-ı

31. Devâ’îm appears to be a spurious pluralization of dâ’îm, formed on analogy with the preceding word. The seat bearing the hemze has necessarily been provided with the dots of a ye. See n. 99 below.
33. See n. 101 below. The full rhyme in its usual form is

34. The word appears to be a misspelling of zorkân.
35. The compound is thus vocalized, though the alternative reading tâk revâ’î is perhaps likelier.
36. The sentence does not resume after the poetic interpolation and is therefore grammatically incomplete.
37. The couplets are taken from the second qasida (fol. 43b).
38. Zamân is erroneously marked with a suğân.
39. I have found no source for this couplet.
40. The dots of the ye have not been inscribed.
41. There is a curious curved stroke inscribed to the left of the ye. Though it appears neatly and deliberately calligraphed, it corresponds to no letter and is textually unnecessary.
42. In this one instance in the manuscript, the word beyt is written over rather than before the first line of the couplet.
behbüber Murād oldılar. Sādāt-ı kesīretü'l-berekāt dahi ḫilʿat-i sulṭānī iḥsānı ile aṣḥāb-ı erkān ve eʾimme ve ḫuṭabā ḫablu ḫilʿat-i fāḫire ve ʿale't-tertīb sāyir vüzerā-yı ʿiẓām müʾminīn ü

secāde-nişīn bunlaruñ cümlesine bile ḫilʿat-i fāḫireler muʿtemedīn ve meşāyiḫ-i ʿuzlet-güzīn ve iki imām-ı kasr-ı ʿizzet-ḳarārlarında ḫurılan taḫt-ı devlet-medārları

[23a] ḫayrların istimdād buyurduḳlarından ʿazīz-i mesfūr daḥi ʿālī-miḳdār meclis-i vaʿẓdan kemāl-i mertebe istifā-yı emera'llāhü'l-Ḫabīrü'n-naṣīr naḳl ü tefsīr idüb pādişāh-ı 43. cek pādişāh-ı merḳūm daḥi faʿāl-i maṭbūʿ ile vaʿẓ u naṣīḥate şürūʿ idi-

ʿazīz-i mesfūr cāmiʿ-i mezbūrda ḫāżır olan cümle vüzerā vu ʿulemā yine fermān-ı rbbīnâ ve ḫalās ve ḫadīs-ı laṭīf-i maḥbūb-ı ādişāh-ı ʿālī-vaḳār cāmiʿ-i ʿālī-miḳdārlarına muttaṣıl ide lāyıḳ aña lutf u ʿaṭā asa'ya ol ḫīnde

The Dome-Closing Ceremony of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque 329

44. I have found no source for this couplet.

45. The couplet is taken from the second qasída (fol. 44b), where it is used in relation to Mustafa Agha rather than Halil Pasha. The spelling of va'llāhī with a final ye is an error that does not occur in the qasída version.

46. Sādāt is erroneously marked with a sikāın.

47. Mecnūs has been written without its hemze, a mistake that occurs again on fol. 25a but not on fol. 24a.

48. Besides the scribe's customary misspelling of taḥt (see n. 12 above), neither the ʿlu nor the te of baʿdehu is dotted.

49. The word is barely visible and seems merged with a gold rosette.

50. Unlike the others in the list, this baʿdehu is not written in gold.

51. Although the usual transliteration is müteferriḳa, the spelling of the suffix with a kef indicates a thinning of all the preceding vowels.

52. Besides the scribe's customary misspelling of taḥt (see n. 12 above), neither the ʿlu nor the te of baʿdehu is dotted.

53. The word is barely visible and seems merged with a gold rosette.

54. Unlike the others in the list, this baʿdehu is not written in gold.

55. Although the usual transliteration is müteferriḳa, the spelling of the suffix with a kef indicates a thinning of all the preceding vowels.
olundukdan-şoûra kîmine müteferrikelik ve kîmine ça-
vuşûk ve kîmine bevvâblick52 ihsânû şaîda olunmuş-
dûr. Ḥâkkû sübhânêhû ve te ’alà âhzâretleri pâdişâh-î
kâmgâr âhzâretlerinûn vûcûd-‘i izizz-âlûdlûnlûn hâtâ vû
hûtûrlûdûndan maşûn u mahuﬁz eyelle, âmîn yû Mu’în.
[27b]
Gûnden âzbaru enver belki bu mertebê ihsânûn
’sûr-‘i ‘aşîri olmûduçi emr-î muhaﬂakk u mukkar
olûndûndan mà’adà kâlem-î şikistle-zebân ule térûm ü
tahûr belki lisan-û faşiûl-î beyân ile takûr ü tu ’bîr emr-
mûhûl olûnd gûnden ‘ayûn u beyân idûğî eerbûb-‘î ‘ukûl u
fuheîl nûmâyûndur. [28a] Ve câmî-‘i şerûfûn maşûrûn
hûr u sêfûl olûnûn âçê cúmle nûzîr-î mûşûrûn ileyh
âhzâretleri sultân-‘i ‘aliyûl ‘z-ûtûn emr-î şerûfe-îleri ile
nezaret-‘i alîyiyeleri hêsebiyle tahsûl û eyledûklûleri âçê
olûn min-ba’d hâmize-î âmûrêdên bir âçê ve bir hâmû
maşûrûn-‘i şerûf-‘î ‘uri hûr u sêfûl [...?]53 [28b] bi-
‘ûrûmît-î Seyyîdîl-’Mûrselin Beyt: “Sa’y ü küşişler idûb
pâdişûhûn câmî’ine / Cûn u bûşûlî calschî dimedi sùbû
me supra54 mûzûmûn üze hâkkû ki nûzîr-î mûşûrûn ileyh
âhzâretlerinûn câmî-‘i şerûfe eyledûjî hîdmeti bir kûl
efendisine îmezmedûjî ma’lûm-î cumhû hûdû û beyên-
nûs mehûm u mehûrdûr. [28.1a]55 Lûkîn sultân-1
‘alîşan âhzâretlerinûn dahi nûzîr-î mûmû ileyh
hûr zâretleri ber-mücebî-î emr-î sultânî nezaret-1
alîyiyeleri hêsebiyle ve câmî-‘i merûmûnda ûtûklûleri
hîdmet mukebâlesenîde ûtûklûleri ihsân-1 firâvûn ve elât-1

52. The initial be is not dotted.
53. The sentence as written is incomplete and requires a word
such as olumnamûsûr, which, curiously, occurs in the cor-
responding position of the next folio, where it sits rather un-
comfortably in the text (see n. 56 below). This apparent
omission or transposition is probably the result of scribal
error, though it is also possible that there is a lacuna of two
facing pages in the photocopy following fol. 28a. None of
the folio numbers between 28 and 32 can be clearly read,
and to complicate matters further, it is at this point in the
manuscript that the foliation falls out of sequence (see n.
55 below). If the photocopy does indeed skip a two-page
opening, then the manuscript contains two unnumbered
(or misnumbered) folios between 28a and 32a, and not just
one as I have indicated in my own numbering.

