IMPERFECT BODIES, PERFECT COMPANIONS?
DWARFS AND MUTES AT THE OTTOMAN COURT IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

by
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a preliminary study that aims to understand the roles and functions of dwarfs and mutes at the Ottoman court with the symbolic and practical dimensions. In this study, the mute and dwarf employment at the Ottoman court is considered both within the context of the world-wide practices of keeping court jesters and their common origins, and with regard to its relation to the peculiar conditions of the Ottoman court in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The question whether there existed in the Ottoman case the type of court jester who was able to criticize and mock the monarch is discussed in the thesis to display the nature of dwarfs' and mutes' role as the sultan's boon companions. On the symbolic level, especially dwarfs were kept as a mark of royalty, and mutes ensured the ceremonial silence around the semi-sacred sovereign. In daily life, they entertained the sultan, actively took part in the communication within the court and with outside, and penetrated into state affairs in informal ways. Mutes, serving in confidential meetings and strangling princes and officials upon the sultan's order, constituted a uniquely Ottoman variant of the tradition of keeping disabled people at courts. The thesis points at the indications that especially eunuch dwarfs and mutes increased their power and wealth thanks to their contacts in and out of the palace at the time of the ascendancy of the imperial harem, discussing how they entered the discourse of decline as a source of concern and complaint.

Pictures: in Ayse_Ezgi_Dikici_FIGURES

ÖZET

KUSURLU BEDENLER, KUSURSUZ MUSÂHİBLER?
ONALTINCI VE ONYEDİNCİ YÜZYILLARDA OSMANLI SARAYINDA
CÜCELER VE DİLSİZLER

Ayşe Ezgi Dikici

Tarih, Master Tezi, 2006

Tez danışmanı: Yusuf Hakan Erdem

Anahtar kelimeler: cüce, dilsiz, soytarı, musahib, saray

Bu tez, cücelerin ve dilsizlerin Osmanlı sarayındaki rol ve fonksiyonlarını sembolik ve pratik boyutlarıyla anlamayı amaçlayan bir ilk çalışmadır. Osmanlı sarayında dilsiz ve cüce istihdâmı, bu çalışmada, hem tüm dünyada görülen saray soytarısı bulundurma pratikleri ve onların ortak kökenleri bağlamında, hem de onaltıncı ve onyedinci yüzyıllarda Osmanlı sarayının kendi özel şartlarıyla olan ilişkisi açısından ele alınmıştır. Tezde, hükümdârı eleştirebilen ve onunla alay edebilen tipte bir saray soytarısının Osmanlı'da mevcut olup olmadığı sorusu, cüce ve dilsizlerin padişâhın musâhibleri olarak rollerinin niteliğini ortaya koymak amacıyla tartışılmaktadır. Sembolik düzeyde, özellikle cüceler, sarayda bir tür saltanat alâmeti olarak tutuluyorlar; dilsizler ise yarı-kutsal olan hükümdarın çevresinde törensel sessizliği sağlıyorlardı. Günlük yaşamda, padişâhı eğlendiriyorlar, sarayın iç iletişiminde ve dışarıyla olan ilişkilerde aktif olarak yer alıyorlar, ve devlet işlerine gayriresmî yollardan karışıyorlardı. Gizli toplantılarda hizmet eden ve boğdurulması istenen şehzâdelerin ve devlet görevlilerinin cellatlığını yapan dilsizler, saraylarda engelli insanlar bulundurma geleneğinin Osmanlı'ya özgü bir şeklini oluşturmaktaydı. Tez, özellikle hadım olan cüce ve dilsizlerin, harem-i hümâyûnun gücünün arttığı dönemde sarayın içinde ve dışında kurdukları ilişkiler sayesinde nüfuzlarını ve gelirlerini arttırdıkları yolundaki göstergelere dikkat çekmekte; bir endişe ve şikâyet kaynağı olarak Osmanlı yazarlarının çöküş söylemine nasıl girdiklerini tartışmaktadır.

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As I am at last and once more graduating from the Sabancı University, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for Halil Berktay, who deserves perhaps an even deeper and better expressed one, not for something particular but for so many things. Finally, I would like to thank the entire History community at Sabancı University and the university community at large for making it possible to carry out academic research on such unusual topics, and above all, for an entire body of knowledge and vision of history that I have come to acquire through these hopeful, turbulent, productive, demanding, joyful, depressive, and pleasing last seven years.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a preliminary attempt to understand the roles and functions of dwarfs and mutes[1] who were employed at the Ottoman court throughout much of the empire's history primarily as jesters, buffoons, and attendants. Rather than an exhaustive study that would penetrate all extant sources, its aim is essentially to explore some avenues for a more thorough analysis of the Ottoman custom of maintaining disabled people at court.

