

Facets of Ottoman Sexuality:
Male Same-Sex Sexual Relations and Boy Prostitution
in the Ottoman Empire



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Picture frontpage

Ottoman book painting, portraying the *içoğlanları*, the young servant boys serving in the Imperial Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. The painting hints at male same-sex sexual relationships happening in the Palace.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Introduction

Current negative, prejudiced views on homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality and transgenderism in the world and the gruesome daily experiences of homosexuals, transsexuals and transgenders in Istanbul in particular inspired me to write this thesis. To me this is not only an important topic within academic discourse on the Ottoman Empire, but also a humanist project to help change prejudiced views contributing to a more peaceful, understanding general attitude. Sex has no history because it originates in the functioning of the human body. Sexuality and gender however do have a history for they are historical and cultural constructs. As such, sexuality and gender can be studied as historical phenomena. Sexuality and gender and views on sexuality and gender, being cultural constructs, are subject to change. Furthermore, one should try to abstain from anachronistically projecting labels such as *homosexual* and *heterosexual* onto time periods during which choosing a sexual partner was considered a matter of practice, not of identity.¹

While opposite-sex and same-sex sexual intercourse are obviously as old as humanity, the discourse of sexuality as an identity is a quite recent phenomenon, an invented tradition. The terms *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *monosexual* and *heterogenit* (bestiality) did not exist until the 1860s when they were coined by journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny. Until this time the dominant sexual theory of the West had been a binary one: sex acts were separated into categories of procreative and non-procreative. Normal sexual behaviour was placed into a context of pro-creativity. This theory and ethic was primarily taught and maintained by the Catholic church and later other Christian churches.²

Not only was this theory present in the West, it was also prevalent in the Ottoman Empire, where dominant religion Sunni Hanefi Islam condemned all sexual intercourse outside marital or concubinage relation between a man and a woman, including sexual intercourse between men. Although marriage/concubinage between a man and a woman has always been regarded as the favourable way of life in the Ottoman Empire, heterosexuality as a concept did not exist. Moreover, sexual contacts outside a marital or concubinage relationship did also happen. These included sexual contacts between men, sexual relations between women and sexual contacts with (female and male) prostitutes. Although female same-sex sexual relations did occur as attested by scarce sources, women's activities seem to have gone unnoticed and consequently, undocumented. My aim in this thesis is to show that Ottoman men were not the

¹ Irvin Cemil Schick, "Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature," *Turkish Studies Association Journal*, 28, 1-2 (2004): 87.

² Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Dutton-Penguin Books, 1995), 17-8, 52.

conquering, “heterosexual,” pious Muslims the current Turkish president likes to portray them in order to create an ideal image to which the modern Turkish male citizen should mirror himself. Male same-sex sexual relations were omnipresent in the Ottoman Empire. These relations happened in the form of (love) relationships between adult men, adult men and (pre-) pubescent boys, between similar-aged pubescent boys and between paying men and boy prostitutes. Male prostitutes seem to have been mainly boys/youths and not adult men. Although there is a number of older academic and new popular publications that touch upon male same-sex sexual relations from the perspective of literature and social history,³ scholarly interest for this subject is of a fairly recent date. Recent academic works on Ottoman sexuality, in which male same-sex sexuality is touched upon as well, are written from three perspectives: literature, social history and art.

One of the first academic works dealing with this subject from the perspective of literature is Selim Sırrı Kuru’s dissertation *A Sixteenth-Century Scholar: Deli Birader and his “Dâfi’ül-gumûm ve râfi’ül-humûm.”* This dissertation presents an annotated translation of a primary source, *Dâfi’ü’l-gumûm ve râfi’ü’l-humûm, Expeller of Sorrows and Remover of Worries*, a *bâhnâme* created by scholar Mehmed from Bursa (d.1535), also called Deli Birader, under the penname Gazâlî in either the late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century for a courtier of Prince Korkud (d.1513). *Bâhnâmes*, “books of sexual desire,” were part-medical, part-instructional treatises to cure sexual deficits and/or serve as a guide for intercourse. This erotic treatise depicts various kinds of sexual acts happening within the Ottoman Empire, including male same-sex sexual acts and boy prostitution. Unfortunately, as Kuru’s work does not contain an analysis of Ottoman sexual life depicted by *Dâfi’ü’l-gumûm ve râfi’ü’l-humûm*, it does not directly contribute to the discourse on Ottoman sexuality. However, the text of *Dâfi’ü’l-gumûm ve râfi’ü’l-humûm* shows that sexual life in the Ottoman Empire was diverse and that intercourse between men was not limited to an older man-young boy couple as some researchers maintain, but that relations between adult bearded men did also happen.⁴

Interestingly, earlier Ottoman literature tends to display a much wider array of sexual acts than later Ottoman literary works that gravitate towards depicting love and sexual attraction between an adult male and a youth. These later Ottoman literary works were scrutinised by İrvın Cemil Schick. Schick’s *Representation of Gender and Sexuality in*

³ İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, *Divan Şiirinde Sapık Sevgi* (Istanbul: Okat Yayınevi, 1968). Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Tan Matbaası, 1958). Murat Bardakçı, *Osmanlı’da Seks: Sarayda Gece Dersleri* (Istanbul: Gür Yayınları, 1993). Rıza Zelyut, *Osmanlı’da Oğlancılık* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2016).

⁴ Selim Sırrı Kuru, “A Sixteenth-Century Scholar Deli Birader and his *Dâfi’ül-gumûm ve râfi’ül-humûm*” (Ph.D diss. Harvard University- ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000).

Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature compares Ottoman erotic *divan* (high-culture) poetry and folk poetry. He informs the reader that folk poetry, a product of rural areas, gravitates more towards describing women than *divan* poetry, a product of urban areas in which a pubescent boy is often object of praise. He explains this difference as a consequence of rural society being less gender-segregated and homosocial than urban society. In cities women were veiled and unrelated men and women did not mingle as protection of female virtue was seen as a moral obligation. Islam had less influence among the rural, agrarian Turkoman tribes where man and woman worked side-by-side in the sustainment of their livelihood. In Ottoman *divan* poetry, themes of love, gender and sexuality were very much present. The poet's voice was mainly male even when the composer was female. The gender of the object of desire would mostly be male but could be uncertain. Schick declares that *divan* poetry indicates three genders: adult men, adult women and young beardless boys. He proposes that choice of sexual partner was deemed a matter of practice not identity.⁵ His article shows that in later Ottoman *divan* poetry expression of sexual attraction and love for a young, beardless boy became standard practice, discontinuing literary expression of sexual attraction and love between adult men that had also been prevalent earlier. As such, the article reveals the changes in expression of male same-sex sexuality in Ottoman high-culture literature and contributes to the discourse on Ottoman male same-sex sexuality.

The literary trope of the young, beardless boy can also be discerned in the book by Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı *The Age of The Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*. The book has set understanding of how early-modern Ottoman and European societies interpreted, defined love and who “the beloved” in their poetry and prose was as its goal. Although the gender of the beloved was often ambiguous in medieval European and Ottoman poetry, the gender of the beloved in Ottoman *divan* poetry was primarily a youth. Andrews and Kalpaklı warn the reader that he/she should not fall in the trap of essentialist cultural misrepresentation of Ottoman sexuality as preferring male same-sex sexual desire when the object of praise is a boy. They indicate that the coded language of Ottoman poetry implies an unconsummated, intellectual, spiritual love for boys that was not available in relations with women who were only valued on a physical level. On the other hand, Andrews and Kalpaklı do express their awareness of the simultaneous existence of male physical attraction to other males/boys as for one, boys from lower classes

⁵ Irvin Cemil Schick, “Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature,” *Turkish Studies Association Journal*, 28, 1-2 (2004): 81-103.

involved in relationships for love and money are mentioned. The book, although not regarding these phenomena as such, contributes to our knowledge on Ottoman male same-sex sexual relations and boy prostitution as it is filled with instances where Ottoman males engaged in same-sex sexual relations and made use of boy prostitutes.⁶

Müge Özoğlu's 2018 doctoral dissertation on late Ottoman Turkish erotic narratives titled *No Man's Land: Gender and Sexuality in Erotic Narratives of the Late Ottoman Empire* discusses how these narratives of the early twentieth century functioned in order to construct new discourses on gender, sexuality, the body, masculinity and identity in the Ottoman Empire. As the literature under scrutiny also contains male same-sex eroticism and deals somewhat with changing opinions on male same-sex sexual relations in the Ottoman Empire, it is a helpful addition to the article of Schick.⁷

There are also several academic works reflecting upon Ottoman male same-sex sexual relations from the perspective of social history. One of these is Khaled El-Rouayheb's book *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. It is the result of scrutiny of multiple Arabic literary texts full of references to male same-sex sexual relations and love written in the Ottoman Middle East from the sixteenth until the nineteenth century and European travellers' accounts to gain an understanding of how the writers looked upon male same-sex sexuality in Ottoman society. El-Rouayheb, noting that it is vital not to confuse the modern concept of homosexuality with male same-sex sexual relations occurring in the past, declares that the majority of the researched literature conveys pederastic love between an adult man and a pubescent boy.⁸ His account, while affirming the prevalence of relations between adult men and young boys, also displays instances of sexual relations between similar-aged young men and mentions events where money was offered to youths for intercourse. As such, the insights offered by this work function to better grasp the range of male same-sex sexual relations. Although boy prostitution is touched upon in short, it is not explicitly discussed and analysed.

Yaron Ben-Naeh scrutinised Ottoman Jewish sources to research the sexual behaviour of Ottoman Jews and specifically male same-sex sexual relations within the Jewish community living during the late fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Ben-Naeh compares sexuality as

⁶ Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁷ Müge Özoğlu, "No Man's Land: Gender and Sexuality in Erotic Narratives of the Late Ottoman Empire" (Ph.D diss., Leiden University, 2018)

⁸ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

prescribed for Muslims by the Ottoman Islamic law system versus sexual acts happening within the Muslim community on the one hand and sexuality prescribed for Jews by Jewish law and communal regulations versus sexual acts happening within the Jewish community on the other hand. Generally the active partner was an adult of higher social status, the passive partner a pubescent boy of lower social status, commonly an apprentice, a pupil or a slave. Sexual relations were based on mutual consent or rape. The passive partner was frequently an orphan without familial protection or a member of a lower social class who worked as bathhouse attendant, entertainer or barber. Sexual relations happened within private houses, coffeehouses, bathhouses or nature.⁹ Ben-Naeh's article furthers our understanding of the sorts of male same-sex sexual relations happening among Ottoman religious minorities. There is no focus on the paid or non-paid aspect of these relations.

Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900 by Dror Ze'evi traces the history of sexuality starting in the Islamicate world towards and ending in the Ottoman Empire. He deals with discourses on sexuality, gender and the body in the Ottoman Empire from its inception to the late period based on primary sources such as texts on law, morality, medicine, shadow theatre, dream interpretation and travel accounts by foreigners. One entire chapter is devoted to reconstruction of Ottoman orthodox Hanafi and Sufi conceptions of sexuality including the love for beardless boys. Male same-sex intercourse mostly in the form of an older man-younger boy couple is mentioned as well. The attitude distinguished in many Ottoman discourses was egalitarian, choice of sexual partner had little to do with gender, status or class and male same-sex sexual acts were seen as a transgenerational phenomenon. Male sexuality was believed to change over time. During boyhood, male's sexuality was untamed, drawn to older men as well as boys or women. It was expected that once boys entered adulthood their sexual behaviour would change and they would only be attracted to women and younger boys. Sexual intercourse between adult men was seen as a deviation from "normal sexuality" and condemned but anticipated. Intercourse with boys contrarily was not regarded a deviation of normality even by the most rigid *ulema*.¹⁰ As the book discloses the prevalence of a wide variety of sexual relations between men and explains the interpretation of what entailed "normal sexuality," it is helpful to understand how Ottomans looked at sexuality and the accepted forms of male same-sex sexual relations. The book does

⁹ Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Moshko The Jew And His Gay Friends: Same-Sex Sexual Relations in Ottoman Jewish Society," *JEMH* 9,1-2 (2005): 79-105.

¹⁰ Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

unfortunately not look into paid sexual acts.

Marinos Sariyannis discusses prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul seen through the lens of illicit occupations in his article *Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth-Early Eighteenth Century*. Sariyannis explains that adultery and prostitution cases are rare in Ottoman court registers because *sharî'a* (Islamic law) makes it very difficult to prove infidelity in case of suspicion of adultery and involved parties in prostitution would not go to court as prostitution was illegal. He describes female prostitution in various forms, customers of female prostitutes, places of female prostitution, practices of pimps and female prostitution linked to the slave trade. Although Sariyannis briefly mentions boy prostitution as portrayed in the works of Evlîyâ Çelebî (seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller), the tolerant attitude of the State towards male same-sex sexual acts, the bathhouse as place of male prostitution and poor boys accompanying soldiers on field excursions as intimate companions, he does not sketch an in-depth picture of boy prostitution. Sariyannis concludes that very little is known about the particulars of prostitutes and that the territory of boy prostitution is still unexplored.¹¹

Elyse Semerdjian explains in her article *'Because he is so tender and pretty': sexual deviance and heresy in eighteenth-century Aleppo* how *sharî'a* courts in Aleppo treated cases of illicit sexual intercourse between men. Semerdjian examines the unique case of conviction of a youth named Muhammad in its social, customary and legal Sunni Hanafi context. Semerdjian explains that this conviction might have happened because Muhammad was a fatherless minor with an unsupported mother, both of lower social status and Ottoman law insisted on a father's responsibility to protect his son. Without male defence legal interpretation necessitated expulsion of son and mother.¹² As the article describes an instance of boy prostitution between a youth and adult men chastised by the Ottoman legal system, it is valuable for our understanding of boy prostitution.

Serkan Delice's essay *The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul* is a rare publication on boy prostitution in eighteenth-century Ottoman Istanbul. It describes lower-class young shampooers who, beside bathing clients, prostituted themselves in the bathhouses of Istanbul. Delice presents particulars concerning the background of these prostituting shampooers and their workplaces gathered from primary and secondary sources, for example eighteenth-century Ottoman treasury

¹¹ Marinos Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Turcica*, 40 (2008): 37-65.

¹² Elyse Semerdjian, "Because he is so tender and pretty': sexual deviance and heresy in eighteenth-century Aleppo," *Social Identities*, Vol. 18, No.2 (March 2012): 175-99.

registers and the *Istanbul Encyclopaedia* by Reşad Ekrem Koçu (1905-1975). The *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, a secondary source, designates young shampooers as Janissary-affiliates and sexual partners of senior Janissaries based on one primary source, a seventeenth-century erotic treatise on bathhouses called *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ*, *The Hearth-Warming Book of the Bathhouse Attendant*. However, since there is suspicion regarding the authorship of the *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ* (it seems that Koçu might have written this treatise instead of its supposed eyewitness author Derviş İsmail), the integrity of this treatise and by extension a part of the *Istanbul Encyclopaedia* are at stake. As Delice based a great portion of his essay on analysis of the *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ*, his conclusion regarding the upgrading to “bedfellow status” of bath attendants in male same-sex sexual relations with Janissaries (not validated by another source) as “a sign of a protective network of patrons, clients and suitors” and “a sign of the formation of an established, independent and self-contained subculture: a male homosexual mode of life...” in which there was more than only sex, might be proven incorrect.¹³

In his article *Shifts in sexual desire: bans on dancing boys (köçeks) throughout Ottoman modernity (1800s-1920s)*, Mustafa Avcı re-interprets the sudden de-popularisation of the long lasting popular *köçek* culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. *Köçeks* were cross-dressing young male dancers performing in Ottoman elite and normal settings. According to Avcı, most scholars researching *köçeks* have tied the disappearance of *köçek* performances to its imperial ban issued in 1856/7 due to outbursts of social disorder. Although Avcı accepts this explanation, he proposes there is more to it. He notes that the ban was created because state officials, wanting to modernise aspects of the empire modelled on Western cultural norms, started to question prevalent open expressions of male same-sex sexual acts in light of those norms. Officials began to feel ashamed of male same-sex sexual practices and consequently women became more visible in public space.¹⁴ As the article reveals that *köçeks* working in coffeehouses and taverns were involved in male same-sex sexual relations, it presents information on what kind of people were entangled in these relationships and several locations where sexual unions took place. Avcı did not look into boy prostitution.

There is one academic work on male same-sex sexual relations from the perspective of art. Tülay Artan and İrvin Cemil Schick’s essay *Ottomanizing pornotopia: Changing visual*

¹³ Serkan Delice, “The Janissaries and their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures*, ed. Gül Özyeğin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 115-136.

¹⁴ Mustafa Avcı, “Shifts in sexual desire: bans on dancing boys (*köçeks*) throughout Ottoman modernity (1800s-1900s),” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 53:5 (2017): 762-81.

codes in eighteenth-century Ottoman erotic miniatures describes several forms of erotic literature, poetry and visual art among which so called *bâhnâmes*, “books of sexual desire,” that often made reference to male same-sex sexual relations. Some Ottoman manuscript copies of literary works were illustrated repeatedly with erotic miniatures. Several miniatures exhibit cross-generational male same-sex intercourse and sexual acts between similar-aged males.¹⁵ It is interesting to see that although sexual relations between adult men was not a topic within *divan* poetry or later literary works, miniatures produced in earlier and later periods did depict intercourse between adult men as well as men belonging to different life stages.

