

The Concept of Order in Hasan Kafi Akhisari's Thought

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Abstract: The concept of order made a perennial impact on Ottoman political thought. In particular, the notion of world order, *nizam-ı âlem*, appeared as the *raison d'être* of the Ottoman polity during the heyday of the Empire. Throughout the centuries, world order had been interpreted variously in the treatises of Ottoman political philosophers in accordance with the current political environment. This study will analyze Hasan Kafi Al-Akhisari's (1544-1615) conceptualization of order in his seminal work *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* (The Principles of wisdom for the order of the world). It will scrutinize the concept of order with special regard to its particular intellectual and socio-political context under the framework of the conceptual history approach. The changes and parallels in the interpretation of order with regard to sociopolitical context allow us to understand the ambivalent nature of the concept of order in Ottoman political thought. It is worth investigating the competing discourses on this concept during Akhisari's time in order to reveal his contribution to the conceptual debate. Hence, a synchronic analysis of the conceptualization of order during the 16th century and early 17th century will be employed. It will allow us to understand the manifold interpretations about the notions of decline, progress, reform, and renewal. Apart from that, the concept of order was strongly associated with a set of moral principles. It makes this concept loaded with different political and social interpretations. Through a discussion of Akhisari's conceptualization of order, this paper will also investigate the ways of the legitimation of the omnipresent state mechanism and well-disciplined social order.

Keywords: Conceptual History, Hasan Kafi Akhisari, Order, Ottoman Political Thought, 16th century

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Introduction

Hasan Kafi Akhisari (also known as Hasan Kafija Prušćak), an Ottoman Bosnian scholar and judge (*qadi*) from the village of Akhisar (present-day Prusac in Bosnia), occupies a significant status in the Ottoman advice literature. He was born in Prusac in 1544. After completing his elementary training in his hometown, Akhisari departed for İstanbul in which he found a chance to study under several respected scholars, including Kazasker Ahmad al-Ansari, Gazanfer b. Cafer el-Hüseyni and Mevlana Bali b. Yusuf (İpşirli, 1979). In 1575, he returned to Akhisar, began to deliver lectures to the students, and produce his scholarly works. Akhisari was appointed to the office of judge of Akhisar in 1583. Until 1593, he assumed judgeship in several towns and regions in the district of Akhisar while maintaining his writing and teaching career. Akhisari took part in the Egri Campaign of 1596 against the Habsburg Empire and presented his political treatise *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* (The Principles of wisdom for the order of the world), originally written in Arabic, to the representatives of Sultan Mehmed III. Upon the request of these statesmen, he translated it into Turkish with some additional commentaries so that it could be presented to the Sultan and used by the officials in the Diwan (Witkam, 1989). *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* was written for identifying the causes of the perceived political, social, and economic disorder of the state. Akhisari's work was appreciated by Sultan Mehmed III and the grand vizier Damat İbrahim Pasha when he presented it to the Palace. He was rewarded with the office of qadi of Akhisar on the basis of permanence and assigned to teach the students in the region. Akhisari passed away in 1616 in his hometown. His numerous treatises on philology, Islamic law, philosophy, and history allowed Akhisari to make a name for himself as a prestigious Ottoman scholar. *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* is Akhisari's greatest contribution to the genre of *naşihat al-mulūk* (advice to kings) and one of the earliest examples of the Ottoman literature of decline where he juxtaposes the traditional premises of moralistic mirror for princes literature with a reform recommendation to the Ottoman state institutions.

Studying Ottoman Political Writing

As persuasively argued by Linda T. Darling (2008), the history of political literature must be studied with regard to actual political transformations as it is not merely encompassed by its literary and philosophical study. Historical texts needed to be treated as an outcome of the distinctive historical context by placing special emphasis on interpreting the author's intentions (Whatmore,



2015); in Skinner's (2002, p. 82) phrase, one ought to analyze "not only what people are saying but also what they are doing in saying it."