In Turkey today we hardly imagine dwarfs and mutes as sine qua non members of the Ottoman imperial household, let alone as historical agents in their own right. To account for this general indifference and oblivion,[2] for sure we may think of the generally backward state of the Ottoman studies as one obvious reason, and of a persistent hierarchy wherein political history occupies the top place—clearly, there are more 'serious' issues waiting in line. To this might be added a defensive reflex of turning back and denial in the face of the Orientalist obsession with the intimate life of the Ottoman palace, the harem and its 'aberrations.' It is also true that to the strictly modern mind, the custom of employing the disabled as buffoons appears as a loathsome premodern barbarity that taints the memory of respectable ancestors. To go even further, we may detect a lurking preconviction that deny the 'vertically challenged' and deaf-mutes any possibility of prominence. If one aim of this present study is to reclaim a place for them in the modern popular imagination of the Ottoman court, the other is to

[1] The term 'mute' (*dilsiz* or *bîzebân*) in the Ottoman parlance referred to those who were deaf and dumb by birth. Throughout the thesis, this term would be preferred rather than 'deaf-mute,' in order to stick to the Ottoman usage.

[2] The extent of oblivion is such that, as early as in 1942, when the memory of the Ottoman Empire was not that pale, Faik Reşit Unat could happen to misread the almost inseparable and hackneyed pair "*dilsüzler ve cüceler*" (mutes and dwarfs) as "*dilsüzler ve hocalar*" (mutes and tutors) (Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Paşa, "Sadrâzam Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Paşa Lâyihası," Faik Reşit Unat (ed.), *Tarih Vesikaları*, vol. I, 6. Ankara: Maarif Vekâleti, 1941-1942, p. 472.)

make a call for the rethinking of the assumption that they were trivial entertainers with no role in 'serious affairs.'

Indeed, court dwarfs and mutes have hardly come to the attention of the scholars of Ottoman history. What has been written by Turkish historians on the topic has not gone beyond the short passages in reference works and in various studies on the imperial court which treat their history in extremely general terms, sometimes not even as a history per se but as a virtually unchanging state of affairs with no period specification. The works of İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, İ. H. Baykal, R. E. Koçu, and Ç. Uluçay, all of which dealing with the Ottoman court life, contain only short notes and scattered mentions which are based on the authors' coincidental access to some relevant data.[3] Koçu's and Pakalın's articles in their reference works are likewise impressionistic and haphazardly written,[4] while Emin Cenkmen does not even give reference to the sources he used in his work on clothing at the Ottoman court.[5] Özdemir Nutku's study that especially deals with festival buffoons mention Ottoman court dwarfs only in passing.[6] The relevant articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and especially in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* constitute the most reliable—yet in some aspects insufficient—reference points for getting some general(ized) information on dwarfs and mutes.[7] In all of these, Mustafa Sâfî's *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh*, an important source on the early seventeenth century Ottoman court life, is conspicuously missing from bibliographies. Another indispensable item, the sixteenth century author Selânikî

[3] İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988 (first published in 1945); İsmail H. Baykal, *Enderun Mektebi Tarihi*, Istanbul: İstanbul Fethi Derneği, 1953, vol. 1; Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Topkapu Sarayı: İçinde Geçen Vak'alar, Eski Saray Hayatı ve Teşkilatı ile Beraber Adım Adım, Köşe Köşe*, Istanbul: İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, 1960; Çağatay Uluçay, *Harem II*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971. The same can also be said about N. M. Penzer, *The Harem*, London: Spring Books, 1965.

[4] R. E. Koçu, "Cüce, Saray Cüceleri," *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul: R. E. Koçu ve Mehmet Ali Akbay, İstanbul Ansiklopedisi ve Neşriyat Kollektif Şirketi,1958-1971, vol. 7, pp. 3632-3634, Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, [Ankara]: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993, 3 vols.

[5] Emin Cenkmen, *Osmanlı Sarayı ve Kıyafetleri*, Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1948.

[6] Özdemir Nutku, *IV. Mehmet'in Edirne Şenliği (1675)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1972.

[7] B. Lewis, "Dilsiz," *EI*, II, p. 277; Özdemir Nutku, "Cüce," *TDVİA*, VIII, p. 105; Abdülkadir Özcan, "Dilsiz—Tarih," *TDVİA*, IX, p. 304.

Mustafa Efendi's *History*, has never been subjected to a thorough analysis, as for instance his quite shocking hateful remarks on the intervention of dwarfs in state affairs are completely taken for granted in Nutku's article as well as in Uzunçarşılı's work.[8] Needless to mention, the iconography of dwarfs and mutes in Ottoman miniatures has never been studied at all.

On the other hand, Ottoman court dwarfs and mutes have received scholarly attention from non-Ottomanists who deal with their connection to Orientalist myths and fantasies.[9] Consequently, these works are meant to reveal more about Europe than about the Ottomans. It is only in the year 2000 that Ottoman court mutes and dwarfs themselves (rather than the role given to them in any particular fantasy) came to be the main subject of a study: an article by M. Miles offered an appraisal of the mutes' communication achievements by modern linguistic and historiographical criteria.[10] Being a non-Ottomanist, Miles based his study primarily upon sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts by European travellers, thereby reclaiming their value as primary sources. His study, however, payed only secondary attention to dwarfs.

