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Narrative Construction in Early Ottoman Chronicles^a

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Abstract

In the classical Ottoman political tradition, the legitimacy of authority was closely associated with the principles of justice, order, and divine providence. Within this framework, early Ottoman chronicles functioned not merely as records of past events but as narrative texts through which dynastic legitimacy, political identity, and collective memory were constructed. This study examines the social, political, and discursive mechanisms underlying the formation of historical narratives in early Ottoman chronicles. Focusing on the works of historians such as Tursun Beg, Âşıkpaşazâde, Neşrî, and Oruç Beg, it explores how themes including ghaza ideology, Oghuz ancestry, divine destiny, and the ideal ruler were employed to represent and legitimize Ottoman

sovereignty. The article argues that these chronicles should be interpreted as historically situated narratives shaped by symbolic frameworks, patronage relations, and contemporary political values rather than as neutral accounts of the past. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the processes of selection, interpretation, and meaning-making found in pre-modern historiography reveal continuities with modern historical writing. Accordingly, Ottoman chronicles represent not only historical sources but also discursive spaces where political legitimacy, collective identity, and concepts of social order were produced.

Keywords: Early Ottoman historiography; Ottoman chronicles; narrative construction; political legitimacy; ghaza ideology

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern historiography recognizes that historical writing is not a neutral reflection of the past but a narrative practice shaped by interpretation, representation, and ideological frameworks. Rather than functioning as a simple repository of facts, historical texts organize the past through narrative structures, selective emphasis, and culturally conditioned modes of explanation, thereby producing meanings that extend beyond the events they describe [1–3]. From this perspective, Ottoman chronicles should be considered not only as historical texts that record political events but also as discursive spaces in which political authority, dynastic identity, and conceptions of social order were constructed [4–6].

There was no fully established and autonomous tradition of Ottoman historiography in Anatolia prior to the emergence of the Ottoman state. Consequently, Ottoman historiography developed approximately 100–150 years after the foundation of the polity. The first independent historical works were produced in the fifteenth century, while religious motifs became more prominent in historiographical writing during the sixteenth century [7, p. 203]. From the fifteenth century onward, authors constructed the legitimacy of the sultan around the idea of “chosenness”¹ through dream narratives and representations of sacred lineage. These narratives were further reinforced by concepts derived from Islamic theories of rulership, such as *zillullah*, *halifetullah*, and messianic expectations [4, 6, 10, 11]. This discourse of legitimacy did not merely explain the political superiority of the dynasty; it also shaped the ways in which political authority was represented and contributed to the acceptance of the Ottoman conception of governance as legitimate [12, 13].

The systematic construction of the sultan’s legitimacy in Ottoman chronicles from the fifteenth century onward was closely related to the institutionalization of the state. As the centralized political structure became stronger, the dynasty’s claim to sovereignty increasingly required justification not only through military achievements but also through historical, religious, and symbolic narratives. Ottoman historiography thus became a field in which the political order was interpreted, represented, and reproduced. Indeed, “following the conquest of Istanbul, the writing of general histories in the Ottoman Empire gained greater importance in parallel with the development of historiography” [14, p. 273]. The reign of Bayezid II, in particular, marked a period in which Ottoman historiography flourished and the foundations of more systematic historical writing were established. With his *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân*, Âşıkpaşazâde (d. after 1489) produced one of the earliest and most significant examples of this development [15, p. 658]; [16, p. 133].

In this context, *eş-Şaka’iku’n-Nu’mâniyye*² completed by Taşköprülüzâde Ahmed Efendi in 1558, is one of the significant works in which the Ottoman understanding of scholarship and governance was represented through biographical narratives. The work organized the biographies of the *ulema* and *meşâyih* who lived from the conquest of Istanbul to the reign of Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman into hierarchical sections (*tabakalar*) according to the reigns of the sultans, thereby establishing the institutional memory of the Ottoman scholarly tradition [17]. Some researchers argue that Ottoman historiography was influenced by the Persian historiographical tradition until the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim and, after the conquest of Egypt, by the Arab historiographical tradition [18, 19]. However, it is not sufficient to explain the transformation of Ottoman historiography solely through the influence of external historiographical traditions. This transformation was also related to the need of the increasingly centralized state structure to reproduce dynastic legitimacy through historical and religious discourses. In other words, although Ottoman chronicles were narratives nourished by different historical sources, they also functioned as symbolic structures through which political authority could acquire social acceptance. This situation is particularly evident in sultan-centered historical works.

