INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the Ottoman Empire was in a state of crisis following the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, the date often chosen by historians as the beginning of the modern age of the empire, when Ottoman intellectuals were suddenly faced with the combined fiscal and military bankruptcy of the state. The question of who these intellectuals were, and how they viewed the Ottoman state, which remains the subject of debate, is what initially interested me in the subject of this study, Ahmed Resmi Efendi, diplomat, historian and statesman, 1700–1783.

While Ottoman historiography is strongest in the delineation of the structure and function of the Ottoman central administration, the nature of the relationship between the sultan and his subjects remains elusive. İslamoğlu-Inan argues for the existence of a consensus of groups, or classes, independent of the state which, in a coercive society, was the ideological cement for the legitimation of the ruler. It was the responsibility of the group in power "to reconcile its interests with those of other groups through the forging of ideological unity between the different groups." While it would be unwise to exaggerate the extent of the independence of any one class, approaching Ottoman social and intellectual history in such a fashion allowed me to examine the various elites of Ottoman society as differentiated groups which engaged in political discourse with the sultan, sometimes overthrowing him when he failed to live up to their expectations. It helps to account for the vigor of two such "classes" in eighteenth century Ottoman society: the bureaucracy of the central administration and the provincial grandees (ayan), the latter a group

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1 Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, “Introduction: ‘Oriental Despotism’ in World-System Perspective,” in The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy, ed. H. İslamoğlu-Inan (Cambridge, 1987), 19–20. Şerif Mardin, “Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 11 (1969): 258–81, is very good in this context; Carter V. Findley, Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire (Princeton, 1980), 11, puts it somewhat differently: “... the different cultural orientations of the various branches of the ruling class played a major role in determining the relative political prominence of each branch as the situation and needs of the state changed over time.”
whose gradual assumption of economic power directly threatened the supremacy of the central power of the state by the last decades of the century. The approach is particularly attractive for interpreting the attitudes of the central bureaucracy to change.

Defining the elites and their periods of power continues to be one of the puzzles of Ottoman social history, in part because of the nebulous nature of the self-definitions in the political literature which survives, in part because of the static nature of Ottoman institutional historiography, which established the position of the various components of the Ottoman administration at the height of its greatness, under Süleyman I (1520–1566), and considered the centuries following as one long period of decline of the vitality of those institutions. That methodological structure was reinforced by the cacophony of complaints about the decay of the empire, such as those of Koçi Bey and Kâtib Çelebi of the seventeenth century, who suggested reforms aimed at returning the Ottoman state to its “golden age.” An unwarranted mistrust of such political literature, occasionally exaggerating the extent of the “decline,” has since developed in the field, giving rise to a needless debate about the validity of empirical data, derived from documentary sources, over the theoretical, emotional impressions, derived from political advice literature. There is simply no reason why Ottoman social “realities” and Ottoman perceptions of those “realities” cannot complement one another, the latter the ideological view of the former. After all, the earliest histories of the empire, those of Aşıkpaşazade (fl. 15th c.) and Kemalpaşazade (d. 1536) were written to document the origins and legitimacy of the new empire, as much myth as “who did what to whom.”

According to the classical Ottoman definition, society was divided into two large groups: the taxpayer (reayızs: peasants, artisans and merchants), and the non-taxpayer (askerî: military) classes. The askerî

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class was further differentiated into three administrative elites: soldiers, theologians (ulema) and bureaucrats. At the head of the askeri stood the sultan, temporal and spiritual leader, whose moral obligation as a just and pious ruler, drawing his authority from Islamic law (shari'a) and sultanic prerogative (kanun), was to secure the financial and political stability of the state. Deviation from that pattern led to disorder, and a disruption of the tranquility of the Muslim community. The sultan was compelled, as a legitimation technique, to reconcile the imperial, pre-Islamic heritage with Islamic ideals, what Findley calls "one of the most consistent and intriguing themes of Ottoman history." The dichotomy is best exemplified perhaps by the term din-i-devlet (religion and state) by which the political theorists strove to represent the empire.