The present thesis aims to provide a detailed reassessment of the status, roles, and functions of dwarfs and mutes within the court life of the Ottoman 'classical age.' The main focus will be on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries although sources pertaining to other periods will be used in order to draw comparisons and to provide a broader view. This choice of time frame is dictated by a desire to explore their special situation in the age of the ascendancy of the imperial harem as well as by the uneven chronological distribution of the primary material available within the scope of this research. For purely practical reasons, the research is based on published sources, while archival material is largely excluded unless noted in some publication. Admittedly, this limitation yields only a restricted view that requires extra attention in order not to be misleading.

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[8] Nutku, "Cüce," *TDVİA*, VIII, p. 105; İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988, p. 88.

[9] Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*, London: Verso, 1998. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Framed: The Deaf in the Harem," *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, Jennifer Terry, Jacqueline Urla (eds.), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 49-77.

[10] M. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio: mutes, dwarfs and jestures at the Ottoman Court 1500-1700," *Disability & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, pp. 115-134; available at http://www.independentliving.org/docs5/mmiles2.html.

To achieve this aim, I shall approach the images of dwarfs and mutes in the primary sources as representations each of which hides a certain political and/or ideological agenda. Thus, instead of taking these images as granted and treating them as the stages in a linear history of Ottoman court mutes and dwarfs, this study will focus on the contrasts between them—i.e., the contrast between a witty jester and a crude buffoon, the contrast between an entertainer-critic and a pet-like or toy-like mascot, the contrast between an insolent, menacing, bribe-taking, and powerful courtier and a powerless pitiful creature—and on the question of how to make sense of these contrasts.

Thus, what were the behavioural patterns, roles and functions of the disabled members of the Ottoman court is the main question that this study seeks to provide an answer to. It inevitably overlaps with the question of what kind of a jester was the Ottoman jester—or whether we can speak of an Ottoman 'jester' at all. Therefore, this study begins with a world-wide overview of the practice of keeping physically abnormal people (usually as jesters) at court, which will show that they are in certain ways related to the cult of kingship, a discussion to be carried in the following chapter to the symbolic system of imperial legitimation in the Ottoman palace. One assumption to be questioned in both chapters is the idea that eastern monarchs, i.e. 'Oriental despots,' denied the 'fool's license' to their jesters or buffoons whereas the court fools in Europe acted as helpful critics in full capacity to criticize their masters. The second chapter will seek to reconstruct a basic history of the dwarf and mute employment at the Ottoman court as well. Finally, the third chapter focuses on the representations of court dwarfs and mutes in the writings of Ottoman authors of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, suggesting this period as a particularly significant one for a study of the status of dwarfs and mutes—especially those who were also eunuchs—and the ways in which they were perceived by others.

Chapter I

JESTERS AND COURT DWARFS IN THE WORLD AND THEIR ORIGINS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

As a matter of fact, from ancient to early modern times, royal and noble households at different parts of the world employed jesters or buffoons often with some sort of physical or mental anomaly, most frequently dwarfism. From the dwarf at the legendary King Arthur's court to the seventeenth century court dwarfs commemorated by the paintings of Velázquez and Van Dyck, from Haroun ar-Rashid's court jester Buhlul mentioned in *The Thousand and One Nights* to Shakespeare's celebrated fools, from the pygmy-buffoons at the Ancient Egyptian court to the dwarfs and hunchbacked buffoons of the Aztec ruler Moctezuma II, from Attila the Hun's dwarf to the classical Sanskrit drama's dwarfish and grotesque court jester character *vidusaka*, from the Mughal ruler Akbar's poet-jester Birbal to the Chinese Song dynasty's Immortal Revelation Ding, the list of court jesters found in history, legend, literature or art—or in more than one of these—can well be extended to a good many pages. Speaking of history, this remarkable ubiquity across space and time bears not only variations in practice but also considerable cross-cultural similarities that might help to discover possible remote origins of court ceremonial and symbology in a common basin of ancient/primitive beliefs. On the other hand, 'the historical jester' is often so much inextricable from 'the jester in art' or, say, 'the jester in folklore' that it is nearly impossible to construct a purely historical account for jesters that, being carefully sterilized from any imaginative intrusion, might be wrapped in an aura of verity.[11] 'The jester' is indeed a figure which, having originated from a number of sources, carries a huge luggage of cultural meanings, images, and associations, the exact origins of which

[11] See Enid Welsford's classic study *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), where her preoccupation with the intricate duality of reality and imagination is quite visible in the book's arrangement.

could be disputable. Given its complicated history and cumulative character, any study focusing on the figure of jester is bound to be taken up on an interdisciplinary basis in order to capture as much of the rich complexity of the issue as possible.