One significant example of the *şehnâmecilik* tradition in Ottoman historiography, Kılıççızâde İshak Çelebi’s *Selîmnâme* (*İshaknâme*), is noteworthy in this respect. The work begins its narrative with the 1509 Istanbul earthquake and constructs a historical sequence around key events, including the succession struggles during Sultan Bayezid II’s reign, the Şahkulu rebellion, and the death of Sultan Bayezid. The narrative then shifts to Yavuz Sultan Selim’s (Selim I) accession and the consolidation of his political authority. The extensive inclusion of verses from the Qur’an, hadiths, prayers, poems, and proverbs in the work demonstrates that historical narrative was not merely a means of transmitting events but also a tool for producing religious and symbolic meanings. *Selîmnâme*, which brought İshak Çelebi considerable fame, was regarded as a reliable source by later Ottoman historians; Hoca Sadeddin Efendi also benefited from İshak Çelebi’s work in his *Tacü’l-Tevârih* [20, p. 529]. Works bearing the names of sultans are texts that, beyond narrating historical events, construct the image of the ideal ruler and conceptions of political legitimacy. At the same time, the production of these works

¹ During the reign of Bayezid II (1481–1512), numerous *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân* works, written by both known and anonymous authors, were produced, narrating the development of the Ottoman state from its foundation onwards [8, p. 579]. Âşıkpaşazâde’s *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân*, written in plain Turkish and also known as *Âşıkpaşazâde Tarihi*, was first published by Âli Beg and later republished by Nihal Atsız. Another important *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân* composed during the reign of Bayezid II is the work of Oruç b. Âdil, which was edited and published by the German Turkologist Franz Babinger [9, p. 3]. Representative examples of this historiographical tradition include Âşıkpaşazâde’s *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân*, Neşrî’s *Kitâb-ı Cihannümâ* (1490s), and İdrîs-i Bitlisî’s *Heşt Behîşt* (1502–1506).

² It should be considered that historians and intellectuals such as Taşköprülüzâde, Âşıkpaşazâde, İdrîs-i Bitlisî, and Oruç Beg did not merely record political events but also engaged in intellectual reflections on human existence, divine providence, destiny, truth, and the limits of human agency while narrating historical developments. In Âşıkpaşazâde’s work, numerous poetic passages are found concerning the dream of Osman Ghazi and its interpretation by Şeyh Edebâli. Although directly transferring modern concepts such as “alienation,” “self,” or “subjectivity” into the intellectual world of these authors would constitute an anachronistic approach, Ottoman historical narratives reveal different conceptual approaches to the relationship between human agency and divine will, as well as to the question of who constitutes the subject of history.

was also shaped by the authors' expectations of gaining court patronage, acquiring prestige within bureaucratic circles, and strengthening their intellectual positions. In this respect, Ottoman historiography can be evaluated not only as the narration of the past but also as a cultural practice through which power relations, social hierarchies, and political values were reproduced.

Works of this kind bearing the names of sultans can be considered examples of "*patronage-oriented*"³ historiography, as they aimed not only to record historical events but also to construct the ruler's political legitimacy and the image of the ideal sovereign. In his study *Şâir ve Patron*, İnalçık's observation that "divan poets were, in a profound sense, the *musahib* (companions and intimate associates) of the sultan" [22, p. 24] underscores the patronage-based nature of this relationship. These works also reflected authors' expectations of court patronage, bureaucratic prestige, and intellectual recognition. However, a significant transformation took place between the early Ottoman chronicles and the Ottoman histories written from the late sixteenth century onward. During this process, historiography evolved from an approach centered primarily on the political elite toward a broader narrative framework that also incorporated social issues, with increasing attention being given to the problems and grievances of the general population. In the subsequent period, patronage became a defining feature of Ottoman historiography, and historians often composed their works with the aim of securing court patronage, obtaining bureaucratic appointments, or enhancing their personal prestige. This development had a significant impact on both the content and forms of representation in Ottoman historical writing [16, p. 146].