54. The couplet is from the second qasida (fol. 41b).
55. The photocopy shows no discernable folio number, and
although we would expect it to be 29, I have assigned this
figure instead to the next folio, whose partially legible
number clearly starts with a 2. Indeed, later folios with leg-
able numbers prove that a leaf between folios 28 and 32 has
accidentally been passed over in the sequence, and so the
present folio is here reckoned as 28.1. See also n. 53 above.
56. The word olumnamûsûr follows on strangely from
îmzedûjî, resulting in an unusual double negative. See also
n. 53 above.
57. A second re is erroneously written at the end of the word.
58. The ûzûfet is indicated with a kesre, but the compound
should be ’arş-’âşiyân.


Bundan-sohra yine padişâh-ı ‘alempenâh hażretleri [34a] mu kademâ câmi‘i-şerifin kubbesini baglandıkda ‘ulemlä-yi kıbarûn cümlesine in’am u ihşan buyurub sığırına daḥi şadaqa vu ihşan murad buyurduqlarında sûr-i hümâyûnda fermân olacaq63 nevbet-i ʿİmâret eyledüñ ḥaḳḳâ müzeyyen cāmi‘i mezburda ʿizz ü şevketle serîr-i salṭanat üzre pâdişâh-ı ‘âlempenâh hazretlerinüñ cāmi‘i-şerifeyi daḫi olubdur Ka‘be-i ʿaḥmûd Maḥmûd Efendi, 102–4; and nn. 14, 68, and 70 of Türk Edebiyatında Şehr-engizler evend, 103.

62. The words Muḥmûd Efendi appear latterly added by the scribe, who has here written them in miniscule super-script.
63. As pointed out to me by Edhem Eldem, the word was probably supposed to be olıcaq, equivalent to modern olanca.
64. While perfectly legible, this (compound) word, which is written without vocalization, corresponds to nothing I have found in the dictionaries. Edhem Eldem suggested to me that it is a misspelling of pur-giṭî, with the meaning of “full of fortune,” though it would be unusual for giṭî to form the first element of a compound. Regardless of how the word should be read, its intended meaning is surely close to that proposed by Professor Eldem.
65. The re appears mistakenly dotted.
66. The word was originally (and unnecessarily) suffixed with a –de, which has been scraped away to a faint vestige.
Letâfetinde hemân bir serv-i sim-endama dönmişdür

[36b] Der ü divân zeyn olmuş mücadele mermer-i zibâ

Olbudur gülsen-i cennet yeşil mermer direklerle
Kim anuñ her sütümi oldı şanasın bir serv-i bâla

İçinde var sütümi ağrı altañ diğer [sic]70 anuñ
Toludur iç ve taşı summâtki mermer-i ra’nâ

Veli mir’at-ı İskender olbudur câm-ı billûri
Yanan kandillerin yer yer gören direnir kes şehlâ

[37a] Gelüb ol halet-i vecde kemerler yeledi secde
Müdevver kubb-i a’zam şedef içredür yektâ

İder mihrâbına ’alem ’ibâdet Ka’be-veş anuñ
Teveccih itmeýince aña şahîh olmağ zalât aşlâ

’Aceb bir serv-i ra’nâdur çeküb kadının cenâr-âsâ
Münâkâş minberin güyâ şansûn sitre-i ’alâ

Mağamuñ cämî’ içre söyle ‘âli ma’bed olmuş kim
Hemân bir ksañ-ı zibâdur içinde cennetüñ güyâ

Muraşsa’ tob u kandiller konulmuş anda yer yer kim
Kamaş gözleri halkuñ baêlmaz afitâb-âsâ

Mu’allah mahfilin gör kim okyan hüb71 haﬁzlar
Veli dürr-i yetmîrlerdür içine alumnos şedef-âsâ

’Aceb ol kubb-i beyzâ müşâbîh dürr-i yektâyâ
Dümîşler aña “Şâdîrvân72 revân ol selsebil-âsâ”

[36b] Şanasın ravzâ-1 cennet içinde ol säkî-i Kevser
İder ab-1 zülâlinden kamû’ atşâni ol iskâ

Akan ab-1 zülâlî şan nesim-i ’1tr-1 päki hem
Shaﬁ-ya çeşme-i Kevser havâ-yâ Cennetü’l-Me’vâ

Du’a eyler el açub şeş menâre devlet-i şâha
Daﬁ beş vaqt için eyler kamû mü’minlere inbâ

Oksunsûn dâr-1 kurrâda niçe yıl ayet-i Râhân

[38b] Odur ta’lîm-i Kur’ân’a cihânda mevzî-1 karrâ

Daﬁ dârü’l-hadisüñde ahadis naqîl olunduqca
İcârdan ol ruh-ı pâk-i muṣṭafâ iḥyâ

Dinüldi medreseñ içre ’ulûm-ı ’âliyye dersi
Muḥaṣṣal eyledüñ hakkı aṭrîq-i ’ilmi sen iḥyâ

zuhrâl mürdeler dârü’ş-şifâda tâze cân buldı
cyâhanda eyledüñ āb-ı ḥayât aḥkâmını icrâ

[39a] Tamâmın Haḳḳ mübârek eylesün Hân Ahmed’e
dâyım
Yapilsun devr-i ’adîninde bunuñ gibi niçe meşvâ

Muḥaṣṣal bir eser kodî cihânda Hân Ahmed kim
Hezârân devr ide eflâk nazîri olmaya peydâ

Recâmâz budur Haḳḳ’dan o sultan-1 cihân-bânûn
İde tâ haşre dek bâkî kamû hayârâtuni ibkâ

Veli fermân-1 sultanla aña nâzir olan âa
Şâdâkatle emânetle nezâret eyledi haṭâ73

[39b] Müfettiş gel dirâz itme du’aeya başla sultâna
İdegör ’ömrüñ olduñça du’a-yi devletin icrâ

Hûdâ ’ömrün mezîdsün ki olsun ḫıfz u âmánda
Serî-i ’izz ü devletde güni günden ola a’lâ

Tamâm-1 cămi’iñ gördüm çiç Sultân Ahmed’üñ oldum
Didîm târîh te’âla’l-lâh zehi bir cămi-i a’lâ

The only standard word to which this corresponds is diker, but this is clearly not the intended reading. We are dealing instead with a variant or erroneous spelling of değer (连载), as proved by the occurrence of the expression ağrı altañ değer in other poetic works; see Cemâl Kurnaz, Divan Edebiyatı Yazıları (Ankara: Akçağ, 1997), 215 and Vildan Serdaroğlu, Sosyal Hayat İşığında Zâtî Divanı (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2006), 146. The couplet as a whole is very similar to one describing the Hagia Sophia by Taşkocalı Yahya (see n. 65 above); Vardur anda nice summâtki sütün / Kâymerî oldu ağrı altañ (Levent, Türk Edebiyatında Şehr- engizleri, 103).