The current state-of-the-art on gender, male same-sex sexual relations and boy prostitution forms the starting point of this thesis. As the literature review has revealed, gender in the Ottoman Empire was constructed through the depiction of women as the indicator of society’s virtue and morality. The state sought to regulate women’s visibility and sexuality. Interaction between the opposite-sex was limited. Men were seen as superior to women and minor males. It was the handsome pubescent boy and not the beautiful woman who was praised in Ottoman *divan* poetry. Choice of sexual partner had little to do with gender or class and male same-sex sexual acts were seen as a transgenerational phenomenon. Male sexuality was believed to change over time. Because boys were mentioned as the object of desire in their own right not being a substitute for women, İrvin Cemil Schick proposes to call them a third gender. The state was tolerant of the male same-sex sexual relations that happened in diverse venues in forms of love, sexual or paid relationships. There were boys accompanying soldiers as intimate companions and there were Ottoman officials who had sexual relationships with a youth. Although the current academic literature on Ottoman sexuality does present insights on male same-sex sexual relations, these relations are primarily evaluated as occurrences in the form of an adult male-young boy couple. As there were also other forms of this phenomenon, this narrow and biased representation is not representative of Ottoman reality and hence causes researchers to start on the wrong foot. Prostitution of (pre-)pubescent boys, a phenomenon that might seem shocking, was not uncommon in the Ottoman Empire. Although the amount of literature on Ottoman sexuality and female prostitution is substantial and growing, literature focusing on boy prostitution in the Ottoman Empire is virtually non-existent. These observations have led to the following research question: *What was the position of male same-sex sexual relations in Ottoman sexual life and more specifically, to what extent did boy*

¹⁵ Tülay Artan and İrvin Cemil Schick, “Ottomanizing pornotopia: Changing visual codes in eighteenth-century Ottoman erotic miniatures,” in *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art*, ed. Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif (London: Ashgate, 2013), 157-190.

prostitution play a role in this sexual life?

In order to answer this research question attention will be drawn to various angles. Chapter one will describe how gender and sexuality can be understood in their context within historical societies, including the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the legal framework of sexual relations represented by Ottoman law, combining two legal systems: Islamic law and customary law, united in sovereign *kânûn* or criminal code, will be scrutinised. Chapter two will present an analytical inventory of male same-sex sexual relations in Ottoman society arranged in chronological order and according to space based on both secondary and primary sources. Chapter three, the final one, will outline the phenomenon of boy prostitution within the Ottoman Empire also based on both secondary and primary sources.

After looking into various theories that might be helpful to answer the research question, it has become clear that this research will not benefit from the application of a certain theoretical framework, but from deployment of the right methodology. Diverse cultural-historical primary sources such as archival documents, registers, travelogues, manuscripts on poetry, literature and miniature art, historiographies and books on etiquette will be analysed. Secondary sources such as books on the history of gender and sexuality, books and articles on gender, sexuality and prostitution in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East will be employed. Now let us observe what gender and sexuality entailed in various historical societies, including the Ottoman Empire, how Ottoman law dictated gender roles and human sexual interaction, and how sexual acts, in accordance or defiance of the law, unfolded in reality.

Chapter I: Gender and Sexuality in the Ottoman State

Since societies are influenced by other societies through exchange of cultural production, ideas and modes of behaviour can be passed on from one society to another. In order to understand the phenomenon of male same-sex sexual relations prevalent in Ottoman society, not only the meanings and expressions of gender and sexuality within the Ottoman Empire, but also their meanings and expressions across time in previous societies that influenced the Ottomans should be scrutinised. Sex has no history because it is rooted in the biological functioning of the human body. However, sexuality and gender do have a history and in this chapter this history, starting in ancient Greece and Rome, preceded by the ongoing academic discussion on how to interpret gender and sexuality in the present and in various historical societies, will be presented. Finally, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of gender and sexuality in Ottoman society through scrutiny of various sources reflecting on these notions from the perspectives of law, culture and social history.

As academic fields of research, history of sexuality and gender history in their current social constructionist forms date back to the 1970s. Various researchers have concluded that many publications on the history of sexuality take the gender binary male/female for granted without questioning it and justify deviations as an exception to this standard. Recently, this generally accepted universal given has come under scrutiny and several researchers have come up with more complex designs and third gender models to make sense of the variety of past gender identities and sexual praxis around the world.¹⁶

The binary male/female that has its reverberations in language, religion and science and can be seen throughout history in almost every culture, needs some elucidation. According to Robert A. Nye, the mammalian model of reproduction based on the male/female dichotomy has obviously been replicated in human society. Although male and female reproductive capability, being important to ensure the continuance of the human species, was held in high esteem, there is proof that at times in history communities curbed fertility in order to stop population growth when population numbers threatened communal and individual well-being in an environment of limited resources. Even though sexual performance, genital organs, female menstruation, pregnancy, male erection and ejaculation have consistently played a notable role in cultural evaluation of this capability, human societies have also employed other criteria to define a male as a man and a female as a woman and as more or less masculine or feminine

¹⁶ Robert A. Nye, "Sexuality," in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 11-12.

variants of their gender. As a consequence, it might seem that sexual competency is a biological, static given and gender is a cultural construct. The generally agreed upon gender understandings of societies have prescribed what is allowed in the sphere of sexual behaviour and sexual identity for the male and female gender. This has led to a favourable disposition towards patriarchy or male dominance. Sexual practices are thoroughly shaped by the gender criteria that are prevalent in the social, cultural and political arenas. Furthermore, because of the influence of the agreed upon gender understandings and the procreative model of sex, we are led to reflect upon sexuality as an intrinsic urge preferring opposite-sex sexual relations. This regard has also been upheld by scientific conception and religious doctrine. However, one cannot dictate one's sexual desire to act in a societally approved way. The capriciousness of sexual desire has repeatedly undermined the opposite-sex/heterosexual model. It has stimulated (religious) communities and governments to champion moral regimes that restrain sexuality in support of acknowledged gender and sexual norms. Consequently, this constraint has many times caused sexual liberty to become a motive for revolt.¹⁷

Despite the fact that no one will deny sexual desire to be a force with biological purposes, researchers of sexuality have found new ways to reflect upon the dynamics of sexuality pursuing Michel Foucault's line of thought. Foucault saw sexual desire not as a natural given but as a construct, a cultural discourse involved in power dynamics expressed through discourses of religion, law, politics, science and societal convictions. His reasoning provokes us to question and rethink sexuality; sex not as an inborn urge, but as a creation of cultural strategies entangled in politics and power. Reflecting upon sexuality as a cultural discourse and construct *in lieu* of natural inclination, creates the opportunity for a broader understanding of sexual behaviour of societies. It gives researchers another lens through which they can scrutinise sexuality as a sort of power that performs on and through humans, causing them to comply with or revolt against societal norms. Looking at sexuality through this lens does not mean we should reject the innate root of sexual desire, but we should also think about ways in which an individual's sexual expression is influenced by culture and power dynamics.¹⁸

Gender and sexuality as constructs can be traced in multiple societies throughout history. Interpreting these notions in their cultural context creates the opportunity for a better comprehension of human sexual behaviour. The relationship between gender, sexuality and

¹⁷ Nye, "Sexuality," 12.

¹⁸ Nye, "Sexuality," 13.

power can clearly be distinguished in historical societies, such as Greece and Rome.

Classical Greek and Roman societies with hierarchical gender systems preferred capable male successors and deemed women solely as child-bearing agents. Many Greek and Roman men performed their conjugal obligations but sought their sexual satisfaction with prostitutes or boys. Marriage was primarily an agreement between male family members of the bride and groom to yield male successors and to pass on property to the next generation of patriarchs. Today's love or companionate marriage did not exist.¹⁹

In ancient hierarchic, patriarchal Greece the only people who were considered citizens, a separate, honourable group, were adult freeborn men. Freeborn boys reached the citizen status upon entering adulthood. Freeborn women, slaves (including prostitutes), freeborn boys and foreigners were not seen as citizens and held an inferior position with few rights. Citizens were permitted to have sexual relations with non-citizens. *Paidierastia*, pederasty, was a hierarchical sexual (love) relationship between a freeborn man and a freeborn pubescent boy of the same respectable status. The active or insertive partner was the adult, the passive or receptive partner the minor. There is no consensus whether or not these freeborn youths were allowed to embrace the passive position in intercourse, but they were not stigmatised. However, a freeborn man still desiring the passive role after he had reached citizen-status, was deemed effeminate and jeopardised his honour. Pubescent boys were likened to women in manners and image with their hairless skin and compliant demeanor.²⁰

Kenneth J. Dover, researching Greek male same-sex sexual practices as represented in Greek literature and art, asserts that since mutual sexual desire of partners within the same age category was unknown in ancient Greece, it is vital to distinguish between the active bodily action of the one who has fallen in love and the passive bodily action of the one whom he has fallen in love with.²¹ An interesting point he makes concerning how the ancient Greeks looked upon same-sex sexual desire is that the Greeks were mindful of the idea that individuals vary in their sexual preferences, but because they believed that almost everyone responds at various times both to same-sex and opposite-sex stimuli and that practically no male both penetrates other men and submits to penetration by other men at the same phase of his life, their language did not have words to express the words "a homosexual" and "a heterosexual."²²

Roman society differed somewhat. Although also hierarchic and patriarchal, sexual

¹⁹ Nye, "Sexuality," 13-14.

²⁰ Sara Elise Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.-A.D. 235) Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 264.

²¹ Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, first edition 1978 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 16.

²² Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 1.

encounters between a freeborn man and freeborn boys, unmarried freeborn women, other men's wives and freeborn grown men were deemed unlawful and liable to prosecution. All freeborn persons counted as citizen, the highest status. The Roman freeborn man was allowed to have sexual relations with his wife, prostitutes and slaves of both sexes. In same-sex sexual intercourse he was expected to take up the active role. The freeborn man who chose to embrace the passive position, was ridiculed as effeminate, as this position was only regarded fit for women, male prostitutes and male slaves.²³

The hierarchic patriarchal gender systems prevalent in ancient Greece and Rome established the basis for subsequent occurrence in the West. The Greek and Roman freeborn adult male citizen enjoyed legal preeminence over all societal others. In the Greek case freeborn boys were not yet regarded citizens, in the Roman case they were. Women were seen as subordinate beings and possessed meager rights and autonomy. Strict codes of sexual demeanor based on notions of active versus passive sexual practices complemented their gender systems. An adult male citizen was allowed to be the active party in same-sex sexual relations. If he took the passive position during intercourse he could lose his honour. In ancient Greece, as freeborn boys had not yet reached citizen-status, they had not yet acquired their manly honour and as such, could not lose it. In ancient Rome freeborn boys were citizens from birth onwards and off-limits as a same-sex sexual partner.

Academics such as Kenneth J. Dover, Robert A. Nye and David M. Halperin have reasoned that ancient pederasty had nothing in common with our perception of homosexuality in which alternate penetration between same-sex partners similar in age and social status can take place. This view of homosexuality is different from the Greek and Roman idea in which same-sex intercourse happened between partners unequal in hierarchic position and age. The notion of ancient pederasty and its distinctness from modern homosexuality started an epistemological discussion in the 1970s. Social constructionists contended that it is inaccurate to liken homosexuality to same-sex sexual relations before the creation of the word in the 1860s. People from the past experiencing same-sex sexual relations would not have grasped the feeling of identification of modern people identifying as homosexual. Essentialists argued that homosexuality and homosexual love have always been close to identical. This discussion, separate from the debate on genetically caused inclination towards a sexual disposition continues, encouraging academics to evaluate sexual acts in their historical context.²⁴

²³ Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers*, 3, 229-35, 239, 262-64.

²⁴ Nye, "Sexuality," 14.

Gender and sexual practices in the classical world were devised by social assumptions, custom and law, not by religion. In the period that ensued classical antiquity when Christianity became the principal religion, this changed. Christianity was established by men, its religious texts and teachings were devised by men. Their opinions were taken as normative without consulting women as women were assigned a subordinate position. The male-centered worldview embedded in Christianity prescribed gender roles and status of men and women. A patriarchal order in which the mandate of the father dominated over wife and children informed the political order in which power resided with adult men. This produced a hierarchy in which women and minor males occupied an inferior position with legal, political and social disadvantages.²⁵ Sex was considered the source of original sin and abstinence of sexual activity was seen as the path to redemption. After Theodosius I, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, established Christianity as the imperial religion in 380, the puritanical Christian stance on abstinence was loosened by the need for sexual reproduction to safeguard the perpetuation of the empire. Marriage became a blessed institution as a vehicle for procreation but sex between husband and wife for pleasure was sinful. Medieval Christianity's stance on sexuality was informed by the notion that the will must master the turbulent body. This notion however did not remain undisputed. Some Western scholars argued that sex, even extraconjugal, was indispensable for physical health because it reestablished the body's humoral balance through disposal of harmful seed accumulation in males and females. Having intercourse was considered beneficial and masturbation, although being liable to severe punishment, was advised by some physicians for both sexes. Marriage in the medieval Christian West often was, similar to ancient Greek and Roman practices, a social, economic agreement.²⁶

Despite the fact that masturbation, sex for pleasure and same-sex sexual relations were condemned by Christian law, historians have found sources attesting to the widespread prevalence of these acts amongst men and women in the medieval Western world. The seventh-century *Penitential of Cummean* describes sins that monks might perpetrate with fellow monks and their punishments. In 1432 an office called *Ufficali di Notte* (Office of the Night) was built in Florence to register events relating to male sodomy and in 1418 a college assembly called *Collegio dei Sodomiti* (College of Sodomites) was set up in Venice to judge and punish

²⁵ Ursula King, "Religion and Gender: Embedded Patterns, Interwoven Frameworks," in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Theresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 73.

²⁶ Ruth Evans, "Introduction: What Was Sexuality in the Middle Ages," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ruth Evans (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 1-10, 16.

perpetrators of sodomy by beheading on the square of San Marco.²⁷ Sodomy was used to describe sex between men and between women.²⁸ Cross-dressing, although forbidden by the Bible as a shameful switch of gender roles, was practised by men and women.²⁹

Gender roles and sexual acts in the Christian West were prescribed by religious law and custom. However, in reality people did not always abide to these rules. Same-sex sexual relations did happen undeterred by religious commands. A similar situation seems to have existed in the Islamic world. Gender, sexual ideas and practices in the Islamic world were, comparable to the Christian West, devised by religious law and custom.³⁰ *Shari'a*, religious law, based on Qur'an and *hadith*, writings concerning the sayings and acts of Muhammad, surfaced after his death (632) as the foremost pillar of the faith system. Early Islam's emphasis on equality of men and women and its mandates for women's just treatment were not given their due attention in the lawmaking process evolving in the Abbasid Caliphate. Within orthodox Sunni Islam, six schools of *fiqh*, jurisprudence, developed of which four, named after their founders, have continued: the Hanafi (Abu Hanifa, 699-767), Maliki (Malik ibn Anas, 711-95), Shafi'i (Al-Shafi'i, 767-820) and Hanbali (Ibn Hanbal, 780-855) schools. The earliest school is the one of Abu Hanifa born in Kufa, the first capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. In Hanafi legal doctrine shaped in Abbasid territory, gender roles and sexuality were prescribed by the androcentric principle that women, although granted the right to sexual gratification, were probable forces of sexual destruction requiring the mastership of men to secure their sexuality, honour (also their husband's honour) and the stability of society. Women were obliged to veil, to stay within their homes, be modest, obedient and pious. They were encouraged to marry at an early age (from nine years onwards) and Islamic patrilineal marriage formed the quintessential institution for the Muslim woman. The Muslim man was allowed to marry up to four wives on the condition that each one was treated equally (rendering polygamist marriage close to impossible), keep an unlimited number of concubine-slaves and divorce his wife easily. Only sex between a man and a woman within the boundaries of marriage or concubinage was permitted. All other sexual acts were forbidden. Celibacy was not encouraged, but virginity in females was held in high esteem. Elite and even moderately wealthy Abbasid men acquired huge harems filled with concubines

²⁷ Michele De Martin, "Sodomy in Venice in the XV Century," 29 Jan. '16, www.venicecafe.it/sodomia-a-venezia-nel-xv-secolo/.

²⁸ Evans, "Introduction," 11-13.

²⁹ Evans, "Introduction," 16-17.

³⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-56, 72. Guity Nashat, "Women in the Middle East, 8000 BCE to 1700 CE," in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 233-37.

guarded by eunuchs, cultural traits belonging to the former Sasanian royalty.³¹ *Sharī‘a* within the Hanafi *fiqh* tradition chastised proven *zinâ*, offences of sexual intercourse outside of marriage/concubinage including adultery and prostitution, by the fixed punishments (*hadd*) of stoning to death if the perpetrator was *muhsan* (free, married Muslim) and one hundred lashes if the offender was *ghayr muhsan* (slave, unmarried or non-Muslim). To prove *zinâ*, the offence had either to be affirmed by four just male Muslim eyewitnesses of good standing who had seen the deed performed, or by a personal confession repeated four times. There was however a special clause attached to this ruling. A false accusation led to a fixed punishment of lashes and the witnesses were required to throw the stones.³²

Despite the prescriptions regarding gender and accepted sexual relations and the punishments in *sharī‘a*, divergent sexual relations and cross-gender behaviour were present in society. In the Abbasid court of ninth-century Baghdad slave girls, known as *ghulâmîya*, “boy-like,” dressed as boys to please man attracted to boys. A *ghulâm* was a (pre-)pubescent boy. Male and female transvestism was not only condoned, it was institutionalised in the form of professional entertainment. There is textual evidence for institutionalised cross-dressing, cross-gender behaviour and male homoeroticism, for example the writings of the Abbasid court poet Abu Nuwas and prose writer Al-Jahiz.³³

Another example of deviance of permitted sexuality was the prevalence of *lûtîs*. Abu Nuwas was a *lûtî*, an adult man sexually attracted to pubescent youths, just like his benefactor Al-Amin, the sixth Abbasid caliph. During intercourse the *lûtî* was the penetrating party. The reason for the youth’s compliance was more often financial compensation than sexual desire, although there have been instances of *mubâdil* “exchange of roles.” *Lûtîs* were viewed in a similar vein as the city rogues; with slight discontent mixed with a bit of envy. Abbasid society rated masculinity not based on choice of sexual partner but on sexual act. Being a *lûtî* was not considered harmful to one’s honour or demasculinising. It was regarded as extravagant but sane behaviour, surpassing the set boundaries of morality. The penetrated pubescent boys were seen as effeminate, as boys were likened to women with their corporeal softness, hairless faces and lack of emotional self-control. Beards, regarded as one of the prominent features of masculinity within Islamic cultures, was an aspect boys lacked.³⁴

³¹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 62-67, 79-83, 88-90. Nashat, “Women in the Middle East,” 238-40.

³² James E. Baldwin, “Prostitution, Islamic Law and Ottoman Societies,” *JESHO*, 55 (2012): 121-23.

³³ Everett Rowson, “Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad,” in *Gender and Differences in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 46-52.

³⁴ Rowson, “Gender Irregularity,” 53.

The Sunni Muslim Ottoman state followed the Abbasids in their preference for Hanafi *fiqh* to guide gender roles and sexual practice. In the Ottoman Empire, *şerî'at* never had much practicality in its implementation, its law being inadequate since fixed punishments are solely specified for a definite amount of offences, leaving out many others. Furthermore, its requisites of proof are so stringent that several crimes cannot be disciplined. Consequently, in earlier Muslim territories justice was served by the head of police or the market inspector instead of the religious judges. To penalise criminal offences not punishable by religious courts, separate administrative courts of complaint headed by the ruler or an official were established. Jurisprudence in these secular courts was based on customary law, the public interest and autonomous laws of the ruler. This is why Ottoman sultans, for whom social order and just rule were important, formulated regulations (*kânûn*) combining the separate systems of religious and administrative jurisprudence. These sultanic regulations of criminal law created in harmony with *şerî'at* and *'örf* were put together in codes, *kânûnnâmes*.³⁵

Kânûnnâmes regarded men and women to be equally liable as did *şerî'at*. *Kânûnnâmes*, the first one drafted under Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444-46, 1451-81), differed from *şerî'at* in chastisement and requirement of proof. They provided a system of chastisement based on fines instead of fixed punishments such as stoning. This was in harmony with *şerî'at* as it provided a possibility for punishment at the judge's discretion (*ta'zîr*) when the fixed punishment could not be applied. The *kânûnnâme*'s novelty was that in case of *ta'zîr*, judicial power lay with the jurists who had written the *kânûnnâme* avoiding power abuse of the judge. Adultery and sex outside of marriage/concubinage were chastised with a monetary fine between 30-300 *akçe* (silver coin) with or without lashings/canings. Punishments for procuring and prostitution were not treated in the chapter on *zinâ* but in chapters on other offences. Prostitution was treated as a threat to public order and procuring as coercing. People forced into committing *zinâ* were not liable to penalty. Procuring was chastised with branding of the forehead or lashings in addition to public scorning and a fine. Exile from one's living quarters/village/town/city was prescribed as punishment for the "self-selling harlot" and the criminal (including procurers) in case the neighbours complained in court. The litigants did not have to provide the strict eyewitness accounts of sexual acts as required by *şerî'at* when they uttered their concerns with regards to immorality by using euphemisms and generalisations.

³⁵ Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, ed. V.L. Ménage (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1-3.

The court would accept general agreement.³⁶

Because Ottoman was not a gendered language (except Arabic combinations) when speaking of “self-selling harlots,” women as well as men could be implied. Süleyman’s *kânûnnâme* however displays a gendered vocabulary; men, women, widows, girls and boys are mentioned. There is no focus on numerical age. Attention is given to changing gender identity during one’s life-cycle stages since its main purpose was to preserve social order. It does not discriminate between gender in terms of fines as these were equal for men and women. But it considers marital status, social status, life-cycle phase, being free or slave, religious affiliation, wealth and financial dependency in determination of the appropriate fine. It punishes married *zinâ* offenders more severe than single ones and slaves of both sexes. A married man was obliged to pay for his wife’s infidelity when he did not divorce her after having been with another man. Male same-sex sexual intercourse between an adult man and someone’s sexually mature son and sexual intercourse *per anum* with women are mentioned. In case the boy involved in sexual relations with an adult man was not mature, his father would receive lashes because he had forsaken to safeguard his son.³⁷

There might have been three reasons for the fine-based system: firstly, meeting the conditions in order to confer the death penalty was close to impossible because four honest Muslim male eyewitnesses had to corroborate the instant of *zinâ* and a moral-ethical appeal was done to their conscience as they were required to throw the stones. Secondly, the awarding of fines might have formed a source of income and thirdly might have adapted better to the well-being of the governed communities. Instead of seeking affirmation by four Muslim male eyewitnesses as required by *şeri‘at*, ground to convict was found in less strict ways, for example through consensus of the community.³⁸

Gender roles and sexual acts in the Ottoman Empire were prescribed by a corpus of Islamic legal writings and custom. But just like people from earlier civilisations, Ottomans did not always behave according to these prescriptions. Women did not always submit to concealment and illicit sexual acts, including prostitution and (male) same-sex sexual relations, did occur irrespective of religious prohibition. Although the *kânûnnâme* mentions prostitution taking place in carvanserais where female slaves were sold to guests and postulates besides expulsion, severe corporeal and public punishments for procurers, court registers belonging to

³⁶ Heyd, *Studies*, 36-37, 56-64, 71, 76, 88-89, 92, 95-103, 110, 114, 126-27, 130. Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 35. Marinos Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth-Early Eighteenth Century,” *Turcica*, 40 (2008), 39-43. Baldwin, “Prostitution,” 119, 128, 133-40.

³⁷ Heyd, *Studies*, 56-93, 95-131. Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 94.

³⁸ Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 30, 57-58. Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul,” 40-41.

the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries primarily mention prostitution occurring in residential houses and exile as the pre-eminent penalty for procurers and prostitutes. As prostitution was not seen as a *zinâ* offence punishable with a fixed punishment but as a threat to public order and morality by the *kânûnnâme*, Ottoman courts relegated the responsibility to control prostitution and procuring taking place within a residential quarter to the community there and acted upon complaints of residents by banishing offenders from their neighbourhood or ordering corporeal punishments. Although officials from the military class or sultans regularly physically punished prostitutes and procurers in cities such as Istanbul, Cairo and Damascus as attested by sultanic decrees and historiographies, in general neighbourhoods were responsible for immoral behaviour and prostitution happening in their midst.³⁹

Before looking at examples of court handling of *zinâ* offences including prostitution and sexual intercourse between men, it is important to know how social control operated. The state had been implementing surveillance measures to control crime and prostitution in its cities since at least the time of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's second reign (1451-81) with periodic crackdowns by state officials, Janissaries and sultans on coffeehouses, taverns and hammams. However as there was no professional police force, protection of the community lay with local community leaders and the heads of households. There was no street lighting until the second half of the nineteenth century facilitating illicit activities including prostitution. Residential quarters were overcrowded and privacy was minimal. Many had private militias or night guards to protect its residents. The *kânûnnâme* considered quarters legal entities responsible for morality. As the community was liable for payment of fines when a crime happened and the criminal fled, local residents kept a close watch on each other and everyone entering the neighbourhood, reporting illicit activities to the security official (*sûbâşı*) or the judge (*kâdî*). Single men and women without family or moral guarantor suffered from watchful neighbours who would use each hint of immoral behaviour to have them banished from the neighbourhood. From the early eighteenth century onwards policing of the neighbourhoods became progressively rigid. Instead of conquering new lands and extracting legitimacy from war efforts, the Ottoman sultans turned towards more thorough control of the population and safeguarding social order than ever before, especially in the capital Istanbul.⁴⁰

³⁹ Heyd, *Studies*, 88-89, 126-27, 92, 130. Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Istanbul," 42. Baldwin, "Prostitution," 136, 142-44.

⁴⁰ Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul," 42. Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 125-32. Marc D. Baer, "Death in the Hippodrome: Sexual Politics and Legal Culture in the Reign of Mehmet IV," *Past and Present*, no. 210 (2011): 73. Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2014), 3-4, 13-17, 23.

This population control and preservation of order through neighbourhood surveillance can be distinguished in court registers, giving insight into the particulars of illicit sexual acts and the legal operation on *zinâ* in reality. Aleppo court registers belonging to the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries investigated by Elyse Semerdjian display 121 cases. The records show that women presenting as prostitutes were of lower social status. Many of the prostitutes were from outside Aleppo. No information concerning average income or motivations for prostitution is given. The records of Aleppo's Salahiyya court attest that two women, Myriam bint Yusuf and her mother Yara, a Christian, were expelled from their residential quarter Jubb Asad Allah as requested by their neighbours upon conviction of "gathering strange men in their home," a frequently applied euphemism for facilitating prostitution. Expulsion of offenders from their neighbourhoods seems to have been customary in Ottoman Aleppo as several cases confirm. Two types of expulsion for procurers and prostitutes existed: from the residential area and the city. These expulsions could be started either by residents or local governors. Expellees of the city of Aleppo were sent to Cyprus and the seaside towns of Syria.⁴¹ Also in Damascus removal from one's neighbourhood seems to have been the main penalty for *zinâ*. In the Anatolian city of Bursa punishment meant a fine and beating in the form of *bastinado*, hitting of the foot soles with a piece of wood. A study of a sixteenth-century neighbourhood in Üsküdar also shows lashing as a penalty for a convicted female prostitute.⁴²

The *shari'a* courts in Aleppo treated four cases of illicit sexual intercourse between men and boys. Three belonging to 1735 and one to 1718. Only one of these lead to a conviction. The word *zinâ* was not used in these records. Instead the offender was recorded as *al-lûtî*, a sodomiser. Youth Muhammad ibn Hajj 'Ali and his mother Tajiyya were brought to court by their neighbours on 17 April 1735 on accusation of intimacy between Muhammad and several men known as having intercourse with boys. At the end of the trial Muhammad and his mother were expelled from their neighbourhood as punishment for Muhammad's conviction of engagement in same-sex intercourse. Since there was no consensus among Hanafi jurists how to interpret male same-sex sexual acts and court cases of intercourse between men are rare, the conviction is interesting. It might have happened because of several reasons. The case shows evidence of popular condemnation of male same-sex sexual acts and heterodox Sufi practices of using beautiful youths to gaze at during ceremonies. Another factor must have been that

⁴¹ Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 110-11, 114-15, 118, 129-32.

⁴² Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 129-32.

Muhammad was a fatherless minor with an unsupported mother, both of lower social status.⁴³

Two instances of deviation of Ottoman legal practice in which *zinâ* convicts were sentenced to death have emerged so far. The first event implied a man and a woman and happened in Istanbul during the reign of Sultan Mehmed IV (r.1648-1687) and the resurgence of orthodox Sunni piety under the Kadızadelis. The second event implied two young men and occurred in 1807 in Damascus. The lovers were thrown off a minaret of the Umayyad Mosque. Khaled El-Rouayheb informs that although falling in love with a pubescent boy and articulating this love in verse was tolerated by religious scholars, open and repeated disregard of the religious ban on sodomy could be met with the capital punishment.⁴⁴

The presence of deviations of legally and customarily ordained rules on gender and sexuality; women defying concealment, prostitution and (male) same-sex sexual relations, shows that the Ottomans were also only human after all. Although in scholarly literature one finds occasional references to male same-sex sexual relations and boy prostitution, what lacks is a systematic categorised overview of references in both primary and secondary sources that would allow to construct a more comprehensive image of male same-sex sexual relations and boy prostitution. In order to create such an overview, in the next chapter a representative selection of historical references to all kinds of male same-sex sexual relationships (including instances of boy prostitution) happening in Ottoman society across time will be presented and the information found in these references will be analysed.

⁴³ Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path*, 94, 98, 100-101, 112. Semerdjian, “Because he is so tender and pretty,” 175-76.

⁴⁴ Baer, “Death in the Hippodrome,” 61, 63. El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 151.

Chapter II: An Analytical Inventory of Male Same-Sex Sexual Relations in the Ottoman Empire

In this chapter several environments in Ottoman society in which male same-sex sexual relations unfolded will be described and subsequently analysed. These events are inventorised according to place and presented in chronological order. Each place is awarded its own section. Since many sources mention multiple places, some sources are used several times. Scrutiny of various primary and secondary sources will elucidate who these men were, how they behaved and where they got together for a rendezvous. The timeline of the inventory stretches from the mid-fifteenth to the nineteenth century. As the household was the foundational stone of Ottoman society in which the hierarchic (power) order of society was expressed through division of space tied to gender and sexuality, after a brief introduction what the Ottoman household looked like, the Palace will form the starting point of this inventory.

In Ottoman Muslim patriarchal, hierarchic society the household, including that of the sultan, was the central venue within which family life occurred. Family life was quite sheltered as is reflected in the architecture of residential quarters, houses, pavillions and palaces. In accordance with Islamic legal rulings of *mahrem* and *nâ-mahrem*, the home was divided in two sections: the *haremlık* and the *selâmlık*. *Mahrem* from *harâm*, meaning “forbidden,” implies close male (and female) family members of a Muslim woman who cannot marry her because of familial relationship and are, as a consequence, not endangering her sexual capacity. Hence individuals *mahrem* to each other are allowed to meet freely and Muslim women do not need to veil during these encounters. Its opposite, *nâ-mahrem* “not-forbidden,” implies all men other than those family members who are allowed to marry a Muslim woman and are, as a consequence, endangering her sexual capacity. Hence men and Muslim women *nâmahrem* to each other are not allowed to meet freely and these women cannot be unveiled. In obedience of Islam that forbids Muslim women to be seen by *nâmahrem* men, Ottoman men of sufficient financial means had to build separate living spaces in their residences for their wives, children, slave-concubines, female slave-servants and, in some cases, their widowed mother and unmarried, divorced or widowed sisters. This portion of the house was named the *haremlık* or *harem*. Ottoman residences had also rooms called *selâmlık* or *bîrûn* (outside) reserved for men to host their male guests, women were not allowed here. The *haremlık* and the *selâmlık* were only indirectly connected by corridors and there were deep walls between them.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-5, 9.

At the New Palace (Topkapı) in Istanbul the imperial harem, located in the third inner courtyard, housed two separate harem households: a male harem household and the family harem household of the sultan. The male harem household housed hundreds of boys and young men who were trained for state service, eunuchs, mutes and dwarves. The family harem household consisted of concubines (and wives when sultans started marrying one or some of their concubines), eunuchs, children and female servants. Only males not regarded fully adult were allowed to enter into the two separate harem households. The only officially adult male in the Palace was the sultan, as this hierarchic position was tied to power. In order for his hierarchic position and power to be unchallenged, all other males had to remain in a pubescent, non-adult and powerless state. Men in the palace considered fully adult according to Islamic law were held in a mode of pubescence (powerlessness) through prohibition of growing beards and creating offspring. This prohibition to create offspring necessitated that the head of the family harem household had to be a castrated male (eunuch), whose reproductive capacity had been taken away. But although sexual intercourse was the exclusive domain of the sultan and his female partners as sexual reproduction was linked via hierarchic position to power,⁴⁶ sources show that sexual relations between the boys of the interior happened.

Households (including the Palace and elite mansions)

Multiple sources characterise male same-sex sexual acts taking place within Ottoman palaces, notably the Old Palace (Beyazıt) and the New Palace (Topkapı) in Istanbul. The oldest hint at male same-sex sexual relations dates to the reign of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (1444-46, 1451-81). Although Sultan Mehmed did not despise women as his first child Bâyezîd II born by the slave girl Gülbahâr in 1448 proofs, there are reports that say he cherished a fondness for boys, for example a palace page and the youngest son of Greek notable Lukas Notaras, the right-hand man of last Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI. However, as political opponents or poets yielding royal/elite dislike sometimes spread false allegations about their enemies, these reports might be false.⁴⁷

Social gatherings of learned men at elite mansions are among the venues where male same-sex sexual relations happened. These are described by *Dâfi'ü'l-gumûm ve râfi'ü'l-humûm*, *Expeller of Sorrows and Remover of Worries*, a late fifteenth, early sixteenth-century mock-treatise on sexuality prepared for the learned men at the court of Prince Korkud (d.1513)

⁴⁶ Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*, 10-11, 19, 24.