The relationship between patronage and political authority must also be considered within the broader framework of Ottoman theories of sovereignty. As İnalçık has pointed out, "by the fourteenth century, the idea had become widespread throughout the Islamic world that sovereignty was established in a single individual through the grace and favor of God" [23]. In this context, what was at stake was not merely the exercise of political power but also the extensive sphere of patronage associated with political authority. This further complicated the tension between the Ottoman theory of sovereignty, which represented the sultan as the supreme holder of political power, and the political realities that gradually emerged over time. Ottoman historiography therefore emerges not merely as an activity through which the past was recorded, but as a cultural practice in which power relations, social hierarchies, and political values were represented and reproduced.⁴

In this broader context, Arnold Toynbee regarded the Ottoman Empire, alongside the Persian, Roman, and Arab political traditions of the Near East, as one of the most remarkable examples of a polity that succeeded in establishing long-lasting political unity in the region [25]. The transformation of the Ottoman state from a polity initially shaped by tribal structures and kinship ties into an increasingly institutionalized political organization required the continuous redefinition of dynastic legitimacy. Historiography became one of the mechanisms through which this redefinition was accomplished: it connected the dynasty's past to its present authority, organized collective memory around a meaningful political order, and provided historical narratives through which sovereignty could be represented as legitimate.

2. THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN EARLY OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The form of narrative directly influences how historical facts are understood. Rather than merely presenting events chronologically, historians organize them within a particular framework of meaning, such as progress, decline, struggle, modernization, liberation, or crisis [26, p. 115]. In the Ottoman Empire, historiography emerged not merely as an activity through which past events were recorded, but as a narrative practice in which political authority was interpreted, dynastic identity was constructed, and relations of legitimacy were reproduced. The title of *vak'anüvis*, which was used in later periods of Ottoman historiography, referred to the official historians of the state. The *vak'anüvis* did not only record the events of their own periods but were also assigned the task of completing incomplete records from previous periods in order to ensure historical continuity. For this reason, particular importance was attached to the transfer of notes, drafts, and documents prepared by predecessors to the new *vak'anüvis* in cases such as dismissal or death [5, p. 9]; [27, p. 458]. This institutional approach demonstrates that historiography in Ottoman political culture had a significant function both in the transmission of knowledge and in the formation of state memory.

However, Ottoman historiography began relatively late compared to the process of the state's foundation. Therefore, no contemporary Ottoman chronicles dating from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries have survived to the

³During the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed (Mehmed II), the conquest of Istanbul and the subsequent political, geographical, and cultural transformations stimulated a revival in Ottoman historiography. One of the clearest manifestations of this development was the emergence of the manuscript tradition known as *şehnâme*, which is regarded as a form of semi-official court historiography [21, p. 109]. During the reigns of Yavuz Sultan Selim (Selim I) and Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman (Süleyman I), similar court-sponsored works emerged in the forms of *Selimnâme* and *Süleymannâme*. Unlike the broader dynastic chronicles, these works focused primarily on the reign and achievements of a single ruler.

⁴Associated with a prominent critical tradition in Middle Eastern historiography alongside scholars such as Edward Said and Maxime Rodinson, Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj argues in *The 1703 Rebellion and the Structure of Ottoman Politics* [24, p. 18] that political theory and political reality largely coincided during the sixteenth century, particularly under the reign of Sultan Süleyman I (Süleyman the Magnificent). Consequently, those who had been trained through the *devşirme* system—an institution originally developed to reinforce absolutist rule—gradually came to constitute a challenge to that very absolute authority.

