AHMED B. IBRAHIM
Resmi, Giridi
(b. 1694 or 1695, d. 1783)

LIFE

A.R. was born in Réthymnon (Resmo), Crete (Giridi), in 1106-07/1694-95. According to Muḥammad Murādi (d. 1206/1791-92), our source for the little we know concerning A.R.’s early life, A.R. arrived in Istanbul in 1147-48/1734-35, where he continued his studies under fiAbdullāh al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-indhoven (d. ?) and Abū al-Tījah Ahmad b. ʿAlī al-Manīn al-Dimashqī (d. ?). Even though A.R. is sometimes referred to as a teacher (müderris), and occasionally has the honorific title hāci attached to his name, neither attest to his early training or later experiences. Most sources credit him with expertise in the calligraphic and epistolary arts, typically evoked of those who were life-long members of the ḥāṣegân, the senior ranks of Ottoman bureaucracy. A.R. was such a figure. It also seems to be more than simply a matter of professional convenience that A.R. allied himself with an intellectual circle of reformers, who transformed diplomatic relations of the Ottomans with Europe in the eighteenth century and established some of the first privately-endowed public libraries of Istanbul. His patrons were among the most distinguished statesmen and literati of the eighteenth century. Most of our knowledge of his palace career is drawn from scattered references in his own works, especially those in dedicatory prefaces to patrons, and scanty records of employment from archival documents.

A.R. began his civil service as chief tax farmer (baṣ muqtaʿaci) in 1160/1747. When his father-in-law and first patron Ṭavuqcuabaṣı Muṣṭafā, a diplomat and one of the prominent figures in grand vizier Qoca Ṭāriba Muḥam’s (1110-77/1698-1763) entourage, died in 1162/1749, A.R. began the compilation of Sefinetür-rʾerʾesā, not only to honor him but also to find a new patron. It was in this period that A.R. wrote İstinās fī ahvālʾe-efrās, a standard show piece demonstrating his scribal and literary skills.1 The work celebrated the spring ritual of releasing the royal horses for grazing and served as an encomium to his master Sultan Mahmūd I (r. 1143-67/1730-54). Judging from the number of presentation copies among the extant manuscripts, it must have served also as a means of introduction to potential patrons, such as grand vizier Köse Bāhir Muṣṭafā (first vizierate: 1165-68/1752-55).

After having demonstrated his literary skills and serving in numerous lesser offices including the office of the junior endowments accountant (küçük evqāf muḥāsebecisi), probably because of his attachment to the household of Qoca Ṭāriba Mehmēd, A.R. was appointed in late 1118/1757 to an embassy to Vienna to announce the accession of Muṣṭafā III (1171-88/1757-74). This is also the period when A.R. composed Ḥamiletürʾl-küberā (1163/1749), a biographical list of the chief black eunuchs (qızlar ağaları) of the Palace, of which one copy is dedicated to Qoca Rāgıb.2

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The embassy to Vienna (1171-72/1757-58) was followed by a similar appointment, namely the first ever embassy to the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin (1177-78/1763-64). In both cases A. R. submitted detailed reports on the geography of passage and the politics of the courts he encountered. In the case of the Berlin embassy, he left behind not just an account of diplomatic niceties but also a portrayal of Frederick and the description of the Seven Years’ War then winding down. His observations, however tentative, inaugurated a new emphasis on the need to study European politics, decades prior to Selim III’s (r. 1203-23/1789-1808) initiative to send diplomats to permanent posts abroad in 1207/1793.

Upon his return from Berlin, A.R. was appointed chief correspondence officer (mektübcu) to the grand vizier. In 1179/1765 he became chief sergeant-at-arms (çavuşbaşı) and began his long connection to Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa (d. 1188/1774), who was appointed grand vizier first between 1179-82/1765-68 and then between 1185-88/1771-74 during the Ottoman-Russian war (1182-88/1768-74). Among A.R.’s other appointments to the highest offices was his brief posting as second-in-command (şadaret kethüdâsi) to grand vizier Moldovanî ʿAli Paşa on the Bulgarian battlefront in 1183/1769. He served in this capacity again with Muhsinzade from 1185/1771 until the grand vizier’s death at the end of the war in 1188/1774. A.R. was present at many of the war councils on the battlefield and is noted for his largesse toward wounded soldiers.