The dot of the ha has accidentally been omitted.

It seems the scribe initially omitted this line in error, as it is written in the lower margin, giving the page eight lines instead of the usual seven.

Veli fermân-ı sultanla aña nâzir olan âa
Şâdâkatle emânetle nezâret eyledi haṭâ73

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Sene 1026

[40a] Nāẓır-ı cāmi‘-i şerif Dārü’s-Sa‘ādetü’ş-şerife aşısı el-Ḥāc Muṣṭafā Ağa hażretlerine cāmi‘-i sulṭān itmāmında virilen kaşidedür:

Evelė haṃd ü şenā Ḥālik-ı biçuna sezā
Oldurur cümləmüzə eyleyen eltāf u ‘atā
Şaniyā ola şəlāt Âḫmed-ı Muḥtār’a kim ol
Cümle ‘aşiyə şefi’ ola gerek rūz-ı cəzə

Ṣəlişə ola seləm aline aşıhənə kim
[40b] Gitdiler emr-i şerif üzre trəf bərə hūdə
Ba‘de’zān Hażret-i Sulṭān-ı Cihān Âḫmed Hān
Ya‘nī kim trət şər‘at yolənı buldı bekə
Diseler ləyik aňa cāmi‘-i həyrət-ı ‘ələm
Ki-eyledi rūy-ı zəm-in-ə niçe həyrət ibyə

Cümleden eyledi bir cāmi‘-i ləmi’ haqka
Vaşf u taşvirin anuñ imedi kımse peydə

[41a] Şoł-şədar zinət ü fer vərdi nüküş-ı ezhər
Oldı hər bir țarafı gūșə-i cennət-əsə

Haqka budur böylece bir cāmi‘-i zibə-yl latif
Görmedi vəkərəsənda ne Cem u ne Dərə
ger anuñ haşl-ı cihān ola eger vəşsafi
Diyeər kəbili təbir deqəl haqk-ı edə

Nişun olmaya muşanna’ daşi mevzün cāmi’?
[41b] Aňa nəzər əla ol şəhəbi tedbir ağa

Eyledi haşbī nezəret idüben sa’y-ı cemil
İstikäməte uşın bașa çıktərə haqkə

Sə’y ü kūşişler idüb pədişəhən cāmi’-ine
Cən u başıyla qalışi dimedi şubğ u mesə

Niyyet-ı haşşəna şahid-ı âdildür kim
Cümle müşküllerini eyledi həll Bär-Hüdə

[42a] Dünyevi vəi ührevi ol şəhəbi lutf u keremünn
Eyledi Hażret-ı Haqk cümlə murədəni edə

Lutf idüb Hażret-ı Haqq kıldır taməmən tevfik
Baglaşı kəbbee-i ‘uluyəni şikən sa’yə 74

Çün taməm eyledi ol pədişəhən cəmi’-ini
Eyleli da’vet idüb da’vetinii kıldır revə

Didi-kih[Pə] “Pədişəhəm ‘izzət ü ikrəmlə buyur
[42b] İdiiñiz farz u nevifini [sic] 75 be-ġün anda edə”

Çıktı devletle sarayından o dem şəh-ı cihān
Ṭoğı‘də həvrə-şəmil vərdi cihən içəri şiyə

cümleden eyleli cəmi’-inə cənət ü əkramla buyur
didi-kım "pədişəhəm əzət ü ikrəmə buyur

Cómo devletle sarayından o dem șəh-ı cihān
Ṭoğ‘də həvrə-şəmil vərdi cihən içəri şiyə

Niyyet-i haşşənə şahid-i âdildür kim
Cümle müşküllerini eyleli həll Bär-Hüdə

74. Though the final word is provided with nunation, which would ordinarily give the pronunciation sa’yən, the rhyme dictates the pausal reading. The subject of the couplet shifts from God to Mustafa Agha.

75. Neviﬁl is a misspelling of neviﬁl.

76. The phrase o dem has been added in small script over oldı.

77. See n. 21 above.
History of the Construction of the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I / History of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

Boundless high praise and endless best thanks to the court of that Knower of secrets and mysteries and Commander of saints and good men, the Omnipotent Creator and Beneficent Nourisher [God], may His glory be exalted and His favor spread! [1a] It is deserving and

78. The word has been superscribed.

79. It is not entirely clear when the voice switches from that of the petitioning public to that of the poet; I have taken the end of this couplet as a likely juncture.

80. The nunated pronunciation would be "hasenä." See n. 74 above.

81. Though unnecessary (the usual compound is "Bär-Ḫüdā"), the "ızafet" is indicated with a kesre.

82. The nunated pronunciation would be "ebeden." See n. 74 above. As mentioned in the main text of the present article, the final folios of the manuscript are inscribed with a religious tract that is unrelated to (and written in a far rougher hand than) the Tarih. Its subject is the sinfulness of working on Fridays, a topic perhaps inspired by the Tarih's pietistic eulogizing of the mosque. The language used is archaic, which suggests that the tract was written not long after the manuscript's original date of production. What follows is a transliteration of this text, the remainder of which is cut off in the photocopy but presumably ends on fol. 47b. Because of the tract's tangential nature, I have not provided a translation of it. [46a] Rivayetdür: Peygamberde [sic]—"ṣalla'lḥa'ū—'aleyi th sellem—sordar cem'i günü ise ışleyenin 'azabî nahr didiler. Resal Ḥazret buyurdu-kim Allāhû te'alâ va'de eyledi cem'i günü ise ışeyleyen de on-i dürlü 'azabî vârdr. Üc dünyâda ve a'yretede ve a'yretede ve üçi âyetinde ve üçi kâbirinde ve üçi kýâmetede. Evvel üc-kim dünyâdadur evveli gibiildir. Ya'ni kazanduğun harândur mürdûrdur olmus gibiildir. İkinci ol kazanduğun aḵedên yirse Allāhû te'alâ namâzn kabûl eylemez mâyâmîki ol te'am kûnmdadur. Üçinci Peygamber—'aleyi's-selâm—hâdisîne buyurd: Izy lebise seben min kesbi yevmî'l-Cum'a la yakbelu'lḥa'û mínâhî ve lâ 'adlâ/ʿadûlâ; ya'ni cem'i qiz qazansa [46b] ol aḵçe'i kaftanda virse dahi ol kaftanı güysî cem'iye varsa Allāhû te'alâ hîç bir vechile kabûl eylemez. Ammâ ol üç-kim olįm vaḵtindedür evveli a'yretê imânsa gîde olîmiy sarşofigûla şeytan üzerinde qalîb ola ikinci 'Azrâ'îl cûnu alâm'da kaḵmoqala ala ve ol üç-kim kâbirledêr Münker ve Nekîr sa'âli ńışımlê [sic] şora ikincisini şore kâzaz kim şag eğiisi sol eğiisiçe şec încisinişî kurq gülûda ola ve ol üç-kim aḵrededîr evveli oldûr kim günânda kopdûqâ vaḵtîn kâfîr ile to'nuz sûretine kopa ikinci ęsâb olmâdên Cenhennê gîde [47a] ikinci Allâhû te'alâ ḳamara [sic] i̇ğrâya Hażret-i 'Ali—ra'dîya'llâhî 'anî—râvîyet ider her kim cem'i günü ise ışleye mûnâfık dêr mê'ândur. Ol Tangî haḵkąyçin kim benîm nefsîm anûn kuşret elîndedûr cem'i günü ise işlêne [sic] ı̇ kýâmet gündine benîm sefâ'âtım bûlmaya ben arâ sefâ'ât it'meyem ve daĥî buyurdur her kim cem'i günü is ışleye ol kısi-kim benîm ümûmîm deedülî dêrêzî ki cem'i günü şerîf gündür. Dünyâ 'amelinê terk îmek gerekûdêr ve daĥî şol Adem oğlunu ki cem'i günü bir şêkâtêt iş îşlese ol benî evde yelmsû gibiildir her kim benî evde yûşka cehennem [...] See n. 1 above. See n. 2 above.
worthy of mention that He created the whole cosmos—wondrous of composition—and all the universe—marvelous of disposition—by His favorable and perfect command and His influential and complete might, and—without break or defect—by His matchless and peerless sublime dictate. Above all, He engendered the Sons of Adam by His pleasant will [ib] and consummate wisdom, in a manner most beautiful, and He rendered the bestowing of foundations and alms by the pious rich upon the poor and destitute a means by which to enter the highest heavens, wherein, at the stations of His dominion, the otherworldly minds of those excellent in life came to halt and be dazzled, and where, among the manifestations of His heavenly kingdom, those who became cognizant of even one modicum of [5a]85 His mysteries were left bewildered and amazed. We praise He for the abundance of His pure favor, admitting [our] weakness and shortcoming, and we thank Him for the amplitude of His excellent kindnesses, scooping them up from the ocean of his glorious world.