But how legitimate is it to speak of a single type called 'jester' and of its various manifestations or 'facets' in this or that context? Admittedly, there is a major methodological problem inherent in treating for example a 'jester' of pharaonic Egypt and a 'jester' of Elizabethan England as if they were identical in the way they related to the ruler and the royal household—as if there were a single spirit of jester reincarnating in different guises from one historical context to another. Therefore, in contrast to the 'universality' of 'the jester,' which sounds somewhat unsophisticated and problematic for it exaggerates similarities at the expense of differences, it is certainly more easily justifiable to speak of the 'kinship' of similar figures belonging to different times and cultures.[12] Thus, a particular trait does not necessarily occur in every member of a family, yet they would still be related to each other in spite of the differences.

A second problem arises as one approaches jesters as historical beings rather than some elusive cultural elements with obscure links to the circumstances that generated them.[13] In any case, jesters have an ahistorical side which is inevitably attached to—and is part and parcel of—their existence. How indeed can we historicize, for instance, the need for people permitted to poke fun at authorities and turn social hierarchies upside down? It seems that there are certain things that would ultimately require the recognition of a common human response or behaviour. Relevant

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[12] Or of the various "species of the great genus fool" as Barbara Swain puts it: *Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1932, p. 1.

While one can get a sense from the scholarly literature that there is a general agreement on the similarity and comparability of such entertainers in different cultures, the only work that seems to be singular in directly addressing and explicitly arguing for the "universality" of jesters is Beatrice K. Otto's *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), as the title declares. Otto's approach is not utterly at odds with what is maintained here—almost not at all. She just seeks to disprove European particuliarism (that there is a fundamental difference between the "European" jesters and all the rest) by showing the similarity of European jesters to those elsewhere, China in particular: See pp. xv-xvii. In fact, she is aware and uneasy about the implication in "universalism" of an *a priori* assumption imposed on the evidence (p. xvi).

[13] That is unlike what William Willeford does in *The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

scholarship as well as the commonsense tend to associate the existence of jesters with 'natural' causes—undeniably, kings needed jesters because they needed to laugh, but also in order to alleviate the psychological burden of kingly grandeur:

> A part of the function of jesters was to make kings laugh and to offer themselves as objects of laughter, but it was also their function to make kings laugh at themselves and to permit others, indirectly, to laugh at them…They provided a comic restraint to the inherently tragic possibilities of royal power and authority.[14]

Yet ever since Enid Welsford's much quoted and classicized study on the history of jesters (and perhaps even before), the jester came to be seen not simply as a comic entertainer who functioned to fulfill such natural human needs but also as a figure who originated from ancient rites and beliefs, the residue of which lingered on until the modern times. The age of court jesters corresponds to that part of human history between the passage to statehood and the emergence of modernity, wherefore studying jesters could also be revealing about nonmodern kingship and its strategies of legitimation and naturalization of the state authority, its relation to the supernatural in particular. At the same time, because of the widespread employment of the deformed as court jesters, this endeavour may help to explore how perceptions of disability and conceptions of normalcy intertwined with the history of the state.

Pointing out that jester figures were engrained in the socio-religious system of the state and in certain ways related to the king's cult, however, does not really suffice to write a history of court jesters. How can we explain, for instance, the conspicuous increase of court dwarfs at certain periods, as it was the case with Peter the Great of Russia and it seems to have been the case with Murad III of the Ottoman Empire? Was it just a matter of 'fashion' or the ruler's personal taste? Or was it somehow related to the dynamics of societal change? How close to reality would it be to hypothesize that a certain increase of court dwarfs was due to an effort for relegitimation at a time of crisis and change—an effort that tapped on a perhaps unconscious notion? Can the difference of European jesters from others in the rest of the world help to account for the different historical path that Europe followed? And, to put it in more general terms, how close is the correlation between patterns of jester employment and socio-political structure?

It is to the backdrop of these questions that the Ottoman experience with court dwarfs and mutes needs to be evaluated. Since jesting and buffonery constituted a

[14] Conrad Hyers, *The Spirituality of Comedy: Comic Heroism in a Tragic World*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1996, p. 111.

significant part of their activities in the Ottoman court (see Chapter II), we may safely regard dwarfs and mutes as the Ottoman counterparts of fairly comparable entertainers elsewhere in the world. As this chapter introduces the major concepts and issues for a comparative study of jesters, it also serves to situate the Ottoman custom of maintaining court dwarfs and mutes within the world context. Through a survey of certain recurrent patterns in the global history of jesters, it suggests some of the ways in which Ottoman dwarfs and mutes could be made sense of.

I.1. Essential Typology

For the sake of precision, a clarification needs to be made at this point as regards the different types of entertainers hitherto cursorily referred to as "jesters." As opposed to the all-encompassing Turkish word *soytarı*, its English counterparts 'jester,' 'buffoon,' 'clown,' and 'fool' suggest shades of meaning, which would provide the crucial categories for analysis.