⁴⁷ Franz C.H. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, ed. William C. Hickman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 51, 471-75. Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds*, 1-2.

by Mehmed Gazâlî. The work is an adaptation of a twelfth-century Persian original that hinges on an Indian origin. Mehmed Gazâlî mocks adultery and praises male same-sex sexual intercourse while describing various sexual practices. The pornographic work is framed as a defense of marriage and exposes all extra-marital and, according to the *şerî'at*, corrupted forms of sexuality. Interestingly because Mehmed Gazâlî also defends bachelorhood and shows his sexual preference for boys, it seems that the framework of marriage was only implemented to describe other sexual acts. As long as a man is married, society will look at him as a reliable person and he can act as he pleases. Engaging in male same-sex sexual relations is not problematic as long as one is married and acts as the active partner in intercourse. Pederasts attending social gatherings wait for the young cupbearers, some drunk, to be asleep. While asleep they rape the youth.⁴⁸ Male same-sex sexual relations happened in wealthy Ottoman households between master and his male slave-servant. Although concubinage, a sexual relationship between master and female slave-concubine was permissible by the *şerî'at*, a sexual relation with a male slave was not allowed. Sexual relations between master and male slave-servant occurred nonetheless. Meccan Shafî'î jurist Ibn Hajar al-Haytamî (d. 1566) showed his disapproval of the practice of sodomy between master and male slave in his legal writings. He conveyed that sodomy with male slaves had become common among merchants and affluent Ottomans who acquired white and black male slaves for this purpose. He asserted that the community had reached consensus with regards to the abominable status of this act.⁴⁹

In the last literary work of Ottoman bureaucrat Mustafa 'Âlî from Gallipoli produced in 1599-1600, *Mevâ'idü'n-Nefâ'is Fî Kavâ'idü'l-Mecâlis*, *Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings*, references to male same-sex sexual relations taking place within the Palace and the houses of state officials can be encountered. This work is an instruction manual for Ottoman higher classes in proper conduct during social gatherings and a critique of the evolution of governmental and social institutions in the Ottoman Empire. Because this work is part of a tendency within literary convention to express critique on purported immoral behaviour, one cannot interpret all its assumptions concerning male same-sex sexual acts at face value. It does not mean these sexual acts did not happen, but one has to put critical side notes to them. What the work does show however is that some behaviours were seen as condemnable from the Ottoman normative Islamic viewpoint and that is why it is an excellent source to get to know more about the socially disapproved behaviour of mainly high-class, and

⁴⁸ Kuru, "A Sixteenth-Century Scholar," 11- 21, 193, 202.

⁴⁹ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 39.

to some extent, common-class Ottomans during the sixteenth century. Mustafa ‘Âlî not only mingled with the *‘ilmîye* (scholars, religious personnel, judges) but also travelled, while occupying bureaucratic posts, through Rumelia, Anatolia and the Arab Provinces witnessing civilian life. Condemning the behaviour of others, he may have engaged in similar behaviour. While speaking firm words against fooling around with beardless boys in the open, he also praises their beauty. Mustafa ‘Âlî does not condemn the generally accepted practice of pederasty all together. His objective seems to be that sexuality should be a discrete matter. A gentleman should not meddle into the private life of others.⁵⁰

Mustafa ‘Âlî speaks in an euphemistic way of not letting specific kinds of young men into the New Palace as servants: spoiled youths, *mû-mîyân* (“middle thin-as-a-hair:” effeminate youths) whose “hidden treasure has fallen into the clutches of vipers, snakes and rogue city boys.” He informs that *mû-mîyan* frequent taverns to sell their behinds. Mentioning city boys, Mustafa ‘Âlî aims at the lower class of uneducated boys wandering the streets of Istanbul. He implies that these youths had a loose morality, vipers and snakes being phallic allusions. In short, youths whose virtue and virginity have been lost and who frequent taverns to sell their behinds, must not be accepted into service because experience has shown that these boys caused moral, sexual corruption among the servant boys of the Inner Palace who, forced to be abstinent, were eager to engage in sexual intercourse.⁵¹

Mustafa ‘Âlî warns the supervisors of the Palace that they should not allow the (pre-)pubescent boys captured during war or *devşirme* (practice of recruiting Christian boys from the Balkans, Anatolia and the Caucasus) of whom some would become palace servants, to be used sexually by men. Who these men were is left unexplained, but it seems that they must have been superior, older palace servants. The young servants who are to stay in the Palace for years until they grow a beard, could not be entirely safeguarded from sexual advances. ‘Âlî likens the boys ending up as a passive sexual partner to a female animal, losing their status and honour similar to an old woman.⁵²

Mustafa ‘Âlî suggests that among the palace servants were boys attracted to engage in active sexual intercourse with a passive city boy, boys who were trapped in having passive sexual intercourse with superiors and boys who chose to go to taverns to engage in same-sex intercourse endorsing the passive role. Some of the recruited boys would become imperial

⁵⁰ Douglas S. Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli’s Mevâ’idü’n-Nefâ’is Fî Kavâ’idi’l-Mecâlis “Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings,”* ed. Şinasi Tekin and Gönül Alpay Tekin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), XV-XVII.

⁵¹ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 15-17.

⁵² Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 17.

guards or novices within the Janissary Corps. About these novices who also protected the imperial treasury Mustafa 'Âlî conveys that some become subject of rumors by setting out at night to engage in same-sex sexual relations for which they paid. They sold their possessions, their precious clothes and spent all the money on their beloveds. When time to leave the palace and marry came, they sold off their remaining belongings and ended up in a loveless marriage with an old woman with whom they often disputed. It seems they did not enjoy intercourse with their wives and that their lives ended in misery.⁵³ Janissaries and imperial guards were not allowed to marry until their retirement. By highlighting that these Janissaries did not perform the conjugal duties they were supposed to, Mustafa 'Âlî actually criticises the state system.

In another paragraph Mustafa 'Âlî depicts a peculiar phenomenon using sexual double entendres. During the reign of Süleyman the Lawgiver (r.1520-66), pages would simulate being unwell in order to go to the palace hospital located within the New Palace to have sexual encounters with their beloveds who were their peers. The carriage bringing the pages to the hospital was used for intercourse as well. Sometimes the carriage would go round and round without even reaching the hospital in order to create more time for sexual unions within the carriage.⁵⁴

The account of the palace hospital acting as a place for sexual rendezvous for pages and Janissaries is also rendered by the seventeenth-century travelogue of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. Tavernier who travelled to Istanbul twice, wrote the travelogue on request of French King Louis XIV. As Tavernier was a foreigner loyal to the French king, it is likely that this account wanted to portray the enemy in a morally reprehensive light.⁵⁵

Mustafa 'Âlî dedicated one chapter to beardless servants in the households of prominent Ottomans, serving guests during social gatherings. By giving a praising description of these boys he critiques that during his time there were more men preferring handsome servant boys than men preferring attractive women. He gives two explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, beautiful marriageable women are kept in the harem of their houses out of fear for the security forces patrolling the streets to make sure women did not wander too much outside or visit places exclusive to men. Secondly, it is easier to enter a relation with a youth because they can accompany adult men in the open without attracting strange looks or social disapproval whilst women cannot. It seems however that Mustafa 'Âlî does not reject the practice of males loving males and engagement in same-sex sexual intercourse as long as

⁵³ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 17-8.

⁵⁴ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 18-9.

⁵⁵ Jean-B. Tavernier, *A New Relation of the Inner Part of the Grand Seignor's Seraglio* (London: 1677), 22-23.

the men were also married, carry out their conjugal and morally-desired duties, keep their sexual activities hidden and perform the hierarchically correct role. He is against upsetting the hierarchic order. Adult men should only engage in active sexual intercourse with beardless, non-adult boys endorsing the passive role. In this way the honour of the adult bearded male stays intact. Among the servants were also dancing boys, *köçeks*. Mustafa ‘Âlî praises *köçeks* of various ethnic descent and he advises the man searching for a sexual companion from among the *köçeks*. He deems it permissible that two beardless youths engage in intercourse when they find the right time and place.⁵⁶

Mustafa ‘Âlî expresses dislike at men who upset the hierarchic order and who do not practice moderation in sexual exhibits, another Islamic virtue. He is astonished that even learned, high-class Ottoman men display improper behaviour: staring at the beautiful faces of beardless cupbearer boys at parties in houses of state officials and other high-class citizens. He likens this staring of unmannered guests to oxen and informs that this behaviour can be expected of ignorant youths or musicians and singers lacking intellect and refinement, but should not be encountered within the cultivated class of men.⁵⁷

Mustafa ‘Âlî also critiques beardless servant boys whose beauty attracts men of great learning and standing. Boys not pursuing their studies join the households of grandees as servants and scatter their good names by consorting with good-for-nothing men. He praises intelligent and upright servant boys who do not engage in sexual relations with men and only perform their duties within the household. Some of the servants who got discharged engaged in sexual relations with young men of some standing within the low-class city boys. According to Mustafa ‘Âlî, these boys who receive money from their lovers do not end up well: they become the subject of gossip among the higher classes during their social gatherings.⁵⁸

In the account of Mustafa ‘Âlî one comes across an instance of intercourse between master and male slave-servant. It was regarded proper to ask for permission to enter private chambers by making one’s presence vocally obvious. Once an unnamed military judge entered the library of a higher-ranked unnamed official engaging in intercourse with a servant. The trespasser felt himself risen above the official when he obtained this intimate knowledge concerning his superior and extorted 150 *akçe* from him in order to keep the event a secret. Mustafa ‘Âlî reports that the hypocrite trespasser had not only been “the standard-bearer of pederasts,” a passive partner in male-same sex intercourse during his youth until he had grown

⁵⁶ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 28-30.

⁵⁷ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 113-14.

⁵⁸ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 148-49.

a beard, but had also been a *do-zevkî*, “two-indulger,” a person enjoying both active and passive positions.⁵⁹

Only one source proving the existence of male same-sex intercourse taking place in common houses has emerged until now: the court case of Aleppine youth Muhammad ibn Hajj ‘Ali and his mother Tajjiyya who were brought to court by their neighbours on 17 April 1735 on accusation of intimate relations between Muhammad and several men. According to their neighbours Muhammad would bring the men home to stay the night and engage in intercourse with them. At the end of the trial Muhammad and his mother were expelled from their neighbourhood as punishment for Muhammad’s conviction of engagement in same-sex intercourse.⁶⁰

Risâle-i Teberdârîye fî Ahvâl-ı Âğâ-ı Dârü’s-sa’âde, *The Booklet of the Halberdier on the Affairs of the Chief Black Eunuch*, written by halberdier Derviş Abdullah in 1741 conveys that black eunuchs serving at the harem in the Old Palace during the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century engaged in same-sex sexual acts with castrated servant boys.⁶¹ However, as Baki Tezcan observes, it is quite possible that Derviş Abdullah wrote this in Ottoman eyes’ reprehensible act because he disliked the role of black “infidel” eunuchs in state politics whom he held responsible for much evil.⁶²

That Ottoman males not only engaged in sexual relations with younger boys, similarly-aged peers, adult men but also developed deep affection for their beloveds, is not only attested by a multitude of poetry praising the young male beloved (even if part of convention), but also by *Letâ’if-i Vekâyi’-i Enderûnîyye*, *Jokes on Events of the Inner Palace*. This work is an early nineteenth-century notebook circulating among men at social gatherings. Its author Hâfız Hızır İlyâs Âğâ (d. 1864), a member of the Inner Palace, describes the daily affairs happening within the Topkapı Palace between 1812 and 1831. It presents one interesting record with regards to love between two young male palace servants that was so strong, they fled the Palace together, leading people to express their admiration by saying that it had caused “inspiration to sultans.” The event happened in the year 1237 AH/1821-2 CE. *Çûhadâr Rûşen Âğâ* (servant who fulfills the daily personal tasks of the sultan, including carrying his clothes), brother of *Silâhdârâğâ*

⁵⁹ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 117.

⁶⁰ Semerdjian, “Because he is so tender and pretty,” 175-99.

⁶¹ Pınar Saka, *Risâle-i Teberdârîye fî Ahvâl-ı Dârüssa’âde - Derviş Abdullah: Dariüssaade Ağalarının Hakkında Baltacı’nın Raporu* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2011), 196-97. Baki Tezcan, “Dispelling the Darkness of the Halberdier’s Treatise: A Comparative Look at Black Africans in Ottoman Letters in the Early Modern Period,” in *Disliking Others: Loathing, Hostility and Distrust in Premodern Ottoman Lands*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke, H. Erdem Çıpa and Helga Anetshofer (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 43-45.

⁶² Tezcan, “Dispelling the Darkness,” 52-53.

kaftâncısı Nazîf Âğâ (keeper of the robes of the head keeper of the sultan's weapons), and *Hânende Çâvûş* Edhem Âğâ (singer) fled the Palace because their constantly being seen together showing each other great affection had reached the ears of their superiors and they were anxious that other servants would impede their loving relationship (as relationships between palace personnel were forbidden). As there was no doubt concerning the nature of their relation, no investigation was conducted and after their names were erased from the personnel register, everyone started saying that the example of Rûşen Âğâ and Çâvûş Edhem Âğâ, had giving sultans inspiration.⁶³

Bathhouses and Thermal Springs

Ottoman public bathhouses and thermal springs were other venues where (paid) male same-sex sexual relations happened. In the bathhouse strict gender segregation was enforced. As Evliyâ Çelebî notices in his seventeenth-century *Seyâhatnâme, Book of Travels*, there were separate bathhouses in Istanbul for men and women and each guild had its own bathhouse.⁶⁴

Chapter three of Mehmed Gazâlî's *Dâfi'ü'l-gumûm ve râfi'ü'l-humûm* depicts the longing of a pederast for his young male beloved. While outlining a cure for lovesickness, Mehmed Gazâlî encourages his master to go to the bathhouse of embrace, alluding to the bathhouse as a place where sexual unions between paying male customers and young male attendants happen. Five types of lovers are specified. Men loving (pre-)pubescent boys; men loving *gozashte*, "passed," seventeen-eighteen year old experienced youths past puberty; men loving youths with black hair and thick moustaches; men loving old men with white beards because as they are not pursued by many, these beloveds are exclusive to their lovers; and men loving Blacks and Abyssinians.⁶⁵

The bathhouse as a venue where male lovers meet is also mentioned in *şehrengîz* works. *Şehrengîz* ("messing up the city") literature, written between the early sixteenth and eighteenth centuries by court poets, is a category of prose mixed with poetry related to the Persian literary tradition of *şehrâşûb* ("city chaos"). Its primary goal is to describe the attractive local youths working or lingering in various Ottoman cities and provinces. There are *şehrengîz* describing women but their number is very small. Although some researchers pinpoint to the touristic-

⁶³ Ali Şükrü Çoruk, *Hâfiz Hızır İlyas Ağa-Osmanlı Sarayında Gündelik Hayat: Letâif-i Vekâyi'-i Enderûniyye* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2016), 267.

⁶⁴ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi-Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Muhammed Zillî 1. Kitap: İstanbul Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu-Dizini*, ed. Orhan Şaik Gökyay and Yücel Dağlı (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1996), 137.

⁶⁵ Kuru, "A Sixteenth-Century Scholar," 183-85, 187-92.

architectural quality of *şehrengîz* literature because of its portrayal of places and buildings such as gardens, thermal springs, bathhouses, mausoleums and (covered) bazaars, ultimately these places serve as a backdrop to tell stories of couples of adult men and youths. The youths are depicted in a praising manner. The term *şehrengîz* refers to the attractiveness of the youths being so potent that it “messes up the city.” Thermal springs as a meeting place for male lovers are always mentioned in *şehrengîz* literature portraying Bursa, a city famous for its thermal springs. Two of these are *Şehrengîz-i Brûsa* by Lâmi‘î Çelebî (d.1532) and *Şehrengîz-i Bûrsa* by Çalıkzâde Mehmed Mânî (d.1599). In Lâmi‘î Çelebî’s *şehrengîz* young male beauties are likened to rays of sunlight, enlightening the space they are in. Çalıkzâde Mehmed Mânî compares the old and new thermal springs of Bursa to an old and new male beloved in his *şehrengîz*. An erotic verse makes a variation on the mouth-watering quality of food. The verse states that the mouth of the lion-shaped fountain head of the basin became wet when it witnessed beautiful sirs entering the water. The *şehrengîz* literature shows that the male same-sex sexual (love) relation was an accepted and widespread occurrence among working-class and high-class Ottomans alike.⁶⁶

Evlîyâ Çelebî, mentioning the thermal springs of Bursa in his *Seyâhatnâme*, describes some of them in detail. The *Yeni Kaplıca, New Thermal Spring*, is the scene against which (sexual) reunions between adult men and their youthful male sweethearts take place. The thermal spring employs lovely bath attendants, fearless shampooers and “lovers of people with wounded hearts.” *Bu ılıcalarda herkes dilberânıyla sîne-ber-sîne koç-kocağ olup bir bucağa gitmek tâze çağlıktır ‘ayıp yağlık değildir.* “In these hot-springs, all, embracing their sweethearts, retreat in a corner. It is considered youthful exuberance and not improper behaviour.” During the months of autumn and the night of the winter solstice, all male same-sex lovers enter the water basin lit by the light of various candles. Some of them make somersaults like pigeons, others stretch out like peacocks, others dive like professional divers to rise next to a sweetheart/pretty boy (*dilberin huzuruna çıkıp selâm verir*). They turn in rounds in the water while holding hands and play with each other in various ways, crowling on top of each other. Some create fountains with their hands, others eject water through their teeth. At certain moments all lovers come together, forming a large circle and moving all in one

⁶⁶ Emine Tuğcu, “Bursa Şehrengizlerinde Güzellerin Mekânları: Bahçe, Hamam ve Çarşı,” in *Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol 35, no. 1 (2011): 275-84. B. Deniz Çalış-Kural, *Şehrengiz, Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 11.

direction, they create a whirlpool within the basin.⁶⁷ Evlîyâ Çelebî's positive characterisation of the sexually-charged scene of love and cheerfulness between male lovers in the thermal spring shows that in his viewpoint this religiously-illicit behaviour, was youthful exuberance and not improper. The *dilber*, "sweetheart" was the object of sexual desire, while the *mahbûb*, "beloved" was the object of aesthetic appreciation.