And limitless prayers and endless salutations be upon that Messenger of the two races [humankind and the jinn], that mercy of the highest heavens, wherein, at the stations of His dominion, the otherworldly minds of those excellent in life came to halt and be dazzled, and where, among the manifestations of His heavenly kingdom, those who became cognizant of even one modicum of [5a]85 His mysteries were left bewildered and amazed. We praise He for the abundance of His pure favor, admitting [our] weakness and shortcoming, and we thank Him for the amplitude of His excellent kindnesses, scooping them up from the ocean of his glorious world.

And limitless prayers and endless salutations be upon that Messenger of the two races [humankind and the jinn], that mercy of the highest heavens, wherein, at the stations of His dominion, the otherworldly minds of those excellent in life came to halt and be dazzled, and where, among the manifestations of His heavenly kingdom, those who became cognizant of even one modicum of [5a]85 His mysteries were left bewildered and amazed. We praise He for the abundance of His pure favor, admitting [our] weakness and shortcoming, and we thank Him for the amplitude of His excellent kindnesses, scooping them up from the ocean of his glorious world.

Next: [Blessings be upon] that king of the kings of the world, that heroic vanquisher of mortals, that protector of Muslims and Monotheists and slanderer of pagans and heretics, that possessor of wise viziers [7a] and benefactor of army-holding commanders, that patron of scholars and luminaries and succor of the righteous and the needy, that favorer of the most blessed lords of mankind [the descendants of the Prophet], the Shadow of God and the caliph of the world and of the age, by which I mean Sultan Ahmed Khan, son of Sultan Mehmed Khan, may God Almighty [7b] eternize his rule and perpetuate his sultanate till the revolutions [of the ages] cease and time ends, if God the All-Merciful thus wills. *Couplets: O God, make this young emperor / Happy in the garden of life. // Make Khidr and Elijah on sea and land / Time and again his companions.88 // Make his progeny on kingship’s throne / Firm till the Day of Judgment. // Make his army ever victorious / And his enemy abject and low. // And no prayer can be better than this, O God: / Make him ever-present on the throne of justice.89*

Next: On the face of the earth and in the highest heaven,90 in the exalted and well-protected capital Constantinople—may it never cease to be filled with the favors of the Lord of Creation—did His Majesty Sultan Ahmed Khan—may God perpetuate his reign till Judgment Day—[2b] initiate the building [of a mosque]91 in a gladdening and heartening place known as the pleasure-rich Hippodrome on the eighth day of the noble month of Shawwal of [the year] 1178 [January 3, 1660];92 [3a] and he appointed as superintendent [nāẓir] over the building of this aforesaid mosque the then and present honorable and prosperous chief eunuch of the es-

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85. See n. 6 above.
86. It was fortunate for Sultan Ahmed that he shared one of the Prophet’s names, an overlap that adds to the resonance of the text.
87. See n. 9 above.
89. See n. 13 above.
90. It is unclear whether this evocation of a heavenly status refers to Istanbul in general or Ahmed’s mosque in particular. Either reading seems plausible, and I have kept my translation suitably open-ended.
91. See n. 18 above.
92. This is the date on which the first stones of the qibla wall were laid, as discussed in the main text of this article.
teemed imperial harem and graceful royal palace, the toast of possessors of honor and dignity, the trustee of kings and sultans, friend [3b] to exalted imperial majesty and companion to highest eternal prosperity, superintendent of the pious foundations of the Two Holy Places [Mecca and Medina], that is to say, him who is elevated among the two races, His Excellency Hajji Mustafa Agha, may the Lord God preserve him. [4a] Thereafter, on the fourth day of Jumada II of the year 1026 [June 8, 1617]—which was a Thursday—the completion of the light-filled mosque was facilitated and ensured by the aid of the Lord God Almighty, in keeping with the trustworthy hadith “God gives His blessings on Saturday and Thursday.”93 And several days before it came time to close the exalted dome, [4b] His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent—long may he live—was ordered to set up a place for the sultan of the seven climes in the mosque’s honorable courtyard, whereupon the faithful superintendent, in accordance with the imperial command, pitched that heavenly tent [8a]—whose azure cupola reached the sky and whose golden finial shone upon the world—in that graceful and noble location, as befitting Ottoman law and imperial custom; and he had curtains of cloth of gold and silver hung all around it, completing the imperial tent as well as one could wish. [8b] Thereafter, in fulfilment of the sultan’s decree and because of his selfless supervision, the aforesaid superintendent—long may he live—from dawn to late morning lined both sides of the sultanic road—[9a] from the gate of the privy chamber of the imperial palace to the exalted tent that had been erected at the noble mosque—with variegated cloths of gold and silver and tricolor silk, with diverse fabrics and brocades of iridescent beauty, in keeping with the couplet “From his honored harem to that emperor’s mosque / Did he line all his path with brocades gold and silver”;94 [9b] and, in accordance with custom and decorum, [these cloths] were held by several hundred [palace] doorkeepers. And as the people of the world awaited the noble arrival of the illustrious sultan—may the All-Bounteous King [God] preserve him—[10a] His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent—long may he live—[equipped a horse] with bedecked saddles and tasseled maces, a gilt bridle and bridle, an unmatch horsecloth, a crystal mace, and bejeweled stirrups to host the feet; in short, he saddled a most noble steed—fast as the wind and dripping with gold and ornament—[10b] at the imperial tent and, preceded by all his servants, brought it with full honor to the Gate of Felicity, where he handed it to the chief equerry. Couplets: It was, to be sure, outwardly a horse, but in essence / Formed of pearls, rubies, and diamonds. // [11a] So decked was it in jewels that its glitter / Flashing like day and illuminated the world. // No one on earth had in truth ever fashioned / Such jeweled trappings as these, until the agha did so.95

