PART ONE

ISTANBUL

ACTIVITIES OF DIFFERENT ECUMENICAL COMMUNITIES
IN THE OTTOMAN CAPITAL
Like the history of Islam itself, the history of the Ottoman Empire rests on a construction of its early period derived from sources written one to two centuries after the events, chronicles that rely on an uncertain oral tradition and that express a later interpretation of their subject’s beginnings. The chronicles present the early Ottomans as essentially stateless and resistant to such governmental activities as taxation, accumulation, and record-keeping; the preferred vision is one of tribal “feasting and fighting” and the gaza of heroes. State institutions represent injustice; they spring up during the reign of Bayezid I (1389–1402) as the result of corruption by association with the Byzantines, and when they appear they cause Bayezid’s downfall and the dismemberment of his state. This construction of early Ottoman history was spread by Ahmedi, Yakhshi Fakih, and doubtless other writers and intellectuals of the Interregnum, and through Aşıkpaşazade it became part of the Ottoman historiographical tradition.1

Köprülü in 1931 attacked the idea that the early Ottoman administration was derived from Byzantine influences and argued that the Ottomans had to be studied “within the framework of Turkish history in general,” emphasizing the Seljuk influence on Ottoman institutions. This is the same position taken by later Ottoman chroniclers, who cite the Ottomans’ Turkish genealogy and Seljuk legitimation.2 The reassessment of this relationship by Halil Inalcık seeks to balance the two