The most basic distinction is the one between 'buffoon' and 'jester,' or between the rather coarse form of amusement versus the more intelligent and sophisticated one. The buffoon's jokes are often vulgar and more physical in character, whereas those of the 'jester' are verbal and more refined.[15] A 'jester' is above all someone who 'jests,' i.e. utters witticisms and gibes.[16] Consequently, as Mîna Urgan notes, 'jester' is never used in a denigratory sense, as opposed to 'fool,' 'clown,' and 'buffoon,' which may express insult.[17] 'Clown,' for instance, conceals an upper class bias for it denotes "a countryman, rustic, or peasant," an uncouth and ignorant boor, as well as a merry-maker.[18] The associations of the word 'clown' thus open a window on the amusing quality of uncivilized and alien behaviour (something highly universal) on the one hand,

[15] Mîna Urgan, *Elizabeth Devri Tiyatrosunda Soytarılar*, Istanbul: Pulhan Matbaası, 1949, p. 27. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'buffoon' as a "low jester" and "a man that practises indecent raillery" ("buffoon, n.," Oxford University Press, 1989, 2nd ed., online version available at http://www.oed.com/).

[16] See "jester" and "jest, v." in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[17] Urgan, *Elizabeth Devri Tiyatrosunda Soytarılar*, p. 27.

[18] "Clown," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*; Urgan, *Elizabeth Devri Tiyatrosunda Soytarılar*, p. 27.

and on the low social origins of such entertainers on the other—two important issues to be kept in mind.

Despite these differences, 'jester,' 'buffoon,' 'clown,' and 'fool' are often used interchangeably in order to refer indiscriminately to the members of the same 'genus.' Indeed, it is better to see these (especially 'jester' and 'buffoon') on a spectrum of behaviour rather than as sharply differentiated categories of entertainers since it could often be the case that one person use different strategies to arouse laughter. Among them only 'clown' came to acquire a very specialized meaning in modern circus.[19] Briefly, the 'buffoon' and the 'clown' are similar in their clumsy behaviour, in their (intentional) failure to behave according to established patterns, without disguising their violations under the pretext of a feigned or real folly while the 'fool' does. The 'jester,' however, does not simply offer himself as an object of ridicule like the 'buffoon' and the 'clown,' but redirects the focus of ridicule from himself to others, most remarkably to the king. This point has been observed by Murat Belge in a short article published in 1981.[20] It is not a scholarly article, yet it is worth to dwell on it now in order to illustrate how the distinctions between different types of entertainers intermingle with the question of universality.

Belge superimposes the distinction between crude buffoonery and witful jesting onto an ontological difference between East and West. For one thing, just as Mîna Urgan, whose work he refers to,[21] Belge considers the keeping of *soytarı* (which he obviously uses as the equivalent of 'jester') or *saray soytarısı* ('court jester') as a distinctly European phenomenon, and more specifically as a Renaissance phenomenon. According to him, the jester's liberty to poke fun at authority, at sacred institutions, beliefs, and values could only be made possible by the Renaissance humanism, and was out of question in earlier periods or in the Ottoman context. The jester's dissappearance from the world stage is related to democratization and the transfer of his function to a wider base in the society. The jester and his humour are thus associated with a crucial juncture, i.e. the Renaissance, and neatly placed within a narrative of modernity. This

[19] William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969, p. 12.

[20] Murat Belge, "Saray Soytarısı ve Dalkavuk," *Sanat Olayı*, 1, 1981; republished in M. Belge, *Tarihten Güncelliğe*, Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1983, pp. 288-291.

[21] See Urgan, *Elizabeth Devri Tiyatrosunda Soytarılar*, ch. 2, pp. 25-57.

'discourse' presents the jester almost as a prerequisite of democracy, which "our history" unfortunately lacks. What the Ottomans had instead was the parasitical buffoon, who would offer only himself as an object of ridicule without violating the immunity of the power-holders in any way. The word chosen for this type, *dalkavuk*, which can be translated as a 'sycophant' as well, meaningfully reinforces the contrast with the jester by stressing the uncritical and servile stance. Finally, Belge comments, unable to utter their criticisms directly to the sovereign, the 'Orientals' could only "gossip" insidiously at his back.

This article is significant for the purposes of the present study only because it embodies a problematic Orientalist cliché in circulation. For any work dealing with the jesters of an 'Oriental' society, the universality problem would translate into the problem of comparability of the East to the West. Unfortunately, Beatrice K. Otto's *Fools Are Everywhere* is apparently the only book in English that brings in a considerable amount of evidence from a specific non-Western context in an attempt to break the traditional Eurocentrism of the scholarly literature on jesters in Western languages.[22] Her work poses a significant challenge to the view of the Oriental despot who would not tolerate criticism or any breach of decorum, as the examples it presents from the behavioural patterns of Chinese jesters range from telling off the emperor's misdeeds on his face to slapping the emperor and escaping punishment by a jest.[23] If the Chinese emperor could be tolerant to these, then we may begin to question why the Ottoman sultan could not be so. Apart from that, it is also true that the Islamic world has also produced such semi-legendary figures as Haroun ar-Rashid's jester Buhlul Tamerlane's Nasreddin, who with their wittiness and relationship with their masters are very close to the stereotypical 'European' jester. Though one may argue that their historicity is largely blurred by the anecdotal evidence about them, the same argument can indeed be directed to some extent against the 'European' jester as well. On the other hand, Belge seems to be right in his contention that there is a correlation between the nature of laughter-makers and the nature of state and society. Yet his distinctions between Renaissance and non-Renaissance as well as between East and West are misleadingly sharp.

