CHAPTER 1

Tekfur, fasiliyus and kayser: Disdain, Negligence and Appropriation of Byzantine Imperial Titulature in the Ottoman World

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Introduction

Titulature is one of the most vital tools for pre-modern states in terms of legitimising their authority not only for their own subjects but also for the polities they had contact with. Like any other medieval and early-Modern state, the titulature that the Ottomans used for themselves and for others cannot be seen as anything more than conscious choice. As Kafadar puts it, “we have to regard the fact that they (Ottomans) equated padişah and emperor, and placed the king below them, and called the Venetian doge beg not as coincidence but as conscious preference.” Accordingly, a group of studies have been devoted to the titulature that the Ottoman sultans used for themselves as a reflection of Ottoman sovereignty and legitimacy to rule. Those studies dealing with the

1 For more on this see Halil İnalcık, “Padişah”, Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi, 34 (2007), pp. 140–143.
international correspondence largely focus on the Ottoman-Habsburg imperial struggle which went hand in hand with titulature, as observed by İnalcık.\(^4\) Case studies of respective analyses of Ottoman-Polish titulature\(^5\) and the diplomacy of titulature endorsed by the Crimean rulers vis-à-vis Russia and the Ottoman Empire constitute other examples involving the Ottomans’ use of titulature in international politics.\(^6\)

The Byzantine/Roman\(^7\) imperial tradition presents a very interesting case study for mechanisms of disdain, negligence, and appropriation in the Ottoman world. Although a clearly-defined consciousness as in the above-quotations from Kafadar had not yet been formed in the early Ottoman historiography, in which the representative of this genre referred to the foreign figures mainly with their names or the way they sounded—hence Lazoğlu for the Serbian polity with reference to the Serbian king Lazar or kral with reference to the Serbian term for king, and Rim-Papa or Papos for the Pope, etc.—they can by no means be regarded in complete ignorance of the importance of titulature in this period. The major problem with carrying out such a study, however, lies in the fact that there is not enough official documentation that would enable a full-fledged analysis of Byzantine-Ottoman diplomatic relations through titulature. Moreover, such major sources as the *kanunname* of Mehmed II and

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\(^4\) For İnalcık, “the evolution of the titulature used for the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire is particularly interesting for it followed closely the changes which occurred in the actual power relationships between the Ottoman and Habsburg states.” Halil İnalcık, “Power relationships between Russia, the Crimea and the Ottoman Empire as reflected in titulature”, in Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, Gilles Veinstein, S. Enders Wimbush (eds.), *Passé turco-tatar, présent soviétique: études offertes à Alexandre Bennigsen* (Louvain: Editions Peeters; Paris: Éditions de l’Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1986), p. 382.


\(^7\) Needless to say, the term Byzantine was coined by Renaissance scholars and the Ottomans did not use a separate term for things Byzantine during the Early Modern period. In both rejecting and appropriating the Roman/Byzantine legacy, the term used is *rumi* and its derivatives. For two seminal works on this topic, see Salih Özbaran, *Bir Osmanlı Kimliği: 14.–17. Yüzyillarda Rum/Rumi Aidiyet ve İmgeleri* (İstanbul: Kitap, 2004), and Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum”, *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), pp. 7–25.