Even though the abovementioned three posts were considered stepping-stones to the office of the grand vizier, A.R. never achieved that status. The reason for this could have been incompetence or rivalries. Yet it is more than likely that A.R.’s regular and scathing criticism of the state of Ottoman military organization played a major role in this turn of events.

A.R. acted as first plenipotentiary (murağha-ı evvel) to the hastily convened Küçük Qaynarca peace negotiations in 1188/1774 and became one of the signatories of the resulting treaty. It is therefore small wonder that he disappeared from the appointment rolls for some time after 1189/1775. A.R. resurfaced one last time as chief of the palace cavalry bureau (süvârî muqâbecisi), likely as a sinecure, under grand vizier Ḥalîl Hamîd (1197-99/1782-85), probably in recognition of his continuous service behind the scenes in difficult negotiations with Russia over the future of the Crimea and the Tatars. He died in Şevval 1197/August 1783, shortly before the Aynahlıqavaq convention ceding the Crimea to Catherine II was signed in early 1198/1784. One son is said to have preceded A. R. to the grave; no other information has been discovered to date concerning his family life.

WORKS

1 Hamiletü’l-küberâ

In 1163/1749 A.R. composed Hamiletü’l-küberâ, a biographical list of the chief black eunuchs (qızlar ağa ları) of the Palace until Beşîr Ağa II, mid-18th cen. A copy
was dedicated to Qoca Râgb Mehmêd.3 Hamîletü’l-küberâ and Sefînetü’r-rû’esâ (see below) are unique to A.R.’s age as career profiles of two of the most influential offices of the Ottoman court. In both cases, they were composed to celebrate the patrons and mentors of A.R.4

The book begins with Mehmed Ağa (981-998/1574-90) and ends with Morali Beşir Ağa (the second eunuch with the same name, who served between 1160-66/1746-52). It includes brief biographies of thirty-eight eunuchs, focusing on their origins and professional careers. A tekmile addresses the history of the downfall and execution of Morali Beşir Ağa and provides as much justification for, as explication of, the events.

2 Hulâşatü’l-i’tibâr

Critical and satirical history of the Russo-Ottoman War 1182-88/1768-74, composed in 1195/1781, which is also date of the earliest manuscript copy (no. 19 below). A. R. was on the battlefield from 1771 till 1774, and acutely aware of the failings of the janissary army. The writing is accessible, indignant, sometimes comic, but sincere and passionate. Not by any means a well-composed or highly stylized piece, it nonetheless circulated in multiple editions well into the nineteenth century.

3 Lâyiha

A memorandum presented to grand vizier Ḥâliîl Paşa in 1183/1769 concerning the need for reorganization and control of military headquarters. Simply entitled Lâyiha, this was A.R.’s first analysis of the state of military affairs, which he presented to the newly appointed grand vizier Ėvâzpaşazâde Ḥâliîl (1183-84/1769-70). The only extant copy of the work includes the discussion of thirteen topics of concern about the 1182/1769 campaign, including: 1) The protection of campaign routes from rapacious soldiers; 2) The supply of horses at waystations; 3) How to control rabble troops from Anatolia; 4) The uselessness of the soldiers from the military fiefs (timarli); 5) The problem of camp followers; 6) The abuse of pack animals; 7) The uselessness of janissary palace cavalry and guards units (sipâhi and silûhdâr); 8) The excessive retainers for the men of state; 9-10) Biscuit and bread, and their adulteration by corrupt bakers; 11-13) The matters of supplying the army, purchasing supplies at current market value, and preventing hoarding.5

4 Lâyiha

A political memoir on the Russians during temporary truce and negotiations to end the 1182-88/1768-74 war presented to Muhsinzâde and Ėbürrezzaq Efendi, chief negotiator on the battlefront in 1186/1772. That so many copies are bound together with Hulâşât suggests that the two texts became a primer on foreign affairs and reform.
A.R. presented this Lâyiha to Muhsinzâde as the Ottomans undertook ultimately abortive negotiations with the Russians between 1186-87/1772-73, in which he pressed for peace, arguing that the Russians were badly overextended, and that both sides should recognize their military and territorial limitations. Such language was still novel in Ottoman negotiations. A.R.’s view in this last work as well as in Ḥulâsâtî’l-i’tibâr represents an understanding of the balance of power diplomacy he observed in the courts of Vienna and Berlin.