Historian Reşad Ekrem Koçu mentions in his *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, young, beardless shampooers being Janissary-affiliates and paid sexual partners of senior Janissaries based on one primary source, a seventeenth-century erotic treatise on bathhouses called *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ*, *The Hearth-Warming Book of the Bathhouse Attendant* written by Dervîş İsmâ'îl in 1098 AH/1686-7 CE when he was chief of the bathkeepers. It describes eleven shampooers-prostitutes working in the hammam of admiral Kılıç 'Alî Pâşâ in Tophane, one of the 408 bathhouses of greater Istanbul. Dervîş İsmâ'îl explains that he wrote the work on request of his beloved İbrahîm whose nickname was Yemenicî Bâlî.⁶⁸ The wording and style of *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ* seems very similar to that of the *Seyahâtname* by Evlîyâ Çelebî that was produced earlier. The reason of writing (requested by the author's male beloved) is the same as the one of *Hûbânnâme* by Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî. Admiral Kılıç 'Alî Pâşâ who lived in the sixteenth century was known for his desire for males. It seems possible that the *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ* is a constructed source functioning as an early-modern pornographic novel which story is situated in the seventeenth century but written by Koçu (who was attracted to men) in the twentieth century. Since suspicion has arisen concerning the authenticity of this manuscript and no copy is available for scholarly scrutiny (the only copy is in the private collection of Murat Bardakçı), this work cannot (yet) be used as a trustworthy primary source.

Boys engaging in sexual intercourse with men in bathhouses while also working as bathhouse attendants are described by several primary sources, among these the late fifteenth, early sixteenth-century *Dâfi'ü'l-gumûm ve râfi'ü'l-humûm*, the eighteenth-century *Hammâmnâme-i Dilsûz*, *The Bathhouse Book of the Heart-Inflaming One* written by poet Mehmed Emîn Belîğ (d.1760-61) and *Dellâknâme-i Dilkuşâ* (possibly twentieth century). Also Nina Ergin shortly touches upon the phenomenon of male bathhouse attendants engaging in paid intercourse with male customers in her article on labour immigration from

⁶⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi-Evliya Çelebi b. Dervîş Mehmed Zillî 2. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu-Dizini*, ed. Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Karaman and Yücel Dağlı (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), 17-18.

⁶⁸ Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi-Sekizinci Cild* (Istanbul: Hamle ve Sıra Matbaaları, 1966), 4370.

Albania to the bathhouses of Istanbul in the eighteenth-century based on a 1752' bathhouse register.⁶⁹

Without stating the occurrence of male same-sex sexual relations, a confirmation response from the grand vizier to a previously issued imperial decree by Sultan Selim III dated 1790 present in registers at the Ottoman Archives belonging to the *Hatt-ı Hümayûn Tasnifi, Classification of Imperial Decrees*, reveals that baths suspected of shameful acts should be investigated and should be rendered free from infamous beardless boys.⁷⁰ This is a strong indication towards the prevalence of male same-sex sexual acts at bathhouses.

Taverns, Coffeeshouses and Cafés

Taverns and coffeeshouses were also used as a place for sexual rendezvous between (paying) adult men and youths. In his chapter describing wine taverns, Mustafa 'Âlî speaks of the men frequenting these establishments. Among them are hot-blooded young men keen on sexual intercourse with women and boys. Some of these men brought their boy lovers to the tavern and had intercourse with them in rooms upstairs in the evening. Mustafa 'Âlî informs that on Thursday nights men would seek the company of women and on Friday afternoons and nights they would seek the company of boys. Returning home they would sleep with beautiful servant boys.⁷¹

Agenti Segreti Di Venezia (1705-1797) compiled by Giovanni Comisso contains short eyewitness accounts of Venetian secret agents. One of these accounts by G.B. Manuzzi (12 September 1767) speaks of Ottomans who, while visiting the Republic of Venice for trading purposes, stayed at the Piazza San Marco and frequented the coffeeshops under the Procuratie Nuovo. It is said that their pipe-smoking and indecent behaviour made the Venetian upper-class uncomfortable. The Ottoman traders would lead Venetian Christian youths to the rooms above the coffeeshops to allegedly engage in intercourse. It is said that the visiting Ottoman traders wink at and joke in several ways with one good-looking shop owner or assistant named Giacomo Pasini of whom is said that he looks somewhat feminine. This record is another piece of evidence for the occurrence of Ottoman male same-sex sexual relations.⁷²

⁶⁹ Nina Ergin, "The Albanian *Tellâk* Connection: Labor Migration to the Hammams of 18th-Century Istanbul, Based on the 1752 İstanbul Hamâmları Defteri," *Turcica*, 43 (2011): 242-43.

⁷⁰ Delice, "The Janissaries and their Bedfellows," 119-20.

⁷¹ Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century*, 131.

⁷² Giovanni Comisso, *Agenti Segreti Di Venezia 1705-1797* (Milan: Longanesi & Co., 1994), 136-37.

Workplaces

Mehmed Gazâlî mentions in his *Dâfi'ül-gumûm ve râfi'ül-humûm* also workshops where pigeons are bred as places where pigeon breeders having intercourse with their young apprentices. A perfume shop is another venue where intercourse takes place between a perfume shop clerk-chemist and a young boy eager to learn alchemy.⁷³

It is known that fathers and mothers intervened to prevent their sons from becoming entangled in a sexual relationship with an adult man. A mother in sixteenth-century Aleppo took her son out of an apprenticeship with a tailor of whom she had learned that he sexually desired her son.⁷⁴

Barber shops are workplaces where (paid) male same-sex sexual relations happened. Refik Ahmet Sevengil describes in his book *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu (1453'ten 1927'e kadar)* the preparations for a ten-day-ten-night lasting celebration in honour of the birth of a daughter of Sultan Mustafa III in 1772-3. The official in charge of the festival decorations and preparations went around Istanbul to make sure the *esnaf* (shopkeepers, artisans and craftsmen) were prepared for the celebration. One barber was reprimanded for not having young boys "tailed like Karaman sheep" working in his shop. The official ordained the *esnaf* to make friendships, engage in chit-chat and look after sexual pleasure both of themselves and their clients. He even suggested them to sell their clothing so that they could pay for their own pleasure. People showed sarcastic approval of this open encouragement of prostitution.⁷⁵ As Sevengil only presents a list of primary sources at the end of his book without specifying from which one he took the information, the information presented could not be verified.

Dervish Lodges, Schools and Other Educational Spaces

In *Dâfi'ül-gumûm ve râfi'ül-humûm* some Sufi sheikhs are said to have a predilection for sodomy and engage in intercourse with some of their students in dervish lodges. Schools are alluded to winehouses and teachers' lodgings to whorehouses.⁷⁶ As mentioned before, allegations of engagement in male same-sex sexual intercourse could be brought up to express critique on a person, institution or system. That this behaviour was perceived as offensive shows however that the behaviour did happen.

⁷³ Kuru, "A Sixteenth-Century Scholar," 194-97.

⁷⁴ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 28.

⁷⁵ Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu (1453'ten 1927'ye kadar)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1927), 48-9.

⁷⁶ Kuru, "A Sixteenth-Century Scholar," 198-99.

One of the students of Radî al-Dîn ibn al-Hanbalî (d. 1563), a scholar from Aleppo, was abducted by his father in order to stop a sexual relation to develop between the two. Some parents were willing to ignore the sexual advances adult men made towards their sons. Especially when the man belonged to a higher socio-economic class as the sexual desire of a notable would mean financial benefits for both the boy and his parents. It was said that Ahmad al-Tîbî al-Saghîr (d. 1586), a scholar from Damascus, had entered into a sexual relation with his student ‘Abd al-Latîf ibn al Jâbî. Judge Ahmad al-Shûwaykî (d.1593) from Damascus regularly presented the youths he desired monetary gifts and bestowed onto their parents other benefits. The brother of scholar Ahmad al-Khâlîdî (d.1624/5), inhabitant of Safed was accused of having raped one of his students.⁷⁷

While condemning the practice, Egyptian scholars Muhammad Abû al-Fath al-Dajjânî (d.1660/1) and ‘Alî al-‘Adawî (d.1775), and Meccan judge Ahmad al-Murshidî (d.1638) allude to sexually-tinted acts happening between members of Sufi orders and novices. They ascertain that adult Sufis were allowed to be alone with novice boys, gaze at their beauty and touch their bodies as part of communal ceremonies to reach the Divine. Mystics, such as Syrian Mustafa al-Bakrî (d. 1749), defense however the widespread practice of gazing at beautiful boys as a purely platonic act, devoid of any sexual dimension. One way or the other, warnings against not letting boys share rooms with senior Sufis and gazing at novices by senior Sufis are abundant in the religious-legal writings belonging to various parts of the Ottoman Empire between the sixteenth and eighteenth century.⁷⁸

Nature and Gardens

Intercourse between men happened not only in buildings. It also happened outside in nature or gardens. Although some researchers highlight their spiritual-mystical dimension while quoting metaphors characterising the garden as a meeting place for two male lovers (earthly gardens are likened to the gardens of Heaven), *şehrengîz* literature seems to depict worldly male same-sex love and praises in unequivocal words the beauty and sexuality of the objects of desire: young beardless youths.⁷⁹ Gardens, seen as an accepted background/place to express love for a young male beloved in *divan* poetry, facilitated the description of earthly sexual attraction under the guise of a spritual-mystical union.

⁷⁷ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 28, 35.

⁷⁸ El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 36-39.

⁷⁹ Tuğcu, “Bursa Şehrengizlerinde Güzellerin Mekânları,” 277-78.

Army and Navy

Places where male same-sex sexual relations happened are described in three chapters of *Dâfi 'ü'l-gumûm ve râfi 'ü'l-humûm*. In chapter two pederasts are entangled in a verbal fight with adulterers. While dwelling on reasons why boys' asses are superior to vaginas, the leader of the pederasts asserts that boys can always accompany a soldier on military campaign, can be taken to an empty room or promenade venue whilst women cannot. This reveals that youths acted as a sexual companion to adult men.⁸⁰

An epigram made for admiral Kılıç 'Alî Pâşâ (d. 1587) conveys that he was involved in a sexual relationship, seemingly while being at sea, with a youth named 'Alî whom he gifted a ship with a lantern and 100 *akçe* per day. Kılıç 'Alî, of Italian origin, had been enslaved and had been brought to the Ottoman Empire around 1520. He worked under several sea captains, including admiral Turgut Reis before becoming admiral. The *Târîh-i Selânikî* informs that in the month of *Receb* of the year 994 AH (June-July 1586) Kılıç 'Alî tried to make up for his "sin" of acquiring a young boy named 'Alî, a servant of the governor of Algeria, Hasan Pâşâ, in order not to get expelled from his position by the Ottoman ruler. Kılıç 'Alî, knowing the sultan's love for money, said that he had acquired 'Alî to find out where the hidden treasure of Hasan Pâşâ was. This was a trick to keep the boy and his job. The epigram elucidates the relation between the boy and Kılıç 'Alî. Four verses describe the nature of their relation: "*Bir güzel kancalasa kim ola karpûz kıçlû / Kapûdân eyler-îdî ana takardı feneri. Kanda bir kıçı ile kozkoparan buldı ise / Götine bir feneri dakdı kapûdân îtdî. Pehlevân îdî 'acâyib kıçını komakda / Bâ-husûs önine kataydı kaçan oğlânı. Koyilup keştî-i tâbûta alarga oldı hemân / Lût deryâsına çekdüirdi meger kim kapûdân*. Whenever he got his hooks on a beautiful one with a bottom round as a melon / he made him captain and attached the lantern onto him. Wherever he found buttocks and "kozkoparan" / he attached to his butt a lantern and made him admiral. He was like a fantastic wrestler in putting (it) into buttocks / he especially swept himself in front of the escaping boy. Putting (it) in the ship of the coffin, it immediately became like the middle of the sea / It seemed that the captain had pulled it to the Sea of Lut." The verse explains that Kılıç 'Alî was a fantastic wrestler who made the behind of the boy wet like an open sea. The allusion to the Sea of Lut, refers to the Prophet Lot whom God had ordered to leave the city of Sodom because of corruption and sodomy.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Kuru, "A Sixteenth-Century Scholar," 18-19, 57, 169, 177.

⁸¹ Nusret Gedik, "Gemici Dili ile Kılıç Ali Paşa Hicviyesi," *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 37 (2017): 137-40, 144, 156-58, 162.

The Lingua Franca in the Levant: Turkish Nautical Terms of Italian and Greek Origin is a systematic study of the Ottoman language expressed through Ottoman nautical terms of Italian and Greek origin collected from historical literary primary sources. It displays half of one verse taken from the epigram of Kılıç ‘Alî Paşa while mentioning that this admiral engaged in male same-sex sexual relations. “*Bir güzel kancalasa kim ola karpuz kışlu / Kapudan eyler idi ana takardı feneri. Whenever he got his hooks on a beautiful one with a bottom round as a melon / He made him captain and attached the lantern onto him.*”⁸²

Sekbâns, mercenary security forces, patrolling the Ottoman Syrian countryside during the early seventeenth century were pederasts capturing boys for their sexual satisfaction when looting the environs of Damascus in 1606. The same is said of Egyptian cavalymen by Mustafa ‘Âlî who came to Egypt in 1599 and the Egyptian troops of Muhammad Bey Abû al-Dhahab after conquering Jaffa in 1775.⁸³ Soldiers’ young male sexual companions are mentioned by an account of English traveller Henry Blount, travelling along with the Ottoman Army towards the border of Poland in the 1630s. He reveals that many commanders had, besides wives/concubines, well-dressed passive boys.⁸⁴ Seventeenth-century travelogues written by French travellers Antoine Galland and Louis Laurent d’ Arvieux confirm the account of Blount. Around 1665, Preacher Vâni Mehmed Efendî forbade non-combatant boys to accompany soldiers in their tents while on campaign.⁸⁵

Among Minorities

Yaron Ben-Naeh, who investigated sources describing male same-sex sexual relations within Jewish communities living in Ottoman cities such as Jerusalem, Damascus and Salonica between the late fifteenth to mid-nineteenth century, found three models of male same-sex sexual behaviour: a) the non-egalitarian model where there is a correspondence between age, social class and the sexual role: an adult male of a higher social class is to take up the active role, and a non-adult male of lower social class is to take up the passive role; b) egalitarian relations practised between pubescent boys as part of their sexual maturation; c) effeminate boys willingly taking the passive role. A testimony concerning seventeenth century Damascene Jews recorded in a responsa by Rabbi Hayim Vital called *Sefer HaTezyonot, The Book of*

⁸² Henry Kahane, Renee Kahane and Andreas Tietze, *The Lingua Franca in the Levant: Turkish Nautical Terms of Italian and Greek Origin* (Istanbul: ABC Kitabevi, 1988), 589-90.

⁸³ El Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 21.

⁸⁴ El Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 40-41.

⁸⁵ Madeline Zilfi, “The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul,” *Journal of Near East Studies*, No.4 (1986), 264.

Visions, reveals that even a rabbi was involved in a same-sex sexual relation. Damascene Rabbi Ya‘akov Monidas had a sexual relationship with Nathan Kuleyf and gave him his daughter in marriage. After the wedding, the rabbi continued to engage in intercourse with his son-in-law. Among sixteenth and seventeenth century Ottoman Jewish Kabbalists, it was believed that the soul of a man engaging in same-sex sexual acts would be reborn in a rabbit by divine retribution.⁸⁶

(While Trespassing) Private Property

Early nineteenth-century Ottoman Iraqi scholar Mahmûd al-Alûsî (d. 1854) conveyed that some men used sodomy as a vehicle of revenge/punishment in quarrels (about trespassing their properties for example) with adult men and that it had nothing to do with sexual desire.⁸⁷ This event discloses that there was yet another facet to male same-sex intercourse: a means of male revenge and expression of feelings of hate. It uncovers the degrading loss of male honour, hierarchic status and power in case an adult male is forced into the humiliating passive role. The passive role in male same-sex intercourse was tied to an “effeminate, womanish” *mukhannes*, a male not regarded masculine and thus not a bearer of high status, power and male honour. Casting doubt on an adult male’s masculinity, to feminise him, was a generally known way of insulting a rival both in poetry⁸⁸ and in reality as this event reveals.