The tradition of Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte* in German) probes the epochal transformations of political and social concepts within a particular period. While treating concepts as an appropriate unit of analysis, it places great emphasis upon the role of the socio-political context of the time for the studied texts. Skinner (1969) further adds that for any given statement, it is also necessary to investigate "how what was said was meant, and thus what relations there may have been between various different statement [sic] even within the same general context." In that sense, it must be noted that Ottoman political thought brought diverse political traditions together during its lifetime as a result of the continuous interaction with the Greco-Roman world and the Middle East civilizations (Kafadar, 2009). Hence, the alterations and parallels in the meaning of the political concepts resulted from the interactions with various societies, cultures, philosophical traditions, and ideologies come into prominence in the Ottoman context. Furthermore, Ottoman advice literature reflects, to a large extent, their authors' particular class interests and aspirations for promoting to the higher ranks in the Ottoman bureaucracy. These works bore a striking resemblance to the Islamic mirror for princes tradition concerning their function and philosophical substance (Fodor, 1986; İnan, 2009). Be that as it may, a close examination of these texts could reveal the idiosyncrasy of the Ottoman advice literature while shedding light on the relevant political and intellectual context. Thus, it is of paramount importance to examine the advice letters closely by paying regard to the publication date, the authors' occupation, status in the Ottoman palace, portrayals of the Ottoman past, classification of the Golden Age, and ideal statesmen (Yılmaz, 2003). It requires one to not take the similarities in the Ottoman advice literature at face value and pay attention to competing discourses and the socio-political and intellectual context of the era.

A Central Concept in Ottoman Political Thought: World Order

The sixteenth-century represents an era of drastic transformation in the Ottoman Empire (Abou-El-Haj, 1991). In the Ottoman political vocabulary, the dissolution of order began to be pronounced by the Ottoman authors when the Ottoman Empire was at its zenith during the middle of the 16th century (Lewis, 1962). Ottoman decline consciousness could be regarded as



a reaction to the changes in well-established social boundaries in Ottoman society and politics. In order to analyze these changes, the Ottoman authors generally prefer corruption (*fesad*) rather than turmoil (*ihtilal*) which signifies that the current political state is not good as it once had been; however, it also gives the message that the improvement could be possible if the recommendations are taken seriously (Sariyannis, 2019). The preservation of the classical Ottoman political and social order appeared as the central concern among the Ottoman political thinkers. While they interpreted the transformation of institutions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a sign of the disregard for Ottoman *qanun*, the idealization of Ottoman *qanun-i qadim* (ancient tradition or customary law) and Golden Age signifies the aspiration for freezing an ideal of Ottoman administrative practice (Howard, 1988). In that sense, the emphasis on the concept of order in Ottoman political writing is strongly associated with this ideal. The notion of the world order (*nizam-ı alem*) was variously interpreted by Ottoman scholars. During the era of Mehmed II, the phrase of the world order was used for justifying fratricide in the Ottoman state law, *qanunname* of Sultan Mehmed II: "And upon whichever of my sons the Sultanate will be bestowed, it is appropriate that he may kill his siblings for the sake of the order of the world. Most religious scholars have also permitted it. So may they act accordingly." (Hagen, 2005). As a legitimizing principle for ensuring the unity of the state, the world order gained political implications. The philosophical debate about this concept was initiated by Ottoman historian Tursun Beg during the same period and developed by Kinalizade Ali in his treatise *Akhlaq-i Ala'i*. Tursun Beg associates the preservation of world order with the existence of the government as a divine remedy for the issues caused in human society due to weakness intrinsic to human nature (Hagen, 2005). In a similar vein, Kinalizade links the order of the world with the order of one's spiritual life and balance among the preordained social classes (Sariyannis, 2018). In his theorization, moral balance is tantamount to one's domination over the several faculties of the soul, while social order relies on the ruler's domination and sovereignty. The maintenance of order appeared as the foremost concern in these texts with strong references to the metaphysical realm. Hasan Kafi Akhisari's treatise, in that regard, is one of the earliest examples of the theorization of the *nizam*. Kinalizade and Akhisari represent the first generation of *ulema* class who had developed a sophisticated theory of order. Akhisari's remarkable *madrassa* career makes his work more intriguing as its analysis allows us to interpret the imagination of the world order among the Ottoman *ulema* during the sixteenth century.