§ Sefâretnâme-i Ahmed Resmî or Sefâretnâme-i Prusya

Report of A.R.’s embassy to Berlin in 1177-78/1763-64 containing a logbook for the journey, reflections on the cities of passage, as well as a record of the official meetings with Frederick the Great (1153-1200/1740-86), and many reflections on the rise of Frederick, his kind of rule, and his parsimony. Both this and the Vienna embassy report have been edited and transcribed numerous times, and discussed at length in English and Turkish.

¶ Sefînetî’r-rû’î’esâ or Ḥalîfetî’l-rû’î’esâ

Also known as Ḥalîfetî’l-rû’î’esâ, Sefînetî’r-rû’î’esâ is the only biographical compilation of Ottoman chief scribes (re’îsü’l-kütâb) until 1157/1744, written ca. 1162/1749, continued by Süleymân Fâ’îq until 1218/1804. The work ends with the entries on A.R.’s patrons Tâvuoçbaşı Muṣṭafâ and Râġîb Meḥmed, mainly known to us through Sefînetî’r-rû’î’esâ. A.R.’s probable autograph copy of the work refers to the sending of the manuscript to Qoca Râġîb Meḥmed while he was governor of Raqqa in 1163/1750.6

® Viyana Sefâretnâmesi

Report of A.R.’s embassy to Vienna in 1170-71/1757-58, written immediately upon his return.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

† Hamîletî’l-küberâ

Manuscripts: (1) Istanbul, Istanbul Ünûversîtesi Kütûphanesi, TY 1210; 1167/1753, 13 fol., 23 lines, talik, presentation copy to Qoca Râġîb. (2) Istanbul, Istanbul Ünûversîtesi Kütûphanesi, TY 2423; n.d., 28 fol., 23 lines, talik. (3) Istanbul, Istanbul Ünûversîtesi Kütûphanesi, TY 4371; 1185/1771, fol. 78-112, 19 lines, talik, with Sefînet. (4) Istanbul, İstanbul Ünîversîtesi Kütûphanesi, TY 9721; n.d., 16 fol. 21 lines, rîka. (5) Istanbul, Sûleymaniye Kütûphanesi, Atf Efendi 1881; 1199/1784, fol. 34b-38, various scripts, fragment with Ḥulâsât; (6) Istanbul, Sûleymaniye Kütûphanesi, Esad Efendi 2258/1; n.d., fol. 1-13a, 35 lines, various scripts, with other works. (7) Istanbul, Sûleymaniye Kütûphanesi, Esad Efendi 3378/2; 1178/1764, fol. 36-52a, 16 lines, various scripts, with two other works by A.R. 8) Istanbul, Sûley-


2 Hulâsatü’l-i’tibâr

Iṣq, with Lāyiha (Mührszände). (23) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, S 1251; n.d., copied 1262/1846, fol. I-60a, 17 lines, rka, with Lāyiha (Mührszände).


3 Lāyiha

Manuscript: (1) Istanbul, Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 419; n.d., 11 fol, 19 lines, talik, with Kâtib Çelebi’s Düstûrü’l-’Amel, marginal note by Aḥmed Resmi’s son, who is not further identified.

4 Lāyiha


5 Sefäretnâme-i Ahmed Resmî or Sefäretnâme-i Prusya

Manuscripts: (1) Cairo, Cairo University Library, 6438T; mid-18th c.?, 28 fol., 19 lines, talik. 2) Istanbul, Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 1246; n.d., 12 fol., 21 lines, talik. 3) Istanbul, Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 6095; n.d., fol. 37b-62a, 19 lines, nesih, with numerous other works. 4) Istanbul, Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 9941; n.d., 18 fol., no. of lines varies, nesih. 5) Istanbul, Istanbul


© Sefinetû’r-rü’esâ or Ḥalîfetû’r-rü’esâ


Editions: (1) Istanbul, 1269/1853, includes zeyl by Süleymân Fâ’iq.

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2 Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi 3378/2; 1166/1753.
3 Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi 3378/2; dated 1166/1753.
4 The facsimile edition of the work by Ahmed Nezîhî Turan includes a lengthy discussion of A.R.’s motives.
5 Istanbul, Istanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, TY 419 (Aksan, 188-95).
6 Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Reisülküttab 639.

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