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[22] In her own words: "…[T]he West has been given to believe that Europe was the center of the jester's cosmos and that he was not equaled, let alone surpassed, anywhere else" (Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. xxii).

[23] For these examples, see ibid., p. 119 and p. 57.

As is illustrated by the view in Belge's article, the particular type of jester that was seen in European courts during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance came to assume a stereotypical character (note Belge's assumption that jesters existed only in Europe), which serves as a reference point for comparing and contrasting similar figures elsewhere. The European variant seems to have eclipsed others into oblivion, as it is hard to say that any of them (including the Ottoman) has managed to retain as vivid a memory as the European one.[24]

Figure I.1 – A court fool. Facsimile of a woodcut in the "Cosmographie Universelle" of Munster: folio, Basle, 1552 (Image taken from Paul Lacroix, *Manners, Custom and Dress During the Middle Ages and During the Renaissance Period*, London, 1874, available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10940/10940-h/10940-h.htm).

One reason for this can be the persistance of a strong visuality, which has been a distinguishing feature of the European jester. With his typical motley coat, bauble, cap and bells, the European court jester was not only sartorially distinguished from other courtiers but his distinctive appearance was also relatively well-recorded in pictographic evidence. In that sense, Chinese or Ottoman court jesters do not seem to be his close

[24] "There is certainly a very deep and widespread understanding within Europe of this lively character, and the word "jester" still conjures a vivid and appealing image.…In contrast to Europeans, the past few centuries have seen the Chinese increasingly out of touch with the richness of their own tradition of court jesters…In fact, so far removed have the Chinese become from their court jesters that the Chinese words for "jester," such as *youren*, *paiyou*, and *lingren*, usually have to be repeated, spelled out, and explained, either being met with a blank response or interpreted as "actor" or "entertainer"" (Ibid., pp. xviii-xix).

parallels.[25] Although, as we shall see, similar particoloured clothing emphasizing chaos and disproportion, which, according to Willeford, serves to echo the misshapen bodies of dwarfs, hunchbacks, and other grotesques,[26] is not unique to Europe, the European jester's costume can be said to consist of more or less fixed elements with a peculiar symbolism rather than of a loosely defined lump. Thus, the images in Figure I.1 and I.2—the latter with an eared hood in addition to the bauble, which is a replica of the jester's head—are probably the most immediately recognizable jester figures in the whole world.

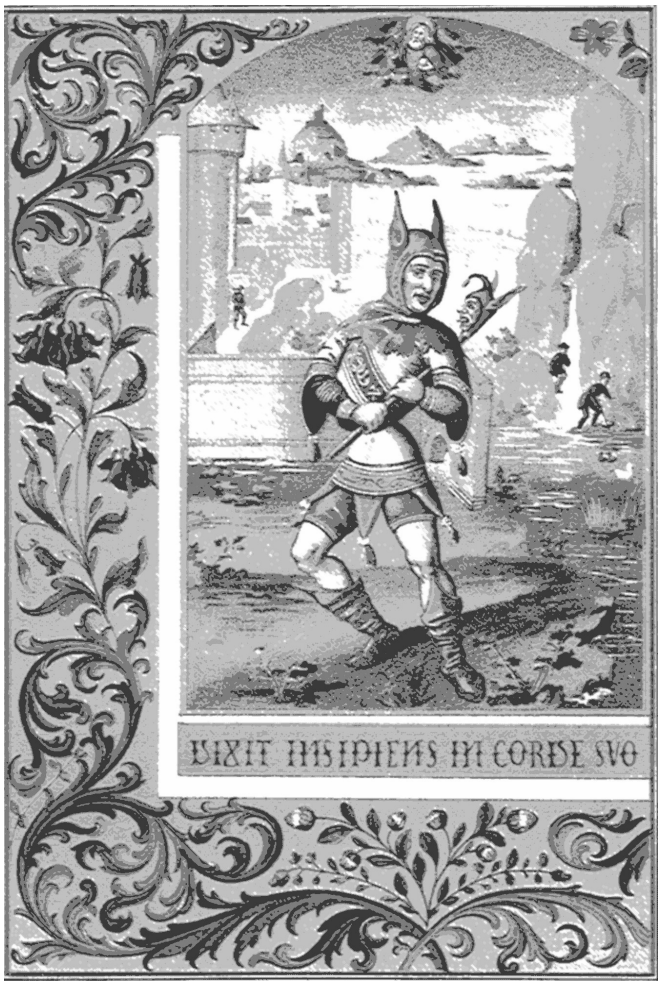

Figure I.2 – A court fool with eared hood. Facsimile of a miniature in a manuscript in the Bibl. de l'Arsenal, Th. lat., no 125., fifteenth century (image taken from Lacroix, *Manners*, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:A_Court_Fool_of_the_15th_Century.png).