present day. Information concerning the foundation period is largely based on the works of Byzantine historians such as Pachymeres, Nikephoros Gregoras, and Kantakuzenos, as well as Arab authors including Ibn Battuta, Ibn Sa'id, and al-'Umari [21, p. 107]. However, early Ottoman historiography should not be regarded merely as an activity aimed at the chronological transmission of political events. The chronicles of this period were also narrative structures that explained the political legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty, contributed to its social acceptance, and gave meaning to dynastic identity. Although the foundation of the Ottoman state has traditionally been dated to 1299, it is now generally accepted that the process of its emergence developed through a longer historical formation between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. This process was concerned not only with political and military developments but also with how these developments were narrated and interpreted. Early Ottoman chronicles explained the foundation of the state and the concept of rulership through symbolic elements such as divine providence, the *ghaza* ideology, sacred lineage, dream narratives, and the idea of "*chosenness*"; thus, they legitimized the authority of the Ottoman dynasty within a historical and religious framework. In this context, early Ottoman historiography constitutes a narrative field in which the past was not merely transmitted but interpreted in accordance with specific political and social needs. Chroniclers created a particular conception of the past that supported the legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty by selecting, organizing, and interpreting available historical materials. Therefore, historiography functioned in early Ottoman society not only as a means of accessing knowledge of the past but also as a discursive practice effective in the construction of political authority, social order, and collective memory.

2.1. DISCOURSE AND REPRESENTATION IN HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The primary question that should be asked is the following: If historiography is not merely the transmission of events that occurred in the past, through which narrative strategies did early Ottoman chronicles construct political and social reality? History should be understood not only as a chronological record of events that took place in the past, but also as a narrative field reinterpreted within the mentality, values, and modes of meaning-making of a particular period [28, p. 91]; [1, 2]. In this context, early Ottoman historiography did not merely consist of texts that chronologically narrated the foundation and expansion of the Ottoman polity. Rather, these chronicles functioned as discursive constructions through which the legitimacy of the dynasty was articulated, its political identity was shaped, and the Ottoman conception of power was given meaning [4, 29, 30]. As Akkoç [31, p. 71] observes, the rise of the Ottoman Empire was associated with the earlier Turkish presence in Anatolia and Europe, presenting the Ottoman state as the continuation of a broader historical process. Within this framework, narrative elements such as *ghaza*, divine providence, sacred lineage, dream narratives, and the ruler's chosen status reorganized the past within particular frameworks of meaning and contributed to the legitimization of dynastic authority [4, 10]. Accordingly, historiography cannot be regarded as a mechanical process consisting solely of the transmission of existing sources. Rather, historians select, organize, and interpret the past through the political conditions, ideological orientations, forms of representation, and literary conventions of their own time [1, 2]. In this respect, historiography should be understood not as a direct reflection of the past, but as a narrative practice through which collective memory, political legitimacy, and historical meaning are continuously produced [29, 30]. Accordingly, early Ottoman chronicles should be understood as discursive representations in which the past was narratively reconstructed to produce and legitimize particular understandings of political authority, dynastic identity, and social order.

2.2. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISCOURSE OF LEGITIMACY IN EARLY OTTOMAN CHRONICLES

According to Tekindağ [15, pp. 655–656], Ottoman historiography began to take shape in the first half of the fifteenth century, particularly from 1424 onward, in the context of the translation of Arabic and Persian works into Turkish for Ottoman rulers. These translation activities contributed to the emergence of a Turkish historical-writing tradition within the Ottoman court. Early Ottoman historians such as Âşıkpaşazâde [32], Oruç Beg [33], Neşrî [34], Tursun Beg [35], and İdrîs-i Bitlisî [36] constructed narratives of the past by reworking oral traditions, legendary accounts, and earlier historical texts in accordance with the political and social contexts of their own time.

As Arıkan points out, the "earliest Ottoman sources were characterized by a plain, unadorned, and simple language and style. Their purpose was to convey the achievements of the Ottoman dynasty to the frontier ghazis and broader segments of the population" [37, p. 593]. This stylistic accessibility suggests that early Ottoman chronicles were not merely repositories of historical information but also instruments of communication through which dynastic achievements, political ideals, and claims to legitimacy could be transmitted to a wider social audience. In this regard, their major works include *Tevârikh-i al-i 'Osman* (Âşıkpaşazâde), *Kitab-ı Cihannüma* (Neşrî), *Tarih-i Abū'l-Feth* (Tursun Beg), and *Heşt Bihişt* (İdrîs-i Bitlisî). Imazawa [38] emphasizes that İdrîs-i Bitlisî's *Heşt Bihişt* occupies a distinctive place among sources on the early Ottoman period, preserving records from earlier Ottoman sources that are not found in the chronicles of Âşıkpaşazâde and Neşrî.