On the Streets

Seventeenth-century palace clerk Mehmed Halife recorded important political events happening during the reigns of Sultan Murad IV (1623-40), Sultan Ibrahim I (1640-48) and Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-87) in his historiography *Târîh-i Gilmânî*, *The Historiography of the (Palace) Boys*, that he wrote in 1655-56. He informs that Janissaries created rebellion in Istanbul in 1042H /1631-2CE. The rebelling Janissaries killed the grand vizier, their head and the storyteller of the sultan. During this period the Janissaries conducted many offences: they abducted half-naked women from the bathhouses, smoked tobacco in the Sultan Mehmed Mosque, molested many Muslims, forced the sultan, the valide sultan and state officials to get on a swing, engaged in male same-sex intercourse at street corners and all kinds of forbidden acts in taverns and coffeehouses.⁸⁹ This expression of violent same-sex sexual acts might have

⁸⁶ Ben-Naeh, “Moshko The Jew,” 92, 94, 105.

⁸⁷ El Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 14.

⁸⁸ Schick, “The Presentation of Gender,” 88.

⁸⁹ Mehmed Halife, *Târîh-i Gilmânî*, ed. Ömer Karayumak (Istanbul: Kervan Kitapçılık, 1977), 28-29.

served as a way to oust critique on the obstinate Janissaries. But it seems possible that these Janissaries, who were not allowed to marry and could only have intercourse with prostitutes, peers or boys, acted out these allegations.

Literature

Divan poetry was permeated with the theme of love and sexuality. The poet's voice was primarily male even when the author was female. The gender of the person praised within the poem could sometimes be ambiguous as a result of the ungenderedness (except Arabic combinations) of the Ottoman language. But due to the hierarchical male-dominated social order expressed in male-only private and public spaces, the lower gender status attributed to women and the reprehensiveness from a moral-religious viewpoint of involving *nâ-mahrem* women, intellectual, sexual, love and hate relationships between intellectually-connected males were more probable than between a man and a woman. As poetry-producing men would be surrounded by boys obtaining knowledge through learning, boys made a more pleasant intellectual partner than women not acquiring knowledge. Consequently, the object of praise or hate in the majority of *divan* poems is male. However, as the hierarchic order would not allow an adult man to be looked upon with desire by another adult man (the passive role in intercourse would damage an adult man's status and honour), the object of praise would be a boy who had not yet reached the status of an adult male. İrvin Cemil Schick explains that *divan* poetry reveals three genders: adult men, women and young, beardless boys/youths. As long as boys had not grown beards, they were not regarded on the same level as adult men and could be (sexually) praised in poems without societal/elite disapproval. When a boy grew a beard and became a fully-adult male, it was regarded reprehensive to openly express attraction towards another adult man or to engage in intercourse with adult men. One could however express his feelings concerning young, beardless boys.⁹⁰

Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî (1756/7-1810), a court poet born in Acre, described the taverns of Galata and Balat as a venue where male same-sex sexual relations took place. While an adolescent he was sent to Istanbul and educated in the *Enderûn* (inner) section of the Palace. In 1784 he was sent away from the Palace because of his scandalous affair with a page. He declared his hostility towards women in his writings and confessed that he was attracted to men in five erotic works. One of these is *Hûbânnâme, The Book of the Beautiful Ones*, in which he depicted the beauty of men from various lands living in Istanbul. Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî wrote

⁹⁰ Schick, "The Representation of Gender," 86-90. Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds*, 13-14, 27.

Hûbânnâme for his male lover who had asked him to show which nation's young men were the most beautiful and which ones had the greatest amount of male lovers. From Greek well-built stunners to French coquettes, from flying Dutchmen to British roses, from dark-skinned Indians to handsome Syrians, he described them with eye for detail.⁹¹

There are multiple copies of *Hûbânnâme* existent, one example being *Hûbân-nâme MS 171 No. 102* dating 1223AH/1808CE.⁹² The poems within the manuscript, belonging to the genre of *divan* poetry, not only give an idea how a member of the Ottoman high-class reflected upon male same-sex sexuality, they also show what kind of people were involved in male same-sex sexual relations, how they were called and where these relations took place. Furthermore, the poems show how *divan* poetry functioned as a medium, part of literary-cultural convention, to convey love and sexual attraction between an adult male admirer and a pubescent beardless boy or to convey hate and animosity between male rivals.⁹³

One of the poems in *Hûbânnâme* is titled: *Der Beyân-ı Sıfat-ı Millet-i Rûm*, "In Description of the Attributes of the People of Rum." Enderûnî describes the male beauties of Greece in these paragraphs. The poem is one of the shorter poems (page 20) and is rendered as follows:

<i>Bâ husûs-ı mogbecegân-ı Galata</i>	In the matter of the novices of Galata
<i>Düşürür ehl-i sevâbî galate</i>	Make those who are into good deeds fall into mistakes
<i>Ne'ola tavşân ise ism ü şânı</i>	So what if his name and fame is "rabbit"
<i>Ruh Havvâ gerdesî tavşân kânı</i>	Face round like Eve's, rabbit-blooded
<i>Bezm-i mey içere îdince devrân</i>	When he turns (in circles) inside the wine gathering
<i>Her birî fitne-i âhır-ı devrân</i>	Each turn like the chaos of the final times
<i>Ola düşende libâs-ı zerbâf</i>	If it happens that his gold-embroidered cloths fall
<i>Ten-i pâkî ola sâf-ender-sâf</i>	He is clean-bodied, very smooth
<i>Tökile 'ârezine türreleri</i>	When locks of hair fall on his face
<i>Mâhlar da şâşırır gerreleri</i>	The Lunar months mix up their first days (new moon)
<i>Döne ol mogbece dolâb gibî</i>	That novice boy turns like a carousel
<i>Tenî heb o yanâya sîmâb gibî</i>	His body always flees away like mercury
<i>Gâhîce raks îde dîlcû üzere</i>	Sometimes he dances above his lover
<i>Otûra gâhîce zânû üzere</i>	Sometimes he sits on his knees

⁹¹ Ben-Naeh, "Moshko The Jew," 88. Bardakçı, *Osmanlı'da Seks*, 59. Zarinabaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 88.

⁹² Fazıl-ı Enderuni, *Hûbân-nâme MS 171 No. 102*, Digital Collection Koç University Library, <https://libdigitalcollections.ku.edu.tr/digital/collection/MC/id/131390>

⁹³ Schick, "Presentation of Gender," 86-88.

Beautiful Greek boys dancing in the taverns in the neighbourhood Galata were likened to rabbits and novices in a dervish convent. Dervish convents were places where mystics gathered and pupils were instructed in Islamic mysticism. Their side locks remind of the side curls of the cross-dressing female musician-slaves of the Abbasid Caliphate. Male same-sex sexual relations are described in other parts within the manuscript. For example in a passage concerning the men of Persian descent where one reads about sexual acts between men. The Persian young men characterised as having red cheeks, round faces and Jew-like curls let men enter their private, intimate places; *sehldir helvet-i veslîne duhûl*. *Helvet-i vesl* means someone's private quarters/bedroom. The line *râygân ondan o fi'il-i mekrûh*, "from him, that reprehensible act is free," hints into the direction of intercourse. That Enderûnî considers the act to be *mekrûh* "reprehensible," a status between allowed or *helâl* and absolutely forbidden or *harâm*, is possibly caused by the lack of juridical consensus with regards to same-sex intercourse. The line *sorhser dîdelerinde makbûl*, "in their eyes red-headedness is acceptable," hints possibly at the head of the male genital organ.⁹⁴

Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî also wrote *Defter-i 'Aşk*, *The Notebook of Love*. There are multiple extant copies, one of them being *Defter-i 'Aşk-ı Fâzıl Bey MS 309* that dates to 1236 AH/1820 CE. In this work, he describes his love adventures and the difficulties he encountered when he fell in unresponded love. *Defter-i 'Aşk* praises a young gypsy dancer named İsmâ'îl with whom Enderûnî fell in love. İsmâ'îl worked in taverns in Galata and Balat. Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî states that İsmâ'îl made his same-sex admirers go crazy and that he made the corner of the tavern into a sexual rendezvous place for his lovers. Unfortunately, the love affair did not have a happily ever after as İsmâ'îl chose to marry a woman and leave.⁹⁵

Hûbânnâme shows that Greek youths dancing in taverns in Galata were objects of male desire. It also sketches an image of Persian young men engaging in same-sex intercourse. *Defter-i 'Aşk* reveals Enderûnî's love and sexual attraction towards a male gypsy dancer working in taverns in Galata and Balat. In his *Çengînâme*, *The Book of Female Dancers* of which a copy dated 1231AH/1816 CE exists, Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî mentions not female but forty-two young male dancers of Istanbul. He discloses the religion of sixteen of these dancers, three being Jewish. Yaron Ben-Naeh ties Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî's observation that Jewish boys and women were an easy prey for men to the aggravating economic conditions for the Jews of Istanbul at

⁹⁴ Fazıl-ı Enderuni, *Hûbân-nâme MS 171 No. 102*, Digital Collection Koç University Library, <https://libdigitalcollections.ku.edu.tr/digital/collection/MC/id/131390>

⁹⁵ Fazıl-ı Enderuni, *Defter-i 'Aşk-ı Fâzıl Bey MS 309*, Digital Collection Koç University Library, <https://libdigitalcollections.ku.edu.tr/digital/collection/MC/id/113544/rec/1>

that time.⁹⁶

Some copies of literary work such as *bâhnâme Hamse-i Atâ'î*, the *Pentology of Nev'izâde Atâ'î* (1583-1635) and *Hûbânnâme* of Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî, were illustrated repeatedly during the centuries with erotic miniatures. Several *Hamse* copies made in the first half of the eighteenth century exhibit miniatures depicting cross-generational male same-sex intercourse between a bearded adult man and a beardless boy taking place in a palace or elite mansion. In some miniatures the youth endorses the passive role, in others the active. In one depiction men watching a male couple are masturbating. Extant eighteenth and early nineteenth-century copies of the Ottoman translation of the thirteenth-century Arabic *bâhnâme Rujû 'al-Shaykh ilâ Sibâh fî al-Quwwah 'alâ al-Bâh*, *The Return of the Old Man to Youth through the Power of Sex*, once circulating within the Ottoman high-class, contain explicit erotic miniatures, including ones depicting same-sex couples. One of these displays young male servants of the sultan's palace in a gangbang.⁹⁷

Another exquisitely illustrated manuscript copy of *Rujû 'al-Shaykh* titled *Tuhfet-ul Mulk*, *The Gift of the World*, first produced by Mustafa Ebu'l-Feyz-et-Tabîb during the early years of the eighteenth century,⁹⁸ has ended up in the collection of auctionhouse Sotheby's. This copy, which author is unknown, contains three dates 1187AH/1779CE, 1214AH/1799-80CE and 1232AH/1817CE. According to the Sotheby's catalogue of the 2018 London auction, looking at the high-quality and refinement of the manuscript, it seems that it was commissioned by a member of the Ottoman elite for a high-class audience. The work is a compendium of several literary works, the earlier-mentioned *bâhnâme* and three erotic works of poetry by Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî. It is divided into a section dealing with male sexuality and one with female sexuality. The section on male sexuality displays scenes of male same-sex intercourse between a master and a student, between foreign soldiers, between palace servants in a gangbang, between musicians, between youths in a bathhouse and between adult males. One of the miniatures depicting intercourse between two long-haired *köçeks*, dancing boys originally trained for entertainment at the Palace, is placed on the cover of the catalogue. The bright colours of their gold-embroidered skirts and tops offset against the black of the background and the detailed precision of the miniature are magnificent.⁹⁹ The miniatures in

⁹⁶ Fazıl-ı Enderuni, *Çengînâme MS 310*, Digital Collection Koç University Library, <https://libdigitalcollections.ku.edu.tr/digital/collection/MC/id/113544/rec/1> Ben-Naeh, "Moshko The Jew," 88.

⁹⁷ Artan and Schick, "Ottomanizing pornotopia," 157-158, 160, 164, 167, 177, 179-80.

⁹⁸ Artan and Schick, "Ottomanizing pornotopia," 159.

⁹⁹ Sotheby's "An Exceptional Illustrated Ottoman Erotic Manuscript,"- Catalogue of the Sotheby's Auction Londen 25 April 2018.

this manuscript reveal that male same-sex intercourse was not only performed between an adult man and a youth and between youths, but also between adult men, a foreign and an Ottoman man or two Ottoman men. Although the manuscript belongs to the genre of *bâhnâmes* intended to invoke sexual desire and consequently its miniatures could entail fictitious depictions, the fact that a great number of sources allude to male same-sex sexual acts happening in a multitude of places shows that there must have been a hint of truth in these representations.

Analysis

As this inventory shows, male same-sex sexual relations took place in a variety of locations. Based on the textual evidence presented by the inventory, I assert that this phenomenon was much broader and comprehensive than previously thought. Although forbidden by religious law, it was a common phenomenon. Open enactment of male same-sex sexual acts was looked upon as religiously forbidden, morally objectionable and socially undesirable by Ottoman society just as it is regarded today. Sexual acts between males were not free of critique, they were seen as reprehensible and hence used to critique certain people. But as long as a man did not blatantly express his sexual desire for other males (boys/youths) and held his sexual activities hidden from society, he could act as he pleased. The hierarchic template for male same-sex intercourse common among the ancient Greeks and Romans was not always enacted among the Ottomans. Although playing an important role, intercourse did not only happen between an adult male of higher social and economic status being the active partner, and a younger boy of inferior social and economic status being the passive partner, but also between two similarly-aged young or adult peers of similar status and sometimes the roles of active and passive were reversed. Some relations were based on love, others on sexual attraction. Schick's model of boys being a third gender, although explaining the prevalence of young beardless boys as a separate group of their own within *divan* poetry and the difference in hierarchic status of beardless boys vis-à-vis adult bearded men, does not account for other facets and explanations of male same-sex sexual relations. Expressions of male same-sex sexual desire in *divan* poetry and male same-sex intercourse in multiple descriptive primary sources such as history books and manner books, reveal not only the particulars of people engaging in this kind of sexual behaviour, they also indicate that mentioning of male same-sex intercourse/desire could also function as a means of critiquing the system and morally reprehensible deeds or even as a vehicle of punishment, bringing down a rival's status and male honour. Male same-sex sexual relations happened in a variety of venues, especially reports on male-only places

such as elite social gatherings, bathhouses, thermal springs, coffeehouses, taverns, educational spaces, dervish convents and workshops, are ample.

Although love and sexual desire for a youth were frequently expressed by *divan* poems and various literary works of prose produced by elite Ottomans, it is wrong to ascertain that male same-sex sexual (love) relationships only happened within this class of people. It was a widespread phenomenon among Ottomans of all classes as is attested by the example of the youth Muhammad, a member of a lower social class, or by the rogue city boys mentioned by Mustafa ‘Âlî. However, in many instances male same-sex intercourse was an affair between socially, hierarchically and economically unequal partners based on either rape or consent gained through payment. Paid sexual intercourse happened in the taverns of Galata for example or in one of the bathhouses. In the following chapter these paid sexual relationships or prostitution of boys/youths will be investigated in more detail.

Chapter III: Boy Prostitution in the Ottoman Empire

As the previous chapter has shown, intercourse between males happened in a wide variety of venues such as palaces, elite households, in rooms above coffeeshops, taverns, workplaces, bathhouses and out in nature. In many instances this intercourse entailed a paid transaction between an older male of higher social and economic status and a younger, often pubescent, boy of lower social status. Although the word *fâhişe*, prostitute, was not used for boys selling their buttocks or genitals but only for females, paid sexual intercourse is prostitution.

In order to sketch an image of boy prostitution in the Ottoman Empire, it is important to first look at the phenomenon of female prostitution and the development of brothels to see what is known concerning prostitution. Many examples of female prostitution can be found in court registers as the Ottoman state and subjects alike seem to have been more worried about controlling female sexual acts and procurers of female prostitutes to safeguard social order. Examples of boy/male prostitution are harder to find in court cases and instances of male prostitution may not always be directly visible because of the way male same-sex sexual relations are described in sources. First, it is necessary to look once more at the *kânûnnâme* by focusing on male same-sex sexual offences, prostitutes and procurers to see what the legal framework dictated and what reality looked like. Furthermore, attention will be paid to how prostitutes and procurers were named and characterised in the *kânûnnâme* and how they were named and characterised by Ottoman writers of reports and literature. Subsequently, an overview of places where (boy) prostitution took place, occupations associated with and people entangled in prostitution will be presented. Secondary sources such as articles and books on female prostitution, crime, policing and primary sources such as law codes, surveys, travelogues, manner books and eyewitness accounts will be consulted. In many events in chapter two, pubescent boys engaged in sexual intercourse with males for money. Now let us look at what the sources convey about prostitution.