Accepting the notion that even in a despotic environment consensus was necessary, we must still look further for the ingredients of the ideology which served the empire for so long. Part of the answer lies in the two words askeri and Osmanlı (Ottoman), sometimes described as the "Ottoman Way," but preferred here as Ottoman imperial culture. Askeri, on the one hand, comprehending all of the ruling elites, reflected the military origins of the empire, incorporating the commitment to a continual state of war (jihad) against the infidel. Osmanlı, on the other hand, was a term which resonated on various levels. Contained in the word itself was the alliance to the house of Osman, the founder of the dynasty, as a slave (kul), a badly misunderstood term, which meant in this context that an Ottoman's life and property were maintained at the discretion of the sultan. To

6 Hobsbawm touches very briefly on this phenomenon, which he describes as the allegiance to dynasty and faith ('proto-nationalism'), in Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge, 1990): 50. I am arguing here for the Ottoman variation of din-i-devlet; see "Din" (Gardet) E1, 2:293–6, for the larger Muslim context.
7 This discussion owes a great deal to the pioneering work of Itzkowitz, who coined the term 'Ottoman Way.' For a recent discussion of the limitations of this approach to Ottoman history, see Lawrence Birken, "Review" of *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali*, by C. Fleischer, in *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 14 (1990): 84–8.
be allied to the household of the sultan by marrying into his family was the highest honor that could be bestowed on an Ottoman elite. An Ottoman was also a member of a group which shared an imperial culture, educated in a very precise tradition, one that combined all of the branches of Islamic learning and the particular blend of the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages exemplified in the Ottoman language of the court. The early sultans, especially Mehmed II (1451–1481) and Süleyman I, fostered the cultural amalgam, by building and refining the educational system, and tolerating and institutionalizing alternative circles of association: the mystical orders, the guilds, and the minority communities, all organized according to their own rules and laws. In theory, the Osmanlı was a sincere Muslim, educated in the Ottoman imperial culture, dedicated to the perpetuation of religion and state as embodied in the sultan, and a member of the select group which protected the revenue-generating classes and promulgated the official ideology. To challenge this carefully maintained organizational fiction meant to engender chaos. The most striking characteristic about this particular worldview was its longevity. Well into the nineteenth century, lip-service was still being paid to the formula, even though it had long outgrown its verisimilitude. The other striking characteristic about the ideology was that it was simultaneously both rigid and lacking in definition, perhaps an attribute which made it attractive. The eighteenth century, then, can be seen as a battleground not just of the Ottomans and the Russians but also of the opposing visions of Ottoman elites, who gradually began to realize the inadequacy of the old ideology. How and why discussion of change and reform of the empire came to be the prerogative of the scribal bureaucracy is one of the major underlying questions of this study of the career and writings of Ahmed Resmi.

Exploring the life of an individual, his associations and expectations, has proved one of the greatest hurdles in Ottoman social history, partly because an individual’s life before the nineteenth century remained undifferentiated in deference to the all encompassing house-

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8 For a discussion of models of social organization in the Ottoman Empire, see Findley, Bureaucratic, where he identifies the “autonomous confessional community” (20); the guilds (24) and “the patrimonial household.” (30)

9 Şerif Mardin, “The Mind of the Turkish Reformer, 1700–1900,” in Arab Socialism, ed. S. A. Hanna (Salt Lake City, 1969): 34–5, referring to the writings of Reşid Paşa and Sadık Rifat Paşa, reformers of the Tanzimat period.
hold of the sultan, partly because of the inherent privacy of Muslim family life, focused on the community rather than the individual. Reconstruction of the life of an influential diplomat and statesman such as Ahmed Resmi, therefore, required innovative approaches to a variety of textual and documentary evidence to elicit a sense of his milieu, his educational level, his interest in worlds beyond the Ottoman, and his articulation of dismay about the state of his own society.

Biographical compendiums such as Ahmed Resmi’s own Sefinet ül-Rüesâ (The Ship of Captains) on the reisülkâttab and others such as that of Murâdi proved unexpectedly rewarding. The numerous contemporary collections of poetry, consisting of brief biographies of poets accompanied by specimens of their work, also elicited some small bits of information on the nature of an Ottoman’s literary accomplishments. Descriptions in these sources generally conform to the idealized portrait of the Ottoman intellectual, versed in Ottoman imperial culture, making the construction of a biography from such materials largely a linguistic exercise, as it is the exceptional phrase, the deviation from the conventional, which individualizes the portrait. The details of Ahmed Resmi’s career were extracted from both historical chronicle and documentary evidence, both of which are far more voluminous for the eighteenth century than for previous centuries, especially in the later decades. History writing became institutionalized in the office of the official chronicler (vak‘änivis), and even though restricted by the imperial imperative, it began to assume a modern tone and form, especially in the work of Ahmed Vâsîf, but also in the voluminous and less well-crafted efforts of Sadullah Enverî. Both works contributed vital and heretofore unutilized material on Ahmed Resmi’s career at the battlefront in the 1768 to 1774 war. Documentary sources such as those to be found in the Başbakanlık Archives’ Cevdet series, in particular the Cevdet Hariciye and the Cevdet Askeriye, proved useful for corroborating some of the textual evidence from the chronicles.