Similarly, İnalçık [39] highlights the importance of examining the sources and textual development of Neşrî's history, demonstrating how the chronicle emerged through the compilation and transformation of earlier historical materials.

As İnalçık [40] demonstrates, the concept of *ghaza* occupies a prominent place in the early Ottoman chronicles, particularly in the works of Ahmedî, Enverî, Âşıkpaşazâde, Neşrî, and Oruç Beg. These chronicles not only recorded military encounters but also represented Ottoman expansion through the language of *ghaza*, thereby contributing to the construction of a dynastic identity grounded in religious and political legitimacy.

Rather than representing a complete rupture with previous traditions, this process demonstrates that Ottoman historiography developed through a dynamic interaction between continuity and transformation. Early Ottoman chronicles should not be evaluated solely according to the extent to which they correspond to historical reality. Rather, they should be understood as narrative structures that produced particular conceptions of legitimacy, reinforced dynastic identity, and gave meaning to the existing political order. For example, Âşıkpaşazâde (d. after 1484) interpreted the origins and rise of the Ottoman dynasty through the themes of *ghaza* ideology, sacred lineage, and divine support. Likewise, Oruç Beg compiled earlier narratives into a simpler and more chronological account, thereby contributing to the continuity of Ottoman historical memory.

Therefore, in Ottoman historiography, the past was not merely an event that was remembered or transmitted; rather, it was a narrative reconstructed within the dominant values, political expectations, and systems of meaning of the period in which it was produced [41]. As Pabuççular emphasizes, "although historiographical traditions have become dominant paradigms within the discipline in different periods, none of them has eliminated another. Rather, transformations emerging globally in certain periods have brought some fields to the forefront more than others, and while historians continued to produce works within different traditions, some of them benefited from different approaches to a certain extent within the same study" [42, p. 71]. This perspective makes it possible to evaluate transformations in historiography not merely as a clear distinction between the old and the new, but within the framework of new questions, methods, and forms of representation that emerged in different periods.

In this context, the purpose of historical research is not limited solely to the chronological transmission of ruler-centered narratives, wars, and political events. Through the analytical possibilities provided by modern historical methods, historians have also made the material and spiritual structures, intellectual worlds, social tendencies, institutions, cultural practices, and aesthetic perceptions of societies subjects of inquiry [43]. This orientation has contributed to critiques of interpreting history exclusively through the activities of "political elites" and has led to the emergence of new fields of research based on social, cultural, and intellectual history.

Within this broader transformation in historical scholarship, early Ottoman historiography can also be approached beyond the limits of event-centered narratives [44]. Ottoman chronicles should be examined not only as records of political events but also as narrative practices through which the past was interpreted within the symbolic, religious, and literary frameworks of their period [4, 11]. Narratives based on legends, dream motifs, the *ghaza* tradition, and divine providence functioned as interpretive tools that connected the Ottoman past with a meaningful political and religious order [4, 10]. Therefore, these elements should not be regarded merely as literary ornaments or traditional narrative patterns, but as fundamental components of the Ottoman historical imagination and conception of sovereignty. Rather, early Ottoman chronicles should be analyzed as historical texts in which political authority, dynastic identity, and social order were represented through the intellectual and cultural codes of their own time [1, 2].

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Within the scope of this study, the examination of early Ottoman chronicles demonstrates that these works were not merely historical texts recording political events that occurred in the past; they were also narrative structures that explained the political legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty and shaped collective memory. The works of historians such as Âşıkpaşazâde, Oruç Beg, Neşrî, Tursun Beg, and İdrîs-i Bitlisî were shaped around specific narrative patterns that gave meaning to the origins, continuity, and superiority of Ottoman power [4, 6, 10]. In this context, early Ottoman historiography emerges not as a simple transmission of the past, but as a process in which historical events were selected, organized, and interpreted in accordance with the political and cultural needs of the period.

One of the main findings of the study is that the discourse of legitimacy in early Ottoman chronicles was not based on a single element but was constructed through the combination of various symbolic and intellectual sources. Elements such as the *ghaza* ideology, divine providence, sacred lineage, dream narratives, and the chosenness of the ruler legitimized the authority of the Ottoman dynasty not only through military achievements but also within religious and cultural frameworks of meaning. These narrative elements represented the Ottoman ruler not merely as an ordinary political actor, but within the model of the ideal ruler who acted with divine support, established justice, and maintained order.