The sixteenth-century *kânûnnâme* by Süleyman the Lawgiver distinguishes illicit sexual acts committed between a man and a woman and between two males. It contains five regulations entailing male same-sex sexual intercourse of which one deals with abduction of boys. Furthermore, there are four regulations concerning procurers and one regulation mentioning banishment for a *hod kahbe*, “self-selling whore” and a *hirsûz*, a criminal. It is unclear whether *hod kahbe* pertains to females, males or both. *Hod kahbes* were seen as a threat to public order. As there are no other regulations explicitly mentioning prostitutes of either sex, it seems that the prostitute is not the priority, but the procurer. In addition, it seems that the

jurists were uncertain how to look at procurers as they are mentioned under various classifications in separate chapters (*zinâ*, abuse/coercion and other transgressions). The *kânûnnâme* calls to account the initiating perpetrator. In case of consensual intercourse both persons are seen as initiators and both are chastised. Persons forced into intercourse are not liable to punishment. Being mentally and sexually mature (*‘akıl ve bâliğ*), being capable of making decisions, is an important feature for legal interpretation to hold an offender accountable. In case a sexually and mentally non-mature boy had intercourse with a pederast, his father was to be punished. Procurers, distinguishing between *kişî*, a person (man), *‘avret*, a woman and *kâfir*, an infidel, were to be chastised with either branding of the forehead or lashings in addition to a fine and in some cases public scorning.¹⁰⁰ Although a master was not punished when he engaged in intercourse with his female slave-concubine as he had gained sexual rights through payment, the same was not valid for a male slave-servant. However, there seems to have been no legal ground to have a master punished for rape. A regulation notes that a slave-servant initiating sexual intercourse with another person was liable to a fine, being half the amount awarded to free persons.¹⁰¹

Punishment of boy prostitutes or procurers of boy prostitutes, as there was an emphasis on persecuting procurers rather than prostitutes, seems not to have been recorded in court registers. It is possible that some procurers were caught while procuring women but that they also procured boys at other times. Only four court cases pertaining to sodomy in eighteenth-century Ottoman Aleppo, of which one ordering exile as punishment for boy prostitution and his procurer (his mother), have been found. In addition, two court cases concerning procurers involved in boy prostitution taking place in Istanbul in 1725 were discovered in security records. The first constitutes the case of Greek tavern owner Dimitri who had brought boys and girls to the non-Muslim tavern of Telçi Nafkur in Beşiktaş, prostituting them in the upper rooms. The second constitutes the case of a man named Abdullah who was sentenced to the galleys for operating a tavern in Istanbul, beating and murdering his pupil and acting as a pimp for boys.¹⁰²

The *kânûnnâme* names prostitutes *hod kahbe*, a “self-selling harlot” and procurers of both sex *pûzevenk*, procurer. A female procurer is characterised as a “woman who procures,” *‘avret pûzevenklik itse*, a male procurer as a “person who procures,” *kişî pûzevenklik*

¹⁰⁰ Heyd, *Studies*, 58, 63-64, 71, 76, 92, 97, 102-103, 110, 114, 130.

¹⁰¹ Heyd, *Studies*, 58, 97. Mark David Wyers, “Wicked” *Istanbul: The Regulation of Prostitution in the Early Turkish Republic* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2012), 52.

¹⁰² Semerdjian, “Because he is` so tender and pretty,” 175-199. Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 101.

îtse. Males initiating/consenting to (paid or not is obscure) same-sex sexual intercourse are characterised as engaging in sodomy, *liwâta îden*.¹⁰³ Procurers of prostitutes of both sex were named *pûzevenk*, *kodoş*, *gîdî* and procurers of boys were also called *goh-dellâl*, mediator of sh*t by eighteenth-century court poet Sünbülzâde Vehbî. In the *Risâle-i Evsâf-ı İstanbul*, *The Little Book on the Qualities of Istanbul*, a sixteenth-century work describing the architecture and city life of Istanbul *intra muros* and Galata written by Latîfî (1491-1582), boys making love their job are named *kahbe*, “whore” and *oğlân orospusu*, “boy prostitute.” Mustafa ‘Âlî names prostituting boys at social gatherings “young men with burning asses using them to earn money.” He likens these men to penis-crazy, sliding sleds for their paying clients in a blunt manner: “Stripping bare his buttocks, he (the client) drives his horse into the ring. Crazy for *andız* wood (cypress-like tree), every corrupting male prostitute.”¹⁰⁴ In the anonymous seventeenth-century book on manners, *Risâle-i Garîbe*, *The Little Book on Strange Things*, boy prostitutes are named *puşt*, “back,” *civân*, “young” and *dilber*, “sweetheart.” Female prostitutes are called *nigâr*, “picture.” The author describes boy prostitutes from Kâsım Pâşâ and men wasting all their belongings on *civâns* and *nigârs*. Other boy prostitutes are called *başı örtülü zerrâk kösnekler*, “head-covered animals wanting to mate” and *göt verenler*, “ones who offer their asses.” Customers are called *gulâmpâre*, “all about boys,” *gulâm*, “boy” and *pâre*, a corruption of *bâre*, “about.” The *gulâmpâres* take *dilbers*, sweethearts and crawl on top of them. Procurers are described as *kâfir gîdîler*, “infidel procurers.”¹⁰⁵

Evlîyâ Çelebî mentions procurers and boy prostitutes in his *Seyâhatnâme*. He witnessed many taverns in greater Istanbul. In the taverns of Galata, an area that had served as the red-light district since Byzantine times, not only *köçek* male dancers could be watched, also boy prostitutes sold their bodies to male clients as taverns were male-only places. Jews were “mediators in the market of love,” *mîyâncıyân-ı bâzâr-ı muhabbet*, Jewish parentless boys, *Yahûdî biçelerî*, were called *olgacıyân* and *hîzân*, “prostitutes.”¹⁰⁶ While depicting the guilds of Istanbul, Evlîyâ Çelebî names *esnâf-ı deyyûsân*, “the guild of procurers” consisting of 212 persons without a guild master, *esnâf-ı bezevenk-i eblehân(e)-i sâzen(de)gân*, “the guild of the idiotic procuring music creators” consisting of 300 persons without a guild master and *esnâf-ı*

¹⁰³ Heyd, *Studies*, 63-64, 71, 92, 102-103, 110, 130.

¹⁰⁴ Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul,” 55. Nermin Suner Pekin, *Latîfî-Evsâf-ı İstanbul* (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1977), 49. Ahmet Yesevi Üniversitesi- Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü-Madde Detay “Latîfî,” acc. 20 June '21, teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/latifi Brookes, *The Ottoman Gentleman*, 109-10.

¹⁰⁵ Hayati Develi, *Tanıtım Nüshası-İstanbul'a Dair “Risâle-i Garîbe”* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1998), 3-5. Hayati Develi, *XVIII Yüzyıl İstanbul Hayatına Dair Risâle-i Garîbe* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2001), 22-25.

¹⁰⁶ Çelebi, *Evlîya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 1. Kitap*, 184-85.

gîdîyân-ı muflisân, “the guild of the bankrupt procurers” consisting of 500 persons.¹⁰⁷ On his travel to Ottoman Egypt, Evlîyâ Çelebî established that in Cairo the guild of female “house prostitutes,” *esnâf-ı fâhişe-i hâneğî*, had *vâsıtalar*, “mediators.” A part of the city called *Bâbullûk-ı sıbyân*, “brothel of little children” housed coffeehouses, bozahouses and taverns. Çelebî informs that all “effeminate boy prostitutes” *me‘bûnân-ı hîzân*, and all “female prostitutes,” *fâhişe* and “boy prostitutes,” *gilmân*, lingered here.¹⁰⁸

With regards to places where boy prostitution took place, what occupations were associated with it and who were involved, *Risâle-i Garîbe* mentions the Yeni Kapı bathhouse where men enter the basin for a boy prostitute of Ayak Kapısı. Female prostitutes and boy prostitutes mix with tanners at Yedi Kule. Other boy prostitutes (possible from Kâsım Pâşâ) bow down to present their behinds to muleteers and agricultural thrashermen in exchange for some wine. Of procurers of women and boys it is said that they are people who do not register within a guild while having had a professional training and they are not working as peasants. Jewish procurers of female and boy prostitutes make their house a brothel and also intermediate. People characterised as unable to find respectable jobs, become night watch, court assistant, bodyguard, Janissary novice or procurer of women or boys.¹⁰⁹

Evlîyâ Çelebî added that “the guild of the bankrupt procurers” were recorded in an registry and paid the heads of the night watchers and security forces in order to roam the bazaars of Istanbul *intra muros* to pick pockets of destitutes newly arrived from rural areas.¹¹⁰ It is unknown whether these procurers sold women and/or boys. It seems that this guild was not a guild of actual procurers, but that *gîdî* was a swearword to cursingly indicate a guild of pickpockets paying tax.

Of 2100 female “house prostitutes” in Cairo Evlîyâ Çelebî said that they, with exception of those belonging to military personnel, were recorded in the register of the head of the security forces and paid tax. The effeminate boy prostitutes from *Bâbullûk-ı sıbyân* also paid tax. Three state intermediaries recorded all female and boy prostitutes in their registry to collect tax. Procurers were also recorded, but it is unclear whether they paid a tax.¹¹¹

Particulars of boys working as bathhouse attendants are described by Nina Ergin’s article on labour immigration from Albania to the bathhouses of Istanbul in the eighteenth-

¹⁰⁷ Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 1. Kitap*, 223.

¹⁰⁸ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi-Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Muhammed Zillî 10. Kitap*, ed. Seyit Ali Karaman, Yücel Dağlı and Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007), 204-205.

¹⁰⁹ Develi, *Tanıtım Nüshası*, 3-5. Develi, *XVIII Yüzyıl İstanbul*, 22-25.

¹¹⁰ Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 1. Kitap*, 223.

¹¹¹ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi-Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Muhammed Zillî 10. Kitap*, ed. Seyit Ali Karaman, Yücel Dağlı and Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007), 204-205.

century based on a bathhouse register of 1752 listing all bathhouse employees of greater Istanbul. Although this register (for obvious reasons) made no allusions to intercourse, as several primary sources refer to the gender-segregated hammams as space for illicit male same-sex intercourse and prostitution, among the boys mentioned there might have been ones that prostituted themselves to clientele. The attendants and servants in the register are characterised by (nick)name, physical traits such as the presence or absence of facial hair and province of origin. More than half of the 2400 hammam labourers, many migrants from Albania, constituted young and minor boys. The combined number of *sâbî*, young boys, *tâze*, youths without facial hair, *çâr-ebrû*, four eyebrows, meaning youths with slight facial hair and *genç îrisî*, heavily built youngsters, amounted to 1282. Other attendants hailed from the Anatolian city Kastamonu.¹¹²

Köçeks were dancing boys performing for the Sultan and his guests at festivals and wedding-circumcision celebrations. Over time they became so popular that they also danced outside the Palace at coffeehouses and taverns. *Köçeks* were often Jews and Greeks. They wore feminine bright-coloured skirts with belts and gold-embroidered tops or long black trousers with a piece of cloth tied around their waists and a silk top. Similar to the cross-dressing dancers at the Abbasid court, *köçeks* had long side curls. Some of them performed in coffeehouses and taverns, while not dancing they acted as servants. The dances performed on the rhythm of tambourines, drums and trumpets were often erotic and desire-provoking. Consequently, they had many admirers among the male spectators. The first record of *köçeks* dates to the end of the fifteenth century. Fâzıl-ı Enderûnî elaborates on his desire for a Greek *köçek* dancing in the taverns of Galata (*Hûbânnâme*), his love for a gypsy *köçek* dancing in the taverns of Galata and Balat (*Defter-i 'Aşk*) and he describes “feminine” *köçeks* in his *Çengînâme*.¹¹³

One of the historical accounts hinting at prostituting *köçeks* is the account of François Baron de Tott, a Hungarian-French aristocrat helping the Ottoman military reform efforts during the second half of the eighteenth century. In his memoirs he depicts an incident between Janissaries, a section of the marine corps and a thirteen, fourteen-year old *köçek* that indicates the jealousy and sexual desire these Janissaries and marines felt for this boy. One day, a violent quarrel arose between Janissaries and marines in one of the taverns of Galata where a beautiful *köçek* used to perform. After alternatingly “having given pleasure to both parties,” the boy became object of their quarrel. As he was abducted by one of the parties, Galata became a war

¹¹² Ergin, “The Albanian *Tellâk* Connection,” 231-56.

¹¹³ Selma N. Erdoğan, *Sexual Life in Ottoman Society* (Istanbul: Dönence, 1996), 73-77. Avcı, “Shifts in sexual desire,” 762.

scene in which the parties fired at each other, even throughout the night, interrupting all life. When the grand vizier heard the tumult, he decided to intervene in order to discourage other groups of Janissaries from doing the same. The party in possession of the boy would not give him up without assurance that he would not be delivered to their opposites. In the end the *köçek* was hanged on order of the grand vizier and all who fought about him were satisfied.¹¹⁴ It is possible that the baron wanted to place the Ottomans in a bad light making insinuations concerning the predatory nature and the sexually-reprehensible behaviour of the Janissaries. However, this seems far-fetched: creating such a detailed story would not be necessary to put across a statement. The account might have a kernel of truth.

The banning of *köçek* performances by Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-1861) in 1856/7 has been evaluated as a response to social turmoil associated with *köçeks* at that time, the rising awareness among state officials in the nineteenth century with regards to their, in Western visitors' eyes, deviant same-sex sexual behaviour and the subsequent transformation of Ottoman sexual behaviour.¹¹⁵ Explicit expression of male same-sex love and sexual acts in high-culture literature and general discourse might have lessened, but sexual behaviour did not suddenly change. Neither *köçek* performances, nor boy prostitutes disappeared and Ottoman males still engaged in same-sex sexual acts, now also in other venues that had not existed before.

It has been established that boy prostitution happened in many places: at taverns in Beşiktaş and Galata, at social gatherings in elite mansions, at the Yeni Kapı bathhouse, in the neighbourhood of Kâsım Pâşâ, in Cairo in the neighbourhood of *Bâbullûk-sıbyân* (coffeehouses, bozahouses and taverns), at tanneries in Yedi Kule, at Jewish residential houses, at one common house in Aleppo and outside in nature. There were no official state-regulated brothels housing prostitutes until 1880 in the Ottoman Empire. Before 1880 residential houses suspected of prostitution were raided by local religious authorities or their inhabitants were brought to court by neighbours.¹¹⁶

From 1860 onwards Istanbul became a centre of prostitution and human trafficking. Rifat N. Bali states that among procurers Ottoman, Central and Eastern European Jews were well represented, luring many Jewish girls from Russia, Galicia, Bukovina and Hungary into prostitution. These girls were forcefully prostituted in brothels of Galata and Pera or sent to

¹¹⁴ F.B. de Tott, *Memories of the Baron de Tott, on the Turks and the Tatars Vol. III* (Dublin: Printed for L. White, J. Cash, and R. Marchbank, 1785), 131-33. Greek and Jewish *köçeks* dancing in the taverns of Galata for example were described by more travellers such as John Cam Hobhouse, J.L.S. Bartholdy and Gustave Flaubert.

¹¹⁵ Avcı, "Shifts in sexual desire," 762-

¹¹⁶ Wyers, "Wicked" *Istanbul*, 38.

centres of prostitution in North Africa and the East. Not all procurers and brothel owners were Jewish, also Orthodox Greeks, Orthodox Armenians and Muslims were involved in this illegal conduct. The majority of the brothels in Galata were owned by Ottoman and European Jews. In Pera were only two brothels belonging to Jews. The dirty, crowded brothels in Galata would be visited by lower-class locals, whereas the more luxurious prostitute-employing night clubs, theatres and brothels in Pera would be visited by locals and foreigners of higher social status. According to the report of Samuel Cohen, conducting a survey into prostitution of Jewish girls and women in Istanbul in 1914, the Jewish prostitutes in Galata were forced to work for the brothel owner and seemed exhausted and desperate. The situation of the Jewish prostitutes of Galata seems to have been heartbreaking. Cohen informs that the reason why the authorities did not intervene and save the women from their horrible existence was that as long as the women and the brothel owner were not Muslim, they did not really care.¹¹⁷

After 1880 state-regulated official brothels sprouted in four districts of greater Istanbul: Pera (Beyoğlu), Galata, Üsküdar and Kadıköy. Most brothels were situated in Galata and Pera. Charles Trowbridge Riggs' survey of adult delinquency describes the prisons and brothels in Istanbul at the end of the Ottoman period. This survey is part of a larger survey of Istanbul's social and economic conditions conducted in 1920-1921.¹¹⁸ The survey of prisons sketches the state of the old main prison of Istanbul *intra muros*, the Sultan Ahmed Prison. Research conducted on 19 March 1921 shows out of a total male population of 748, 72 boys between fourteen and twenty-one years old were incarcerated. Among them there were boys convicted for sexual crimes. Another statistical report on the same prison, dating 1920, conveys the total number of male prisoners to be 1530. Of these, 10 prisoners were accused of sodomy and 210 were hospitalised with venereal disease. It is unclear whether it entailed prostitution.¹¹⁹

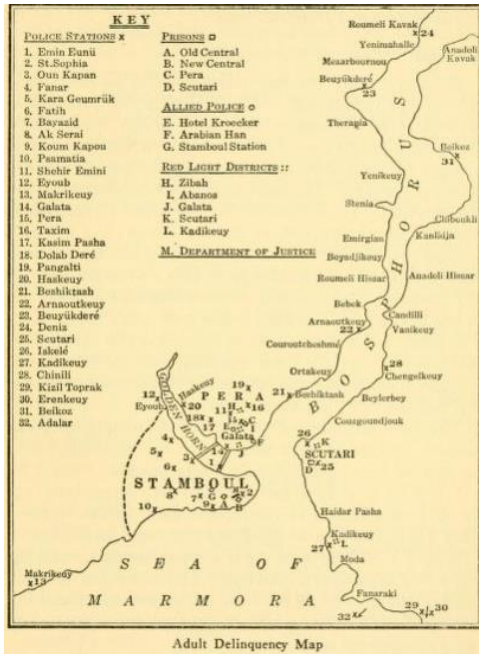
The survey on prostitution displays the venues of (female) prostitution in Istanbul between 1920-1921. An "Adult Delinquency Map" presents the registered red-light districts of Istanbul (image left) and an overview (image right) reveals the nationality of the brothel owners. There were four districts; the quarters of Zibah under H and Abanos under I, both belonging to the district of Pera (Beyoğlu), the district of Galata under J, the district of Scutari (Üsküdar) under K and the district of Kadıköy under L. There was a total of registered public houses and pensions combined of 175: 82 in the district of Pera (Abanos and Zibah

¹¹⁷ Rifat N. Bali, "Yirminci Yüzyılın Başlarında İstanbul'un Fuhuş Âleminde Yahudilerin Yeri," 1-11, www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/mahrem3.pdf, acc. 18 June '21.