[25] Ibid., p. xix.

[26] Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, pp. 15-16.

Another hallmark of the European jester apart from his symbolically laden costume is his real or feigned 'folly,'[27] which entitles him to say what others would not dare to. Indeed, in the European context, the word 'fool' and its equivalents (*fou* in French, *Narr* in German) are fully synonymous to 'jester,'[28] though it retains a certain ambiguity in itself. Literally, 'fool' refers to someone suffering a mental lapse or aberration, which might range from simple sillyness to idiocy or insanity. However, it may also mean someone who, as in the case of a court jester, pretends to have such an anomaly.[29] Therefore, just like 'clown,' 'fool' could refer both to a conscious and to an unconscious laughter-maker. The crucial distinction is thus between the "natural" and the "artificial" fool, which may not be easily distinguishable at every instance.[30]

From our present level of knowledge on world jesters, nowhere seems to match Europe in its abundant collection of 'naturals' at royal courts or its interest in artificial manifestations of mental deficiency.[31] The Ottomans do not seem to have shared this fascination with the mentally ill, nor do the Chinese,[32] despite the highly widespread belief that associated mental anomaly with prophecy.[33] When it comes to the connection with the supernatural, it is pointless to expect psychiatric differences between anomalies to be treated with subtlety—in fact, all aberrations are lumped together as "folly" and treated as if they are interchangeable manifestations of the same 'blessing.'[34] We may thus imagine that although the Spanish court records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did differentiate between *loco*s (madmen) and *simple*s (simpletons)

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[27] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, pp. 31-32.

[28] Ibid., p. 35.

[29] According to Willeford, 'fool' may denote either "a silly or idiotic or mad person, or one who is made by circumstances…to appear a fool in that sense, or a person who imitates for nonfools the foolishness of being innately silly" (*The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 10.). Rather differently, Swain observes the term's three referents as "a village tattle-tale," "a privileged royal jester," and "a particularly unworldly spirit who bears his worldly burdens with gentle amiability" (Swain, *Fools and Folly*, p. 3.).

[30] Though it is recognizable even in Roman writings (Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 59), this distinction came to be overtly expressed from the time of Elizabeth I onwards (Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 10).

[31] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. 33 and 37.

[32] Ibid., p. 35, and also pp. 36-37.

[33] Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 76.

[34] Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, pp. 23-24; Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 77.

maintained in the palace,[35] the ways in which these individuals were made sense of possibly derived from the same age-old notion.

The combination of physical and mental anomaly was often also a desired characteristic for jesters. The ancient Roman household jesters, from whom the 'European' jester partly originated, usualy displayed both mental and physical deficiency, and it was almost impossible to differentiate between the 'morio' ('fool') and the 'nanus' ('dwarf').[36] The next section looks at the distinction between similar entertainer figures and possible origins.

I.2. A Preliminary Theory of Origins

An important analytical distinction, however, is yet to be made, which is between court jesters, or more generally household jesters, and unattached performers. The latters display an almost indescribable variety in terms of the nature of their performances, which may virtually include anything related to the notion of entertainment, such as acting, acrobacy, music, and dance. Metin And, in an article on the jester as a cross-cultural figure, conceives of a kinship between jugglery, buffoonery, and acrobacy, all of which he designates as the predecessors of the modern performing arts.[37] The huge variety of performers that we may encounter in the narrative and pictorial accounts of the Ottoman court-sponsored festivals[38] could indeed

[35] See José Moreno Villa, *Locos, Enanos, Negros y Niños Palaciegos: Gente de placer que tuvieron los Austrias en la Corte española desde 1563 a 1700*, Mexico: La Casa de España en México, 1930, available at http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/ecm/46860953115138273022202/index.htm. *Loco*, however, could refer to an artificial fool as well as to someone with psychic aberration: see p. 27.

[36] Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 58.

[37] Metin And, "Soytarı: Tiyatronun Yaşam Suyu," *Sanat Dünyamız*, 74, Istanbul: YKY, 1999, p. 127.

[38] For the illustrations of the buffoons, jugglers, acrobats, and the like performing at the circumcision festivals of 1582 and 1720, see respectively: Nurhan Atasoy, *1582 Surname-i Hümayun: An Imperial Celebration*, Istanbul: Koçbank, 1997; and Esin Atıl, *Levni and the Surname: the Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival*, Istanbul: Koçbank, 1999. The most abundant among these performers were those called *saka* or *tulumcu*, the water-bearers who had the dual role of watering the dust on the festival ground and entertaining the audience at intervals. Many of such and

be regarded as the creatures of a topsy-turvy world who confront, challenge, and mock the established patterns of this world—whether physical or social. However, such an approach which seeks to highlight connections is likely to miss the court jester's distinctness within a crowded mess of performers. Truly, the fact that the Ottoman festivals were enjoyed by both elite and commoner participants, and that permanent court jesters are known to have taken part in the performances, might blur the distinction we may seek to establish between court jesters and unattached buffoons in the Ottoman context. Still, there seems to be a difference in costume as well as in physique, which needs to be assessed in the light of Enid Welsford's preliminary theory on the origin of jesters.