Thereafter, to prepare for his invitation to the noble mosque, His Majesty the Sultan of the World graciously appointed as his representative the then and present [11b] grand vizier and illustrious field marshal, His Excellency Halil Pasha, possessor of exalted might, trailer of the skirts of unattainable dignity, font of good works and kindnesses, mine of virtues, and recipient of glorious favors; and [the sultan] bade him return to the imperial tent with his honorable servants. [12a] His Enlightened Excellency the Vizier then awaited a propitious hour to invite that cheer-spreading sultan and world-nourishing emperor, watching the ascent of the beautiful sun as it illumined the world of the magnanimous emperor; [12b] and when it reached the propitious hour, he invited His Blessed Majesty the Sultan to grace the noble mosque with his presence, whereupon the emperor graciously presented His Honorable Excellency the Vizier with sumptuous robes of honor, one sable-lined and one plain. After he had worn them, [13a]

93. The hadith as written is far from trustworthy: I have not found it in the usual compendia, and its use appears to have been overwhelmingly limited to the Ottoman sphere. For other instances of it, see Belkıs Altuniş-Gürsoy, “Amedi Galib Efendi Sefaretnamesi,” Erdem 9, no. 27 (1997): 930; Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatname, 4162, translated into English in Evliya Çelebi, Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname, trans. and ed. Robert Dankoff (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 329; and Hazim Šabanović, “Hasan Kafi Pruščak,” Prilozi za orijentalsku filologiju = Revue de philologie oriental 50 (2002): 67247, whose translation I have adapted. That Thursday is esteemed in God’s eyes is, however, an established tradition: see G. H. A. Juynboll, Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 628.

94. See n. 21 above.

95. See n. 26 above.
at the happy and glad hour, His Most Mighty Majesty the 
Emperor—accompanied by his worthy and fortunate 
sons, two flourishing princes who were the apples of 
his imperial eye and the fruits of his prosperous lineage— 
emerged from the glorious imperial palace, his counte-
nance appearing from the lofty and exalted vault[FN 96] like 
the luminous sun as it rises in exaltation;[13b] and in 
acceptance of the invitation, the sultan drew towards 
his noble mosque in state and glory. And in accordance 
with the couplets "Whenas the sultan turned to his 
mosque, / The agha that moment brought that Dudul-
like horse,"[97] / When the world's emperor then mounted 
his horse] in state, / [14a] All his viziers and command-
ers set out before him,"[98] the glorious and prosperous 
emperor mounted the wind-swift horse and, with the 
two flourishing princes, saluted the soldiers of Islam; 
and as he came [to the mosque], the populace, the 
cavalry and janissaries, and all the ruthless [foreign] ambas-
adors were prepared and ready to view the sultan, [14b] 
and they viewed him avidly while praying for the long 
reign of His Exalted Majesty the Sultan, who went with 
pomp and glory towards the heaven-high tent. Verily 
was it a wind-swift steed whose legs were monuments 
to glory and prosperity,[99] and whose giraffe-like hooves 
were shod[15a] with the 
coins.[100][15b] And in keeping with the hemistich: The 
goldsmith knows the worth of gold, the jeweler the worth 
of jewels,[101] it is a matter certain and true, agreed by all 
everywhere, that a knowledgeable appraiser would 
equate the value of the bejeweled and encrusted trap-
pings—the like of which no sultan past had attained—
with the taxes of Rum.[16a] Indeed, such is the case that 
mystics would consider it impossible for the winds of 
fortune to bring [again] the like or equal [of the trap-
pings], even were the firmament to rotate a hundred 
times.

Thereafter, His Majesty the Sultan of the World and 
his two flourishing princes reached the august imperial 
tent[16b] and wished to enter, whereat the flourishing 
princes dismounted first; and the auspicious emperor 
was escorted by His Excellency the aforesaid super-
intendent to a splendid bejeweled throne—variegated 
with diverse gemstones—that had been placed inside 
the portico of the tent, [17a] and he sat upon it. Couplets: 
That emperor came in state to the mosque in early 
morn, / As all his slaves applauded and prayed. // They 
said, “Blessed be the mosque, my Emperor, / May you 
perform your devotions therein for a thousand years!”[102]

Then, in preparation for the saying of prayers at the 
closing of the noble mosque's exalted dome, [17b] the 
august emperor called His Excellency Mahmud [Hüdá-
yi] Efendi, saint of the age and dweller in holiness, con-
duit of the Lord God's kindness; and when he came, [the 
sultan] granted the said saint a sumptuous sable-lined 
robe of honor, after which [the sultan] favored other 
mendicants and dervishes—the saint's followers—
[18a] with sumptuous robes befitting their condition. 
Then, the sultan commanded that the said saint, togeth-
er with all the viziers, distinguished ulema, and the 
building superintendent, should climb and close the 