¹¹⁸ Charles Trowbridge Riggs, "Adult Delinquency," in *Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople*, Clarence Richard Johnson ed. (Constantinople: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 323-367.

¹¹⁹ Trowbridge Riggs, "Adult Delinquency," 336, 338-39, 343.

neighbourhoods), 77 in the district of Galata (Galata neighbourhood), 10 in the district of Üsküdar (Bülbüdere neighbourhood) and 6 in the district of Kadıköy (Kadıköy and Moda neighbourhoods). The ones in the districts of Pera and Galata were owned by Christians (Greeks, Armenians and one Hungarian) and Jews. The houses in the districts of Üsküdar and Kadıköy were owned by Muslims (Ottomans, Bosnians and Africans).¹²⁰



Pera District							
	Abanos	Zibah	Galata	Scutari	Kadikeuy	Totals	
No. of houses	59	23	77	10	6	175	
Nationality of prop'r	Gr.	37	13	28	..	1	79
	Arm.	19	10	6	..	..	35
	Jew.	3	..	42	..	..	45
	Hun. ....	..	..	1	..	..	1
	Egypt. ....	..	..	..	..	1	1
	Negro. ....	..	..	..	2	..	2
	Bosn. ....	..	..	..	1	..	1
Turk. ....	..	..	..	7	4	11	

Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople; image left: page 351, image right: page 356

There were registered public houses where female prostitutes lived and pensions and private houses where female prostitutes would come and stay only for a short time to leave for their own homes afterwards. Private houses existed in the neighbourhoods of Kâsımpâşâ for lower-class Muslims and in Şişli for high-class Muslims. Besides these, there were between 20 and 25 hotels in parts of the city where agreements between waiters and female prostitutes were made to rent a room for a sexual rendezvous. There were 17 pensions (within the 175), all of them in Pera, registered as prostitute houses by the Central Sanitary Control Bureau. It seems that only women worked at the 159 public houses and pensions in Pera and Galata as the survey counted 664 female prostitutes of which 662 were officially registered. Of these women 58% were Greek, 14% Armenian, 19% Jewish and 6% Russian. Since the foreign investigating men were not allowed into Muslim brothels, they did not record the inhabitants of the brothels in Üsküdar and Kadıköy.¹²¹

The survey displays no registered boy prostitutes. Although the investigated brothels in 1920-1921 housed female prostitutes, there has been at least one brothel, operating around

¹²⁰ Trowbridge Riggs, "Adult Delinquency," 351-56.

¹²¹ Trowbridge Riggs, "Adult Delinquency," 355-59.

1900-1905, that housed boy prostitutes. The following account describing this institute, an early twentieth-century hotel in Galata lodging boy prostitutes, presents a peek into a hitherto hidden part of Ottoman boy prostitution.

A unique primary source, *Jeudige Zondaars te Constantinopel*, a treatise written by Esgo Taco Feenstra Kuiper around 1900-1905, is an eyewitness account concerning prostitution of boys in Istanbul. Feenstra Kuiper was a Frisian Dutch writer-journalist who lived in Istanbul for approximately eight years. He witnessed boy prostitution happening around him and met a young Greek procurer of boy prostitutes. Together with a friend he rescued an eight-year-old boy from prostitution and sent him to the Netherlands on a Dutch ship. His story provides valuable insights into boy prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul. In the booklet one encounters the story of minor, homeless, destitute boys who were sold or sold themselves to customers in a hotel, bathhouses and private homes. Not only the (pre-)pubescent prostituting boys were victims of bad circumstances, the venturesome pubescent Greek boy working as a pimp and “private secretary” (bed partner) to an Ottoman official, can also be seen as a victim of the system.¹²²

Feenstra Kuiper found out that European primary schools were breeding grounds for prospective boy prostitutes and that teachers, sensing what was going on, would not inform the principal out of fear to be seen as implicated and sent away. He tells about Herman (pseudonym), a seventeen-year-old daring Greek boy who trained Maurits (pseudonym), a thirteen-year-old Jewish or Christian boy to become a prostitute and who acquired an eight-year-old Spanish Jewish boy named Carlos from a slave seller in order to use him as a prostitute. Herman tells Feenstra Kuiper that Carlos stays with an acquaintance in Galata and that Carlos needs to learn French, English, German, Greek and Turkish/Ottoman so he can receive clients. This reveals that people of these ethnicities made use of boy prostitutes, or at least people who spoke these languages since French was not only spoken by French foreigners living in Istanbul but also by Ottoman Armenians and Jews. French functioned as the *lingua franca* between people of various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Herman and Feenstra Kuiper mainly communicated in French with each other, although both of them knew Ottoman and Greek. Herman names one of the state officials as someone who likes to pay for little Jewish boys. Furthermore one reads that there were slave sellers who brought slaves for prostitution from the Balkans and France. Looking at their names it is obvious that these slave

¹²² Esgo Taco Feenstra Kuiper, *Jeugdige Zondaars te Konstantinopel*, first edition 1905 (Utrecht: Stichting De Vernis, 1978).

sellers were Jewish. Feenstra Kuiper asks Herman to take him to a bathhouse with boy servants and a brothel with boy prostitutes. On Sunday Herman and Feenstra Kuiper go to a bathhouse in the proximity of to the Bazaar in *Stamboel* (Istanbul *intra muros*), possibly the district of Tahtakale. In the bathhouse six beautiful boys welcome Feenstra Kuiper. He has to choose one of them as his bath attendant. While bathing him, the bath attendant does not convey any sexually-explicit behaviour and fulfils his job with dedication. Afterwards however, while Feenstra Kuiper, wrapped in towels, is relaxing on a couch, the same bath attendants enter the room and start to dance embracing each other. Then they disappear and the bath attendant helps Feenstra Kuiper to get dressed again. Then Herman arrives urging him time to leave has come as bathhouses in *Stamboel* close at sunset and they leave for Galata to visit Hotel Brousse. Brousse (Bursa) is a city located in the vicinity of Istanbul. Many prostitutes and procurers were sent here in exile as punishment when convicted by the court.¹²³ Some of those prostitutes would return to Istanbul when they were allowed to resettle in their old neighbourhoods after having displayed good behaviour. Feenstra Kuiper notes that Hotel Brousse was the largest boy brothel in Istanbul. Its owner was a man from Croatia greeting him in German. The brothel owner made apologies that he could only offer boys between twelve and seventeen years old as his suppliers had not offered him younger and older boys as of late. The handsome boys staying at Hotel Brousse were Greek, Jewish and Hungarian. Although their salaries were meagre, they were sheltered, could rest during the day, bathe often and slept on clean bed sheeting. Although boys fled the brothel, most of them returned when they were not able to find refuge elsewhere. These boys were afraid to fall into the hands of police officers who, knowing that they were prostitutes, abused their power position and sexually assaulted them. Feenstra Kuiper informs that one evening together with a friend he found Carlos, a fatherless eight-year-old Spanish Jewish boy born in a brothel in Barcelona, crying in a corner of a side road of the Grand Pera Street destitute, hungry and poorly-clothed. Carlos begs Feenstra Kuiper to help him, he has escaped his custodian-brothel owner in Galata and he does not want to be a prostitute anymore. He wants to become a normal boy just like his class mates at school. Feenstra Kuiper helps Carlos to escape to the Netherlands onboard a Dutch trading ship. In the final part, Feenstra Kuiper describes his last encounter with Herman. Herman has contracted a venereal disease, he is weak and on the verge of death. Feenstra Kuiper brings him to a hospital. Laying in his hospital bed, Herman explains Feenstra Kuiper that he had accepted a job as a “private secretary” to a wealthy Greek merchant. For some months Herman let a good life

¹²³ Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, 98.

surrounded by luxury, serving his master during the nights while during the day and evenings he could do whatever he pleased. But then a new stableboy arrived at his master's mansion. Herman fell in love with the stableboy. One night, when his master was at the operahouse, he had intercourse with him. Unexpectedly, the master returned and found Herman and this boy in bed. They were expelled from their positions. Herman was outcasted by his prostitute friends because he had been unfaithful; this feeling is similar to a marital relationship, when a "private secretary" betrays his master with another man, this behaviour is not accepted and punished by excommunication. Herman sought refuge in a brothel in Galata. Soon he became sick and was kicked out of the brothel. The once beautiful, audacious but poor and vulnerable barely adult man dies at the age of eighteen, leaving Feenstra Kuiper a thank you note with his only possession left: a necklace with a pendant depicting the Virgin Mary.¹²⁴

Until now no other detailed description of boy prostitution happening in the Ottoman Empire at any time has been found. Feenstra Kuiper's account is plausible as the presence of prostituting bathhouse attendants is confirmed by other sources. Official documents held at the Dutch National Archives in The Hague convey particulars concerning Feenstra Kuiper proving that the man truly had lived in Istanbul. Investigation of archival records belonging to the Consulate-General of the Netherlands in Constantinople capsulating the years between 1817 and 1955 (archive number **2.05.94**) attest that Esgo Taco Feenstra Kuiper lived in Istanbul between 1900 and 1908. His name appears in the correspondence register multiple times. He was summoned to the consulate on the 3th of June 1907 to renew his residence permit and at two other instances to settle disputes over finances. Other entries displaying various dates in 1907 convey that he was employed by the The Hague-based daily newspaper *Het Vaderland*, which multiple times sent him a varying salary (in German *Reichsmark*, *RM* 41,96 and *RM* 56,41).¹²⁵

The account conveys besides the existence of a hotel used as brothel for boy prostitutes, another facet of Ottoman boy prostitution: financially destitute, unprotected boys falling into the hands of cruel men selling them for profit or using them as a sexual partner. Many boys wanted to leave prostitution and they got infected with lethal venereal diseases, such as syphilis and gonorrhoea. The survey of Trowbridge Riggs confirms the presence of venereal disease under prison inmates accused of sodomy, among them boys hospitalised to treat venereal disease. As Feenstra Kuiper's account might not be the only one, research into other primary

¹²⁴ Feenstra Kuiper, *Jeugdige Zondaars*, 8-27.

¹²⁵ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, *Archiefbescheiden Gezantschap, Consulaat, Consulaat-generaal te Constantinopel / Istanboel (Turkije)*, access number 2.05.94, inventory number 848.

sources, hitherto hidden among archival documents, be it in national archives or private family collections, is needed to elucidate boy prostitution in the Ottoman Empire further.

Conclusion

In answer to the research question of what the position of male same-sex sexual relations in Ottoman sexual life was, and more specifically, to what extent boy prostitution played a role in this sexual life, it can be said that male same-sex sexual relations took place everywhere, especially reports on male-only places such as elite social gatherings, bathhouses, thermal springs, coffeehouses, taverns, educational spaces, dervish convents and workshops, are abundant. Although forbidden by religious law, it was a widespread phenomenon among Ottomans of all ethnic backgrounds, religions and classes. Not only bachelor males, but also those who were married/had concubines had sexual relations with other males, in many instances boys/youths. The hierarchic template common among the ancient Greeks and Romans was not always enacted among the Ottomans. Intercourse did not only happen between social and hierarchical unequal partners, but also between two similar-aged peers of similar status, both youths and adults, and sometimes the roles of active and passive were reversed. Some relationships were based on true love. Open enactment of a variety of male same-sex sexual acts was looked upon as religiously forbidden, morally objectionable and socially undesirable by society just as it is regarded today. Sexual acts between males were not free of critique and they were seen as reprehensible. But as long as a man did not speak about it, did not openly express his sexual desire for other males and held his sexual activities hidden, he could act as he pleased. Expressions of male same-sex sexual desire in *divan* poetry and male same-sex sexual intercourse in multiple descriptive primary sources display not only the particulars of people engaging in this kind of sexual behaviour, they also indicate that allusions to a man's same-sex sexual behaviour could function as a means to critique the system or morally reprehensible deeds. Furthermore, forced same-sex sexual intercourse was used as vehicle of punishment, bringing down the status of an adult male enemy by destroying his male honour as being forced into the passive role was regarded destructive. As young beardless boys were not yet regarded fully-adult men in possession of a high hierarchical status and accompanying male honour, they were less prone to reputational devastation and could not lose their honour like an adult man could. Adult men still wanting to engage in same-sex sexual intercourse in the passive role were seen as non-masculine and effeminate. Although love and sexual desire for a beautiful youth were frequently expressed by *divan* poems and various literary works of prose produced by elite Ottomans, it is wrong to ascertain that (paid) male same-sex sexual relations only happened within this class. It was a widespread phenomenon

among Ottomans of all classes and religious backgrounds as is attested by the multiple examples presented.

Boy prostitution, although part of Ottoman sexual life, seems to have fulfilled a meaningful but not all-encompassing role. Although there seems to have been a market for boy prostitution that catered to a need, men did not necessarily depend on boy prostitutes to engage in same-sex intercourse. Pubescent boys having sexual intercourse with males in exchange for money sometimes had procurers (belonging to a guild or working solo), and in other instances they sold themselves. Textual evidence shows that these sexual transactions happened in many venues, among these elite mansions, common houses, bathhouses in greater Istanbul, thermal springs in Bursa, battlefields, ships, streets, outside in nature, taverns of Galata and Balat, the neighbourhood of Kâsım Pâşâ, the neighbourhood of Babûllûk-ı sıbyân in Cairo, workshops, shops and in a non-registered hotel-brothel in Galata (Hotel Brousse). The eyewitness account of Feenstra Kuiper conveyed that boy prostitutes in early twentieth-century Istanbul were financially destitute, unprotected boys who fell into the hands of cruel men who would either sell them for profit or use them as a sexual partner. Many boys wanted to leave prostitution and they got sick through infection with venereal diseases.

Relations that can be seen as more than a one-time paid sexual encounter between males also occurred, as the example of Kılıç'Alî Pâşâ showed. Sometimes prostitution was an important source of income for the boy prostitute and/or his family. Parents were willing to ignore the advances men made towards their sons. Especially when the man belonged to a higher socio-economic class as the sexual desire of a rich notable would mean financial benefits. One must keep in mind though that boy prostitution, similar to female prostitution, also highlights a darker part of Ottoman history: abuse of vulnerable minors and human trafficking. The generally held view seems to have been that the practice of male same-sex sexual intercourse and boy prostitution did not cause any problems if it was kept hidden from societal scrutiny. According to Mustafa 'Âlî, it was more important to keep sexuality a private matter and true gentlemen should not meddle into the private life of others.

With regards to why many Ottoman men engaged in male same-sex sexual relations and made use of boy prostitutes, it seems there is no conclusive answer. It seems to have been a matter of preference and love, circumstances and acquired culture. As Rabbi Eliya HaCohen (d. 1729) living in Izmir, wrote in one of his books on ethics that it made no difference whether the object of sexual desire was a young boy or a woman and suppression of feelings of lust toward both should be exercised, it seems that the Ottomans like the Greeks were mindful of the idea that individuals may vary in their sexual preferences and that people may respond to

same-sex and opposite-sex stimuli. Moderation in sexual behaviour seems to have been the one true value and sexual acts should be conducted in private while not forsaking one's conjugal and reproductive duties. Academics have sometimes argued that men had no other choice than to resort to boys, peers and boy prostitutes for (paid) gratification of sexual desire because of the unavailability of women due to gender-segregation of society. This largely accepted stance, is incorrect. Women were not absent from public space as many women from lower social strata worked outside. Female prostitutes were available. Moreover, my discussion suggests that there were more reasons.

Male same-sex sexual relations including boy prostitution occupied an important place in Ottoman sexual life. This research has only scratched the surface. The multitude of references to both male same-sex sexual relations and boy prostitution found across many primary sources shows that there is still much more to be discovered. Ottoman sexual behaviour, male and female same-sex sexual acts and especially prostitution of boys deserves further scholarly attention. Hopefully this work will be an inspiration to other students and scholars to dive into this intriguing facet of Ottoman social history.

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