A further implication of these findings is that Ottoman legitimacy may be understood as a form of narrative legitimacy. Legitimacy was not produced solely through individual claims concerning genealogy, conquest, divine favor, or justice; rather, these otherwise distinct elements acquired political force by being integrated into a coherent historical narrative.

The chronicles therefore did more than preserve legitimizing arguments: they organized them into meaningful sequences in which the origins of the dynasty, its victories, the virtues of its rulers, and the continuity of divine favor were presented as interconnected elements of a historical process. In this sense, narrative itself became a mechanism of legitimation. The political significance of the chronicles lies precisely in this capacity to transform contingent events into a meaningful historical order, thereby presenting Ottoman sovereignty not simply as an existing political reality but as the outcome of a coherent and intelligible historical trajectory. Such a perspective also shifts the analytical focus from asking whether the chronicles accurately reflected the past to examining how narrative form transformed the past into a source of political meaning and legitimacy [1, 2].

Another significant finding is that the transformation of early Ottoman historiography cannot be explained solely through the influence of Persian and Arab historiographical traditions [6, 18, 19]. Although Ottoman historians benefited from different historiographical traditions, the reshaping of these elements within Ottoman chronicles was directly related to the needs of the increasingly centralized state structure and dynastic authority. Therefore, the transformation in Ottoman historiography was not merely the transmission of narrative models borrowed from external sources; rather, it was also the result of the effort of political power to position itself within a historical past.

This narrative production of legitimacy also points to a broader epistemic function of Ottoman historiography. By selecting certain events, attributing particular meanings to them, and incorporating them into an intelligible historical sequence, chronicles did not merely represent political reality; they participated in defining what could be recognized as a meaningful account of political reality. In this respect, the relationship between historiography and power cannot be reduced to the direct influence of rulers or patrons upon historians. Power also operated at the level of representation, through the categories, distinctions, and narrative connections by which events became intelligible as evidence of legitimate rule. The significance of Ottoman chronicles, therefore, lies not only in what they said about sovereignty, but also in the epistemic framework through which sovereignty became historically knowable and narratively credible. This perspective resonates with Foucault's understanding of discourse as a system that regulates the production and circulation of knowledge and truth, while also extending the analysis beyond a simple opposition between "truth" and "distortion" [29, 30].

Another point revealed by the study concerns the relationship between historiography and patronage relations. Particularly, works such as *Selimnâme*, *Süleymannâme*, *Şehnâme*, and *Zafernâme* were produced within the palace environment and developed narratives that emphasized the political achievements, military victories, and ideal governing qualities of rulers. Yet patronage should not be understood simply as a mechanism through which rulers imposed a predetermined interpretation upon historians. Rather, it constituted a social and institutional framework within which historical narratives were produced, circulated, and endowed with political significance. The patronage relationship thus shaped not only what historians could write, but also the conditions under which particular interpretations of sovereignty became culturally authoritative and historically meaningful. From this perspective, patronage was not external to the production of historical knowledge; it formed part of the very social conditions through which historical knowledge was constructed. This does not require such works to be dismissed as mere texts of praise. On the contrary, their significance lies precisely in their capacity to reveal the political values, expectations, and relations of power that structured the historical consciousness of their period [11, 16].

From the perspective of these findings, assessing early Ottoman chronicles according to modern criteria of historical objectivity is insufficient for understanding their historical function. The issue is not simply whether these texts accurately represented events, but how they transformed events into historically meaningful accounts within the conceptual and political world of their time. Their historical significance therefore derives not only from the information they preserve but also from the interpretive structures through which that information was selected, ordered, and given meaning. In this sense, the chronicles should be approached as historically situated forms of knowledge whose claims to truth were embedded in particular religious, political, and cultural frameworks. Their value as historical sources consequently lies in a double capacity: they provide information about past events while simultaneously revealing how those events were understood, classified, and integrated into a broader conception of political and social order. Early Ottoman historiography thus offers access not only to the past that it narrates, but also to the historical consciousness through which that past became intelligible.