The Analysis of Usûlü'l-hikem fi Nizâmi'l Âlem

Hasan Kafi's primary concern in his treatise is the dissolution of the world order which became prevalent since H. 980 (1572). The verse of the Quran, "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" guided him to write about the causes of the political and social turmoil in the Ottoman territory (Akhisari, 2020). Akhisari identifies four causes of the waning imperial prowess. Firstly, justice and good governance had been disregarded whilst the appointment of talentless and incompetent people to posts of authority became widespread. Secondly, the high-ranking politicians ceased to take counsel from religious scholars and the ones who have experience in governance due to the prevalence of arrogance among the statesmen. Thirdly, the discipline of the army is loose, and there is a neglect to follow the latest military technology. Fourthly, corruption, the wide prevalence of bribery, and the reign of women are the underlying causes of the abovementioned problems. Akhisari reiterates that his primary aim is to deduce the principles for the restoration of the order. The book's introduction demonstrates that Akhisari's understanding of the world order is based on the political, social, and metaphysical dynamics that are prone to be violated by contemporaries.

The introductory chapter titled "About the Cause of the World Order" presents the division of the society into four status groups on the basis of occupation as a prerequisite for the maintenance of world order. The first estate is men of the sword including kings, viziers, governors, and soldiers; second estate men of the pen: religious scholars and the ones engaged in works of piety and knowledge, whose function is to teach the religious principles that guide both Sultan and its subjects; the third estate consists of the farmers, both Christian and Muslim; fourth estate are artisans and merchants. Akhisari concludes that everyone has to belong to one of these four estates so that the order could be maintained within the society. Maintaining a hierarchical society model as being composed of four classes was a constant motif of Ottoman political thought, also known as *hadd* (keeping one's place) (Sariyannis, 2019). Prior to Akhisari, Ahmed Amasi and Kinalizade wrote on keeping social compartmentalization as the followers of Tusian tradition. What distinguishes Akhisari from previous thinkers is the change in the usual order for these classes. Kinalizade defines them as the four elements of the body of the world: men of the pen, men of the sword, the class of merchants and craftsmen, and the farmers. As Black



(2011) advocates, Akhisari may want to give encouragement to the soldiers and the farmers by placing them in the upper position within the hierarchy of the society. Particularly, Akhisari states that the farmers' labor is the most superior action after engaging in science and participation in jihad. He also criticizes the forced recruitment of *reaya* and artisans from towns and villages to the army since H. 1001 (1592/3) in Bosnia (Akhisari, 2020). In Akhisari's vision, keeping the peasants in their traditional position facilitates the maintenance of economic order based on the timar system. Akhisari also refers to the philosophers who recommend the execution of jobless people for the benefit of society. The primary duty of the Padişah in this setting is to maintain old law (*kanun-i kadim*) and preserve preordained social divisions. For Akhisari, just as the health of the body relies on the hearth, the well-being of the state relies on the just and righteous ruler. The interdependency between the ruler and his subjects has been a quite popular theme in Ottoman political thought. Similar metaphors were used by Idris Bitlisi, Şeyhoğlu Mustafa, Celalzade Mustafa and Kinalızade Ali Efendi prior to Akhisari's time.