A survey and analysis of the copies of the works penned by Ahmed Resmi also yielded some surprising and gratifying results: the number of copies of Hulâsat ül-‘Itibar (A Synopsis of Admonitions) Prusya Sefaretnamesi (Prussian Embassy), and Layîha (Memorandum) written for

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Grand Vizier Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa, was convincing proof that he was an author who was widely read; the dedicatory pages (presentation pages to sultans and/or high court officials) of the numerous copies of Sefinet yielded evidence of Ahmed Resmi’s use of patrons and patronage to enter the Ottoman bureaucracy (hacegân), common to aspiring candidates of the time, and a previously unknown Layiha (Memorandum), which Ahmed Resmi presented to Grand Vizier Halil Paşa on the battlefield in 1770, has been added to his bibliography.

As Ahmed Resmi was a member of the central administration, this study begins by considering the position of the chancery in the eighteenth century, its composition, aspirations and influence. Professional degradation had set in, evinced in hereditary appointments, and the annual rotation of positions, central and provincial, to accommodate population pressure in the ranks. The increasing size and elaboration of offices, however, demonstrates an emerging source of power which continued well into the nineteenth century.

The military was probably the most disfranchised and alienated professional group of the eighteenth century, although in light of an almost complete dearth of research into eighteenth century military history, that statement may be premature. Several factors point to its veracity, in spite of the evidence of the privileges the Janissaries continued to demand and receive. The persistent myth that everyone in the government was a soldier, applicable, if ever, to the empire of Selim I (1512–1520), was completely irrelevant to the eighteenth century. Yet, how else can we explain the continued practice of taking the entire government on campaign, and of appointing as commander-in-chief grand viziers, many of whom, by the end of the century, had never left the palace? The empire, in fact, was relying in peace time on an army, salaried but ill-paid, ill-educated and ill-trained, whose complicated relationship with Istanbul and provincial societies, as both state representatives and local grandees, made them an extremely unreliable force. In times of war, less frequent for a large part of the eighteenth century than for earlier periods, the sultan was forced to hire local soldiery on a cash basis, the provincial fief system having effectively disappeared from the equation. Maintenance of two armies proved extremely costly, both socially and financially. Comparison with the military history of Europe is instructive in this regard, as all the problems of the Ottoman army were equally those of eighteenth century Europe, especially Russia. The fact that the
Janissary was the essential icon of the Ottoman imperial ideology made for a very difficult reform agenda.

The ulema enjoyed access to and control over the entire Islamic legal structure of the shari'a, and remained very potent moral guardians of the empire, "the linchpin of this complex ideological matrix."¹¹ In spite of that theoretical authority, and the growing economic autonomy of the ulema as a whole through the alienation of property to charitable uses, they increasingly lost ground to the central bureaucracy of the period. At least part of the reason can be found in the educational system, so stratified and complex as to require years for completion. Much as with the military class, population pressure on the career path of the ulema, combined with the rigidity of the schooling, had led to the creation of a sub-class of ill-educated, perpetual students, a common feature of Istanbul life in the eighteenth century, as Zilfi has demonstrated. The upper echelon of the ulema became restricted to a very small number of families, amongst whose members the highest positions of the religious establishment circulated.¹² The exigencies of the shrinking borders of the empire, and the collapse of the askeri ideals simultaneously undermined the authority of the religious class and stiffened its resistance. The ulema found support in the dissatisfied, impoverished lower ranks of the military and the bureaucracy, often the most vocal participants in rebellions of the period.

The bureaucracy, and especially the offices involved with foreign affairs, notably the Chief Scribe/Foreign Affairs Officer, the Reisülküttab and his staff, grew in size and stature as the century progressed.¹³ My examination of Ahmed Resmi’s early career as a member of the upper strata of the hacegān highlights the factors which contributed to this growth, particularly the nature of the scribal education, and the importance of patronage and proficiency in Ottoman imperial culture. Of equal importance to the growth and influence of the bureaucracy was the professionalization of foreign affairs and increased contact with Europe. Abou-El-Haj considers the Karlowitz treaty of

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¹³ I am indebted in this regard to the work of Halil İnalcık, especially his article “Reis-ül-küttab” IA, 9:671–83.
1699 significant for two reasons: it was the first time that a member of the bureaucracy, rather than the military, negotiated the terms of the peace treaty, and, it was also the first time that there was a willingness on the part of the Ottomans to accommodate the diplomatic system of Europe, the beginning of what one scholar has called "The Europeanization of Ottoman Diplomacy."\(^{14}\) Over the next hundred years, political theorists of the empire would consider in tentative ways the advantages of the European system, part of their reaction to the gradual contraction of the borders of the empire. The Ottomans persisted in the use of diplomatic initiatives with Europe in preference to war for an astonishing thirty years, from 1739 to 1768, the longest such period of peace on the western borders of the empire in its entire span.