Within this framework, historiography can be understood not merely as a discipline that provides information about the past, but as a cultural practice through which societies interpret their historical experience and define the meaning of their political order. Early Ottoman chronicles demonstrate that historical narration operated simultaneously as a form of memory, interpretation, and political reasoning. Their narratives did not simply reproduce an already existing conception of sovereignty; they contributed to its formulation by connecting dynastic origins, divine providence, military success, justice, and ideal rulership within a coherent account of historical continuity. The significance of these chronicles therefore lies in the interaction between narrative and power: political authority acquired historical depth through narration, while historical narration acquired political significance through its capacity to render authority meaningful and legitimate. From this perspective, the chronicles should neither be regarded as texts that merely distort an objectively accessible past

nor as neutral reflections of historical reality. They are historically situated narratives in which particular conceptions of sovereignty, legitimacy, order, and truth were articulated and reproduced. This interpretation also helps explain the continuity between pre-modern and modern historiography identified by White, Ricoeur, Rüsen, and Iggers. Although their methodological assumptions and criteria of historical validity differ substantially, both forms of historiography involve processes of selection, interpretation, narrative ordering, and meaning-making [1–3, 45]. The crucial difference, therefore, is not between a supposedly objective modern historiography and a supposedly subjective pre-modern historiography, but between different historical regimes of knowledge, each shaped by its own concepts of truth, authority, and meaning. Early Ottoman chronicles should consequently be read not only as sources for reconstructing what happened, but also as evidence of how political reality became historically intelligible, legitimate, and memorable.

4. CONCLUSION

Early Ottoman historiography comprises diverse but interconnected narrative forms, among which two major tendencies can be identified. The first consisted of general chronicles that narrated the history of the Ottoman dynasty from its foundation to the authors' own periods, while the second included ruler-centered works such as the *Selîmnâme*, *Süleymanname*, *Şehnâme*, and *Zafernâme* genres. Produced largely within the framework of palace patronage, these works emphasized the legitimacy of the ruler, political achievements, military victories, and the ideal characteristics of rulership and governance. Despite their different forms and purposes, both types participated in the broader process through which Ottoman political authority was narrated, interpreted, and legitimized.

The findings of this study further suggest that Ottoman political legitimacy operated partly through what may be described as narrative legitimacy. Dynastic ancestry, *ghaza*, divine providence, conquest, justice, and ideal rulership did not function merely as separate legitimizing claims; they acquired greater political significance when integrated into coherent narratives of historical continuity. Through this process, contingent political events could be represented as meaningful stages in the development of Ottoman sovereignty. Early Ottoman chronicles therefore did more than describe an established political order: they contributed to making that order historically intelligible, legitimate, and memorable.

From this perspective, the significance of early Ottoman chronicles extends beyond the events they recorded. These works reveal how the Ottoman political order understood and represented itself through historical narratives and how particular conceptions of sovereignty, legitimacy, and social order were made historically meaningful. They should consequently be considered not as passive reflections of the past, but as active forms of historical knowledge through which political authority, dynastic identity, and collective historical consciousness were shaped. At the same time, this interpretation does not imply that Ottoman chronicles simply fabricated the past. Their importance lies precisely in the interaction between historical events and the narrative frameworks through which those events were interpreted.

In this respect, early Ottoman historiography and modern historiography should not be understood as completely separate historical practices. Although they differ substantially in methods, purposes, and standards of historical validation, both involve processes of selection, interpretation, narrative ordering, and meaning-making. The continuity between them should therefore not be understood as an identity of methods or epistemological principles, but as a continuity in the fundamental human practice of transforming the past into meaningful historical knowledge. The difference lies in the regimes of truth, concepts of authority, and criteria of validity through which this process is carried out in different historical contexts [1–3, 45]. Early Ottoman chronicles should thus be read not only as sources for reconstructing what happened, but also as evidence of how a political community understood its past, legitimized its present, and imagined the continuity of its political order.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article.

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The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the course of preparing this manuscript, the authors employed ChatGPT to improve the linguistic quality and readability of the content. After utilizing this AI tool, the authors conducted comprehensive review and necessary

revisions to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and scientific rigor of the manuscript. All authors bear full responsibility for the final content of the published work, including any errors or inconsistencies that may arise.

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