[96] This is presumably a reference to the palace gate or, synec-
dochically, to the palace itself.
[97] Dudul was the Prophet Muhammad's mule.
[98] See n. 30 above.
[99] It is difficult to translate devā‘īm, here rendered "monu-
ments," more faithfully or definitively: the word is unat-
tested and appears to be an ad hoc pluralization of dā’īm 
(see n. 31 above), an active participle that means "perpet-
ual" and does not usually function as a noun.
[100] This is rather more than the 50,000 gold coins (zec-
chinii) estimated by the bailo Nani; see p. 287 of the main 
article.
[101] The hemistich forms the first part of a Persian couplet 
whose second half (see n. 33 above) translates, "The night-
ingale [knows] the worth of a flower, Ali [b. Abi Talib] the 
worth of [his slave] Qanbar." This poem, whose origin I 
have not been able to determine, enjoyed fairly wide cur-
rency in Persianate literary culture, with the first hemistich 
only isolated and used proverbially, as it is in the Tarīh. 
See Taṭŷār-zade Aḥmed ʿAta, Osmanlı Saray Tarhı: Tarḥ-i 
Enderûn, ed. Mehmet Arslan, 5 vols. (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 
2010), 2218; M. L. Banner, ed., Everybody's Hand-book of 
Proverbs (Allahabad, 1893), 67; and Thomas Roebuck, trans. 
and ed., A Collection of Proverbs, and Proverbial Phrases, in 
the Persian and Hindoostanee Languages (Calcutta: Printed 
at the Hindoostanee Press, 1824), 317, no. 1602.
[102] See n. 37 above. There is a discrepancy between the 
time stated for the sultan's procession (early morning) and the 
timeframe given for Mustafa Agha's preparation of the 
route (dawn to late morning).
lofty dome with prayer and eulogy. And in compliance with the illustrious command, they—His Excellency Mahmud Efendi, all the viziers, the grand mufti, the two chief military judges, the chief eunuch, and the chief treasurer—ascended that exalted dome while, inside and outside the mosque, all the rest of the ulema and the righteous and the sayyids and the mendicants opened their hands in prayers with a thousand supplications and entreaties, in keeping with the couplet: When devotions were performed in the mosque of the heavens / The [celestial] lotus tree opened the hand of supplication in prayer—and they all prayed and eulogized until the lofty dome was closed and completed, some of them reciting the Holy Koran, others saying gracious prayers for the blessed Muhammad Mustafa—the best of prayers be upon him—and still others glorifying God and professing His oneness.

After those aforementioned had closed the dome and descended, the sultan decreed that the aforesaid saint—in accordance with the couplet: Come, O Preacher, and give us counsel and advice, / And guide us to the path of righteousness—should embark on a sermon to advise the faithful Muslims present at the mosque; and upon the issuance of that sultanic command, the aforesaid saint readied himself to preach and counsel in a pleasing manner. The august emperor, meanwhile, prepared with humility and reverence for the preacher's assembly, and with insightful vision did he witness the faithful words of the revered saint, who conveyed and explicated the noble divine scripture and the pleasing traditions of God's beloved [the Prophet Muhammad], as commanded by God, the All-Knowing Helper. When the sermon ended, the illustrious emperor, whom it pleased to the highest degree, requested the good prayers of the aforementioned saint, whereupon the said saint raised his hands in prayer with a thousand supplications and devotions, and all the Muslims said amen; and with the aid of God, the Lord and Helper, their prayers were favorably accepted. Then, the sultan commanded that precious robes of honor be conferred on all the viziers, the ulema and righteous, and the dignitaries and mendicants—high and low—who were present in that mosque, and in accordance with the glorious order, His Excellency the Grand Vizier Halil Pasha was at that moment granted a splendid sable-lined robe, in keeping with the couplet: May the emperor of the world favor and honor that slave of his, / Would that he show him such grace and favor as he deserves. And the other great viziers, honorable ulema, members of the council, dignitaries, imams, preachers, righteous individuals, and most blessed sayyids were in due order likewise granted their share of sultanic robes, gratifying their wishes.

When the most dignified emperor ascended the commanding throne that had been placed in the glorious pavilion adjoining his exalted mosque, splendid robes of honor were given even to all the following: first, the inspector of pious foundations, who is most favored among the state ulema; and second, the chief architect, the building supervisor, others servants and trustees of the construction, eremitic shaykhs, and the two congregational imams. They then had the honor of kissing the auspicious sultanic hand, and they said prayers for the continuation of the emperor's reign and for the increase of his life and glory.

After this, the glorious emperor sat on the variously bejeweled and colorfully encrusted throne of exalted fortune that had been placed inside the illustrious imperial tent, and his compelling decree was as follows: "Let all the viziers, ulema, commanders, members of the council, and men of rank kiss my auspicious hand as their honorable predecessors have on the Noble Eids," whereupon first the chief of the Prophet's descendants and second the tutor of the flourishing princes kissed [his] hand and prayed for the imperial state, after whom followed members of the council, namely all the

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103. The word fukan can also be understood to mean the poor more generally, but the text goes on to say that these individuals were given robes of honor, which suggests that we are dealing with dervishes.

104. See n. 39 above. The lotus (or lote) tree in question is the Sidrat al-Muntahā, which marks the boundary of the seventh heaven: see A. Rippin, “Sidrat al-Muntahā,” in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2002).

105. See n. 43 above.
chief doorkeepers, the tasters, and the officers; \textit{then} His Excellency the Grand Vizier \([25a]\) and other great viziers; \textit{then} the minister of finance; \textit{then}\textsuperscript{108} the jurist of mankind, His Eminence the Grand Mufti; \textit{then} other honorable ulema; and they performed the ancient custom and great rite of humbly kissing the auspicious hand \([\text{of the sultan}], \text{at the same time praying for the continuance of the emperor's life and state and appealing for the perpetuity of his power and prosperity.} \textsuperscript{[25b]} \]

\textit{Then}, when the gracious sultan returned in state with the flourishing princes to his glorious palace, the viziers, ministers, and dignitaries of the council set out, as earlier, before him; and once they had reached and entered his sacrosanct palace, \([26a]\) a bejeweled dagger, a bejeweled khanjar, two sable-lined robes of honor, three sumptuous plain robes of honor, a purse of gold coins of full carat, five purses of piasters, and limitless shiny aspers were granted by royal decree to His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent—long may he live—on account of his selfless superintendence and in reward for the service he had given the noble mosque. \([26b]\) After he had received boundless and innumerable royal favors, fifteen of his slaves were \([\text{also}]\) rewarded, some with the rank of halberdier, others with that of officer, and others still with that of cavalryman or doorkeeper. Then, each of those who had served \([\text{in creating}]\) the aforesaid mosque \([27a]\) was granted a sumptuous robe of honor, with some being honored with the rank of officer, some that of halberdier, and others that of doorkeeper. May God Almighty—Glory be to Him—preserve and protect from sin and danger the glorious person of His Most Mighty Majesty the Emperor! Amen, O Helper! \([27b]\)