The first chapter of Akhisari's treatise is about justice and good governance, which are deemed as the main pillars of the Sultanate. The circle of justice is evoked by giving reference to Ardashir I of the Sasanian Empire: "There is no authority without men, and there are no men without money, and there is no money without cultivation, and there is no cultivation without justice and good governance." This understanding originated from old Iranian and Middle East tradition (Darling, 2013), while its numerous formulations are attributed to Greek philosopher Aristotle (London, 2011). Halil İnalcık (2013) shows that a similar concept of justice could be found in *Kutadgu Bilig*, written in 1069. The circle of justice remained a recurring theme in Persian and Ottoman political thought tradition, although the elements of the circle may change in different definitions and many authors of political works in the sixteenth century reiterated this pattern in manifold versions (Sariyannis, 2019). During the sixteenth century, the Middle Eastern political advice literature advocated justice over security and liberty, while European tradition opined that the maintenance of security comes before justice and liberty (Darling, 2008). Here, *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* pursues the prevailing Middle Eastern tradition in an explicit manner. Akhisari further laid particular stress on the mildness, generosity, and support of all social classes. The second chapter advocates the necessity of consultation in political matters with the wise people, which was also a well-known theme in the classical Arabic-Persian mirror for princes



literature. In these chapters, Akhisari uses the Quran verses and hadiths to support his arguments. Additionally, he gives reference to Hindu proverbs and sayings of Alexander the Great, Abdullah b. Tahir, the poet Abolfath Bosti, Abbasid governor Fazl b. Sehl, Persian vizier Buzurgmihr, Sasanid Kings Ardashir I, Anushirvan and Yazdegerd, Caliph Omar and Ali. These references demonstrate that Ottoman political thought during the Classical Age had been influenced by a wide range of political traditions prevailed in the Middle East and Greco-Roman world.

One of Akhisari's outstanding contributions to the advice literature came from the third chapter of *Usûlül-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* in which he talks about the use of military technology and army discipline. In classical Ottoman political thought, the concept of order invariably was associated with the order of the army. It is no coincidence that the army in Turkish, *ordu*, and order, *nizam*, shared the same meaning in the usage of the old Turkish (Gencer, 2019). Akhisari's treatise was not an exception to this understanding of the order. The subsequent failures of Ottoman armies in the Bosnia region against the enemies encouraged the author to make a reform recommendation to the Ottoman Sultan. In order to increase the discipline of the army, he suggests that the Sultan should inspect his soldiers and constantly check their military training on the basis of a reward and punishment system. Akhisari goes on to advocate that the inability of the Ottoman army to face the "infidels" comes from the enemies' success in producing superior military technology. As a first-hand observer of the prolonged wars in the frontier region of Bosnia against the Habsburg Empire, Akhisari was the very first Ottoman scholar suggesting the following of Western progress in military matters. In a similar vein, Ottoman historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600), Akhisari's contemporary, also makes a comparison between the strict discipline of Habsburg armies and the anarchy and disorder of the Janissary corps and concludes that the Christian officers are superior to the Muslim soldiers (Fleischer, 1986). On the other hand, Akhisari states that the fifty years of experience prove that as long as the Muslims produce and use similar weapons, they always prevailed over the infidels with the help of God. As Kafadar (1986) aptly points out, the intellectual foundations of Ottoman Westernization could be found in the earliest stages of Ottoman decline consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century. Additionally, Akhisari's realistic observation of the Western military improvement also demonstrates the vivid intellectual and political environment in Bosnia during the end of the sixteenth century.