The second part of my study focuses on Ahmed Resmi's two embassies to Europe, the first to Vienna in 1757/58 and the second to Berlin in 1763/64. The proliferation of such embassies contributed in no small measure to challenging the presumed superiority of the Ottoman worldview. Most of the ambassadors were from the central administrative bureaucracy, a fact which simply strengthens the theory of the gradual alienation of that particular elite's traditional assumptions by exposure to different systems. The reports of the ambassadors were included in the official histories of the period, some of which were published by İbrahim Mu'teferrîka (d. 1745) on his new, Turkish, press.\(^{15}\) While admittedly small in terms of numbers produced, these glimpses of the other allowed for the dissemination of more information on the infidel, in the simple prose narrative of the embassy reports, as Valensi has persuasively argued about similar reports of the Venetian representatives to the Ottoman court.\(^{16}\) As the century progressed, the amount of information included, and the gradual critical analysis of that information increased. Thirty-four of the surviving Ottoman embassy reports are from the eighteenth cen-

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tury, of which only eight do not deal with Europe. Ahmed Resmi's contribution to the genre, especially his report on Berlin, is large.

The long period of inactivity against western foes helped to mask Ottoman military weakness until the battlefields of the 1768 to 1774 Russo-Turkish war. Ahmed Resmi was Second-in-Command to the grand vizier for most of the war and plenipotentiary to the peace negotiations which finally ended it. The war is considered here from the Russian as well as the Ottoman viewpoint, with particular emphasis on neglected Ottoman sources, texts and documents by Ahmed Resmi himself and two other eye-witnesses: Enveri and Vâsif, both as battlefield chroniclers. As part of the government at war, these individuals were essential to the process of informing their colleagues, and contributing to the creation of a climate for change. Their observations on the complete collapse of the traditional order helped to undermine further the adherence to the ideology which had sustained it. Ahmed Resmi's *Hulásat* was particularly iconoclastic, and to judge by the number of surviving copies, received wide circulation in administrative circles.

The final part of this study on Ahmed Resmi considers his contribution to Ottoman political discourse in a transitional age. The source of most our thinking about the Ottoman condition has come from the political literature discussed above. If one accepts that in Ottoman/Islamic society the aim of historical/didactical literature was to point to the recreation of “a God-given ideal state which [one] can only imperfectly grasp,” in order to give “moral relevance to . . . immediate history,” and that “the only legitimate change is change which results in the moral betterment of the Muslim community,” then, at least, some of the fog of misinterpretation surrounding the political advice literature evaporates, and expressions about a “just sultan” and “the circle of equity,” assume their legitimate places in the Ottoman ethos as ideals. Those ideals disappear for the most part in the political advice literature of the later eighteenth century, although appeals for the preservation of religion and state (din-ü-devlet) remain constant.

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Ahmed Resmi’s long service in the chancery, intimate knowledge of the ways of Europe, and significant involvement with military affairs during the 1768 to 1774 war, were recognized shortly before his death by an honorary appointment to the entourage of Grand Vizier Halil Hamid (1782–1785), one of the new generation of reform-minded Ottoman statesmen. Ahmed Resmi’s contribution to Ottoman political discourse of the period has to do as much with tone and style as with subject. The integrity of the elderly statesman, who risked his career to sign the humiliating peace treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, and who did not hesitate to criticize the very foundations of the empire he served, is clear even in the few writings of his we possess. A true product of the Ottoman imperial system, he nonetheless anticipated the agenda of Selim III’s (1789–1807) advisors by a decade, calling for a complete reform of the military, as well as for peace within prescribed borders. Though he died in 1783, Ahmed Resmi’s pivotal contribution to this transitional period is evident in the discussions of the new generation of statesmen around Selim III, some of whom were relatives and friends of Ahmed Resmi. What seems clear is the commitment of the new cadre to change, not necessarily by denying the religious foundations of the state, but by considering the greatest good for the Muslim community and the survival of the state, simultaneously legitimizing their own position as the mediators between Ottoman society and western innovations, and alienating the other classes, whose reaction “seems to have been one of involution.”21 In the consensus between sultan and bureaucrat to reform the traditional structures of the state can be discerned the makings of the new absolutist hegemony more fully realized in the reigns of Mahmud II (1809–1839) and Abdulhamid II (1876–1909).