It is clearer and brighter than day—and a matter of doubtless certainty—that not a tenth of a tenth of such generosity had been seen before. Moreover, neither a faltering pen nor indeed an eloquent tongue are capable of describing it, as is clearer than day to men of intelligence and excellence. \([28a]\) And the aspers spent on the expenses of the noble mosque were all those that His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent had acquired by the noble command of the sublime sultan on account of his exalted superintendence, and \([\text{not}]\) a penny from the imperial \([\text{public}]\) treasury was thereafter spent on the expenses of the noble mosque. \([\text{[…]}]\)\textsuperscript{109} \([28b]\) By the honor of the Lord of Prophets \([\text{Muhammad}]\), and in keeping with the \textit{couplet} “He exerted himself with zeal for the emperor’s mosque, \(\text{// Working with heart and soul, whether morning or evening,}^{110}\) verify the service that His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent rendered at the noble mosque had never been given by any slave to his master, as is general and widespread knowledge among the people. \([28.1a]\)\textsuperscript{111} But \([\text{likewise}]\) none of the earlier sultans had shown a slave of his such abundant favor and limitless grace as His Illustrious Majesty the Sultan \([\text{Ahmed}]\) ordered to be shown to His Excellency the aforesaid superintendent on account of his exalted superintendence and in reward for the service he gave to the aforementioned mosque. \([28.1b]\) Truly were \([\text{his}]\) service and integrity such that it is fitting that he should receive \([\text{so many}]\) favors from the mighty emperor in reward for his service, and likewise apt if the service he diligently rendered at the noble mosque and the abundant good prayers he said for the world-sheltering emperor should earn the bountiful reward of God the Illustrious King \([29a]\) and secure his place in paradise. And may God the All-Powerful King, Who facilitates and predestines, daily increase and make more abundant the life and state of His Majesty the Emperor, refuge of the world! Amen O Helper, by the honor of Muhammad the Trustworthy. Truly was that day such an auspicious holiday that \([29b]\) the people of the world were thus adorned and ornamented with various sumptuous robes of honor, and those in the highest heaven at the foot of the divine throne and the houris and youths in exalted paradise danced with joy and delight. And the people of the world sweated with embarrassment at the selfless favor that the mighty emperor had shown them. \([30a]\)

Furthermore, the sultan was watched that day by the ruthless \([\text{foreign}]\) ambassadors who were present at the assembly, and when they—despite having not a trace of faith in their hardened hearts, wherein the devil and rebellion resided—saw the selfless favor that \([30b]\) the magnanimous sultan conferred on the people of the world, together with the good works and pious deeds \[\text{\textsuperscript{108}}\] See n. 50 above. \[\text{\textsuperscript{109}}\] See n. 53 above. \[\text{\textsuperscript{110}}\] See n. 54 above. \[\text{\textsuperscript{111}}\] See n. 55 above.
done in the path of God and the effort and labor exerted in the course of the religion of Muhammad, countless infidels could not help but come to Islam, wherewith they were honored with the glory of Islam [31a] and decked in royal favor. And even the remaining wicked infidels could not help but say countless prayers for the life and state of the mighty and exalted sultan, that he should remain secure and stable on his throne of glory; and so they confirmed as was right the glory and power pertaining to the religion of Muhammad and to the emperor of Islam, [31b] while seeing for certain the ignominy and vengefulness of their [own] false rites; and whether the ambassador of the reprobate Qizilbash [Savafid] or whether Venetian, Fleming, or Frank—they are one scourge alike—all of them were frustrated and confounded, their heads hung in vexation and sadness, and each of them was plunged into utter disgrace. [32a]

And so the people of the world—seeing the favor that the illustrious emperor showed that day to the viziers and commanders, his perfect affection for the ulema and the righteous, his inclination for good works and pious deeds, and his kindness to and compassion for all his subjects—could not help but pray for the preservation of the emperor’s state [32b] and for the continuance of his glory and happiness. To the Muslims’ prayer did all the angels enthroned in the highest heavens say amen, and—God Almighty willing—their glorious prayers have been answered.

Thereafter, [33a] on Friday, the sixteenth day of the month of Sha’ban in the aforementioned year [August 18, 1617], His Majesty the Emperor, refuge of the world, wished for the noble mosque to be opened and for the Friday prayer to be performed [therein], whereupon that chief saint of the age, His Excellency Mahmud Efendi—paradigm among mystics, pillar of learned men, and holy saint of the age—again served as preacher in the aforementioned mosque; [33b] and upon the [sultan’s] command that he first deliver the noble sermon [34a] [Friday sermon], His Excellency Mahmud Efendi, in accordance with the exalted order, first gave the noble sermon and thereafter preached and exhorted in the said mosque. [34b]

After this, His Majesty the Emperor, refuge of the world, [34a], having already bestowed gifts and favors on the distinguished ulema when the dome was closed, [now] wished to grant charity and favors to those ulema of lesser rank also, and when the order was given at the imperial festival, their auspicious [?] turn was called by royal command on the day when the aforementioned mosque was first opened and the Friday prayer performed [therein];[34b] and in this manner, he likewise rendered joyous the desolate hearts of all the lesser ulema, granting them their share and satisfying their desires.

This is the chronogrammed qasida composed for the completion of the noble mosque and given to His Majesty the Emperor, refuge of the world: [35a]

[35a] O Shah! Praise and glory be to Him who is the Lord [God],
To Him belong kindness and benevolence, to Him belong favor and generosity.

To the resplendent pure soul of the Sultan of Creation [Muhammad],
As also to his companions and kinsmen, offer [you all] prayers and salutations.

Because, O Large-Hearted Sultan, you have modeled yourself on him,
You have truly executed the rule of holy law in the world.

Remain firm on the throne of kingship in glory and majesty,
[35b] May the Lord Almighty facilitate your heart’s pleasures.

112. A distinction is being drawn here between the ordinary sermon (waṣṣa, from Arabic waṣṣ) and the khutba, which is reserved for Fridays and holidays.

113. While the overall meaning is clear enough, the passage is rather convoluted and difficult to parse. Moreover, it contains a word that I have not been able to identify and have tentatively translated as “auspicious” (see n. 64 above). I am extremely grateful to Edhem Eldem for helping me navigate the text, though we differ in our interpretation of certain details.

114. See n. 65 above.
Since it is you, O Shah, who in this age encompasses all
good deeds,\textsuperscript{115}
Truly have you built a mosque adorned and beautiful.

Above all, the Flourishing House [Ka'ba] and the city of
God's Prophet [Medina]
Have been reanimated in your time, given honor and
new life.

May your good works find favor in the eyes of God
Almighty,
For your exquisite mosque has become a Paradise of
Refuge in the world.

[36a] What a sublime temple! Its like or counterpart
cannot be found,
For it is a pure spring of piety for the people of faith.

This mosque is a Masjid al-Aqsa for the sake of the
healthy,
And for the poor it is an Exalted Ka'ba.\textsuperscript{116}

With its bejeweled glass, it is a mosque magnificent and
wondrous,
No [other] king has been favored with an exquisite
mosque of this kind.

In elegance it transformed at once into a silvery cypress,
[36b] Its doors and walls are ornamented [with]
beautiful sparkling marble.

With its green marble pillars, it is a heavenly rose garden
Whose every column you would think a high cypress.

Within it are columns worth their weight in gold,
Its inside and outside abound in exquisite porphyry.

Its crystal glass, moreover, is as Alexander's mirror,
Whoever see its lamps lit round about stops and squints
amazed.

[37a] The arches reached ecstasy and prostrated
themselves,
The exalted round dome is unique, engulfed by
mother-of-pearl.\textsuperscript{117}

The world worships before its mihrab as if at the Ka'ba,
Prayer can never be true without turning toward it.