The fourth chapter deduces the causes of the victory and defeat and God's assistance. It follows the tenets of classical *nasihatname* literature by emphasizing the significance of piety for the soldiers. According to Akhisari, the victory is only gained by the help of God; thus, it is necessary to keep the soldiers away from the rebellion, misdeeds, and dispensable innovations such as coffeehouses. He further states that the Ottoman soldiers in the Rumelia region, particularly Janissaries, began to oppress the Muslim *reaya*, plunder the villages, assault the women and children. The increasing attacks of the enemies in this region were deemed God's punishment due to the oppressions of the soldiers. In that sense, Akhisari combines material and metaphysical explanations in order to analyze the military failures of the Ottoman armies. As a renowned scholar and judge in this region, Akhisari's observations were one of the earliest criticism of the Janissaries. Mustafa Ali also echoed a similar grievance. According to Ali, Janissary discipline was relaxed since 1582, and the military became unruly and lawless while bribery became a widespread practice among them (Fleischer, 1986). Akhisari's report of the military disorder in his region to the Ottoman palace signifies a crucial aspect of the Ottoman advice literature. These texts, including *Usûlü'l-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem*, are closely monitoring the current political environment within the Empire, like an opinion column in some cases, in order to detect and find solutions to the social and political malaise (Kafadar, 2001). In Akhisari's mind, military order is strictly associated with the piety and morality of the soldiers. Injustice and oppression lead to the dissolution of the order and military failures.

Lastly, Akhisari devoted a whole chapter to the peaceful resolution of the conflicts. He emphasizes the benefits of peace and agreeing treaties while stating the hardships of the continuous wars. In 1592, the Ottoman governor of Bosnia, Hasan Pasha, initiated his private war against the Croatian border without taking the official approval of the Ottoman palace that sparked the so-called Long War (1593-1606) between the Ottomans and the Habsburg Empire (Murphey, 2006). Possibly, Akhisari was quite uncomfortable regarding the prolonged conflict in the Bosnia region following more than twenty years of peace.

A significant motif in Hasan Kafi's treatise repeated throughout the chapters is about the ulama class in the Empire. Akhisari states that the ulama class had been disrespected and undervalued by the upper classes (*hünkârlı olan tâ'ifeden*). He frequently refers to the respected position of the ulama in Islamic tradition and the need to take counsel from them concerning political affairs. As the inheritors of the Prophet, Islamic scholars



are occupying the place of the Prophets, and their duty is to ameliorate Muslims' lives both in this world and hereafter (Akhisari, 2020). Although the criticism of the madrasa education in the Ottoman Empire goes back to the 1540s when Taşköprülüzade complained that ulema was no longer interested in theoretical science and they only read simple handbooks, poetry, anecdotes, and worldly parts of Islamic law (İnalçık, 2000), Akhisari stays silent on this topic and voices the particular interests of his class.

Conclusion

Hasan Kafi Akhisari is a significant figure in Ottoman intellectual history. His political treatise, *Usûlül-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem*, not only was a great contribution to the "decline literature" but also a developed theory of the concept of order which was a central theme in the Ottoman political thought. Akhisari, as an eminent Ottoman scholar and judge in the Balkan region, presents his vision of the world order in his book. His treatise combines the fundamental principles of classical Islamic/Middle Eastern mirror for princes tradition with a set of reform recommendations regarding the Ottoman polity. Akhisari's impressive education career allows him to write on the material and metaphysical explanations about the perceived political and social turbulence in the Empire during the end of the sixteenth century. He emphasizes the significance of justice, good governance, and counsel in the rule of the country. His strict division of the social classes in the Ottoman society demonstrates his aspiration to freeze the preordained social rules in accordance with the old law, *kanun-i kadim*. In military matters, Akhisari realizes the superior military technology of the West and recommends the improvement of weapons in order to defeat the enemies. Akhisari's treatise includes an abundance of examples and sayings from the Persian statesmen and Alexander the Great, which signifies the impact of the Persian and Greco-Roman political tradition on Ottoman political thought. Furthermore, Akhisari's decline consciousness was originated from the drastic social and political transformations in the Empire during his time. As a remedy to the urgent political issues, Akhisari presents the old law as an ideal administrative system and attempts to hold a mirror to the Sultan and high-ranking bureaucrats by giving moral advice. The author also touches upon the ongoing conflict between the ulema class and the men of the sword. Ultimately, *Usûlül-hikem fi nizâmi'l âlem* stands at the crossroads of the Ottoman intellectual history with its idiosyncratic content and philosophical substance.



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