It is a wondrous elegant cypress, soaring like a plane
tree,
You would think its ornamented minbar a high lotus
tree.

So exalted a temple did your [imperial] loge inside the
mosque become
[37b] That it is exactly like a beautiful pavilion in
heaven.

It is dotted with jeweled chandeliers and lamps that,
Sun-like, cannot be looked upon by the people's dazzled
eyes.

See its exalted gallery where the fine memorizers who
recite [the Koran]
Are like singular pearls in a mother-of-pearl shell.

That wondrous white dome is akin to a unique pearl,
They said to it, "O Ablutions Fountain! Flow like a
heavenly spring."

[38a] It is as if that conduit of [the heavenly spring]
Kawthar were in the garden of paradise;
It quenches the thirst of all with its delicious water.

You would think its delicious water and its pure
perfumed breeze
The pureness of the spring of Kawthar and the air of the
Paradise of Refuge.

\textsuperscript{115} Cāmi ʿü'l-hayrāt. The original Ottoman plays richly on the
multiple senses of these words. As well as meaning "that
which collects/unites," cāmi denotes a congregational
mosque, and the word recurs in this capacity in the fol-
lowing hemistich. Hayrāt likewise ranges in meaning from
generic "good things" to "charitable works" and even "pious
foundation."

\textsuperscript{116} See n. 68 above.

\textsuperscript{117} As well as positing the dome as a pearl, this image may
refer to the effect of the lead cladding on the dome's exte-
rior.
The six minarets open their hands in prayer for the sultan’s state,  
And they call all the faithful to the five times [of daily prayer].  

Let holy scripture be read for countless years at the house of [Koran] readers;  
[38b] For the study of the Koran, it is the world’s locus of recitation.

And whenever the traditions [of the Prophet] are related at your college of hadith,  
That pure soul of the Chosen One [Muhammad] is revivified from its source.

Lessons of the exalted [theological] sciences are taught in your madrasa,  
In short, you have truly revived the path of learning.

Thousands of dead have found new life at the hospital,  
You have made the water of life flow in the world.

[39a] May all of it [the complex] be always blessed by the Lord for Ahmed Khan,  
May many like houses be built during his just reign.

In short, Ahmed Khan has placed such a work on the earth  
That should the heavens rotate a thousand times, its like would not appear.

Our plea to the Lord is this: May that world-ruling sultan’s  
Good works all be preserved till Doomsday.

As for the agha who supervised it upon sultanic command,  
Truly did he superintend with devotion and fidelity.

[39b] Come, inspector, tarry not—start praying for the sultan,  
As long as you have life, pray for his prosperity.

God increase his life that it may be preserved and protected,  
May he grow daily more exalted on his throne of power and glory.

When I saw the completion of his mosque, I belonged to Sultan Ahmed;  
I stated the date, God Almighty—what a sublime mosque!

Anno 1026

[40a] This is the qasida given to the superintendent of the noble mosque, the agha of the Noble Abode of Felicity [chief eunuch of the imperial harem], His Excellency Hajji Mustafa Agha, upon the completion of the sultan’s mosque:

First, praise and glory to the Divine Creator are merited;  
He it is who bestows favor and munificence on us all.

Second, let there be prayers for the Chosen Ahmad [Muhammad],  
Who will surely intercede for all sinners on Judgment Day.

Third, salutations be upon his kinsmen and companions,  
[40b] Who, upon [his] noble command, followed the righteous path.

Then, [on] His Majesty the Sultan of the World, Ahmed Khan,  
Who took the road of sacred law, achieving immortality.

Let them say he is worthy of all the good works on earth,  
For he has created so many good works in the world.

Above all, he has built a mosque truly resplendent,  
The description or image of which no one has produced.

[41a] Designs of flowers give [it] so much beauty and luster  
That every part of it is as a corner of heaven.
Indeed, neither Jamshid nor Darius ever dreamt Of a mosque of such graceful elegance.

Should the people of the world attempt to describe it, They would say it is impossible to do it justice.

Why should there not be such a well-proportioned, artful mosque? [41b] May that diligent agha oversee it.

Admirably did he exert himself, supervising without thought of gain, Truly with integrity did he take the job in hand.

He exerted himself with zeal for the emperor's mosque, Working with heart and soul, whether morning or evening.

The just witness to his pure intentions was He Who resolved all his difficulties, the Lord God.

[42a] On earth and in heaven, God Almighty has granted Every wish of that kind and generous man.

Graciously did God Almighty facilitate its completion, He [the agha] closed its high dome with thanks and hard work.

Whenas he completed that emperor's mosque, He invited [the sultan] with a fitting invitation.

He said, "My Emperor, come in glory and honor, [42b] Perform there daily the obligatory and supererogatory [prayers]."

The world's emperor then emerged in state from his palace, Rising like the sun and illuminating the world.

Whenas the sultan turned to his mosque, The agha that moment brought that Duldul-like horse.

It was, to be sure, outwardly a horse, but in essence Formed of pearls, rubies, and diamonds.

[43a] So decked was it in jewels that its glitter Flashed like day and illuminated the world.

No one on earth had in truth ever fashioned Such jeweled trappings as these, until the agha did so.

When the world's emperor then mounted [his horse] in state, All his viziers and commanders set out before him.

From his honored harem to that emperor's mosque [43b] Was his path all lined with brocades gold and silver.119

And he scattered gold and silver along his path, Every pauper found wealth in his generous spirit.

That emperor came in state to the mosque in early morn, As all his slaves applauded and prayed.

They said, "Blessed be the mosque, my Emperor, May you perform your devotions therein for a thousand years.

[44a] "May the Lord Almighty grant your every desire, May you create many glorious buildings like this.

"May your good work please God's court, May you be rewarded, O Emperor, in both worlds."

They said, "Of that kind and generous superintendent, Let us sing his praises; whatever we say will not be enough.

"Let us extol him loud and clear at the very least, [44b] Such a munificent, generous man the world has never seen.

"In truth, no one has trod this gentleman's path, He sacrificed his all with heart and soul.

"May the emperor of the world favor and honor that slave of his,

119. See n. 21 above.
Would that he show him such grace and favor as he

deserves.”

Seeing his deeds, that emperor of the world
Gave him robes of honor and prayed for him.

[45a] On seeing his laudable efforts, he graciously said,
“Be prosperous; may you be the object of God’s favor.

“Through your efforts have you rendered service to my
mosque,
May the Lord grant your wishes in the world and the
hereafter.”

The ulema and the pious lifted their hands and prayed,
“May a happy reward be inscribed in the book of your
deeds.

“May the Lord God grant your every desire,
[45b] Always sparing your gracious person from sin.

“And so may your noble person be in good health,
And forever fixed in the seat of felicity.”120

120. The words spoken in the final three couplets seem to be
meant for Mustafa Agha, though they would apply equally
well to the sultan. This ambiguity works to the qasida’s
advantage and is perhaps deliberate.