Welsford begins with the basic observation that:

> The chief difference between the court-fool and the parasitical buffoon is that the former is more strikingly abnormal than the latter, and more completely separated from the rest of his fellow-men. … The court-fool … causes amusement not merely by absurd gluttony, merry gossip, or knavish tricks, but by mental deficiencies or physical deformities which deprive him both of rights and responsibilities and put him in the paradoxical position of virtual outlawry combined with utter dependence on the support of the social group to which he belongs. I have included physical deformity in my definition because it is not possible to draw a hard and fast distinction between the court-fool and the court-dwarf, since they both had much the same function in society and since both types of infirmity were frequently found in the same person.[39]

Welsford's suggestion that the court jester had a different provenance that the other type (festival fool, parasitical buffoon, or unattached fool) relies on this difference in appearance. In the origin of the physically deformed court jester lies a mascot to ward off the Evil Eye, whereas the unattached buffoon was originally a scapegoat, a sacrificial victim of ancient rituals. However, as Willeford suggests:

> Scapegoat and mascot are, in fact, complementary functions; moreover, the role the scapegoat is clearly relevant to the fact that the king is the repository of powers to be guarded. The fool and the mock king are thus sometimes interrelated forms in which a fundamental fact about kingship is imaginatively expressed: the king has a kind of double—either an adversary, such as death or winter, or the protective genius of his person or his office. The court jester, unlike the fool or mock king of the festival, is the permanent embodiment of this double. Since the court jester is in many ways whole and complete within himself, though he is peripheral to the human image, he brings the king into

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similar buffoons with their unusual and colourful garments, as opposed to those employed at the court, recall the stereotypical figure of the medieval European fool with his motley coat and coxcomb.

[39] Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 55.

active relationship with a level of wholeness beyond the king's personal claim to power and beyond the separation of the kingdom from what it excludes. Thus it is not surprising that in the differentiated form of the jester familiar to us from the European late Middle Ages the mascot has reassimilated many elements of the scapegoat: we feel them when Lear threatens his Fool with the whip.[40]

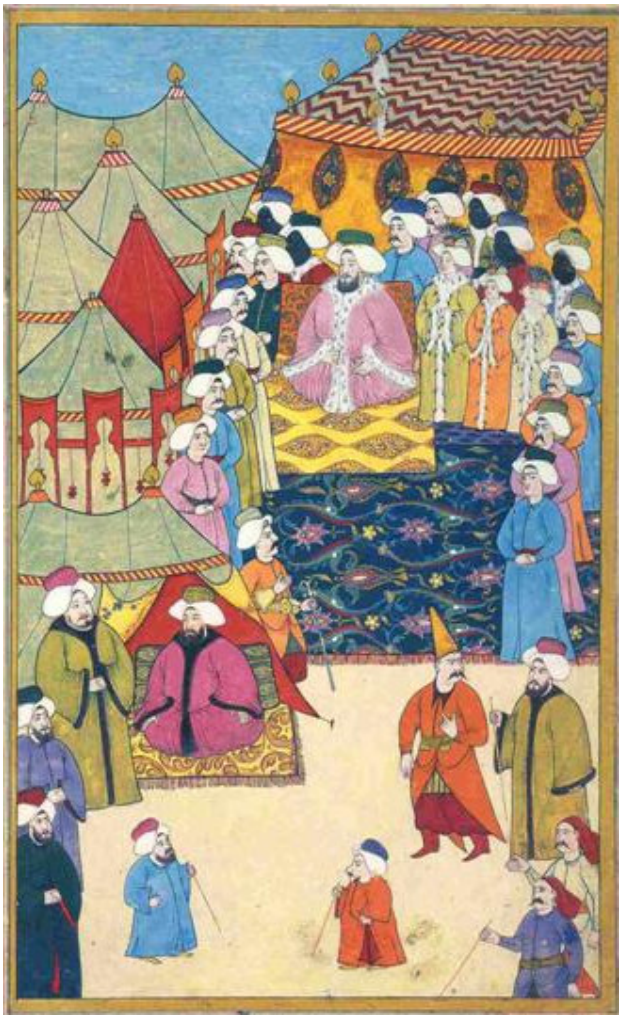

Figure I.3 – Two dwarfs entertaining the audience including the sultan Ahmed III, his sons, the grand vizier İbrahim Paşa, and Kethüda Mehmed Paşa during the circumcision festival of 1720. From *Sûrnâme-i Vehbî*, fol. 46b (Image taken from Atıl, *Levni and the Surname*, p. 205, ill. 21).

Buffoons seem to have originated from the rituals that aimed to regulate the fertility cycles of the nature and from the professional performers of the Antiquity called 'mimes.'[41] There is a genealogical link between the European court jester and the

[40] Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter*, pp. 158-159.

[41] And, "Soytarı: Tiyatronun Yaşam Suyu," p. 128.

mime actors of ancient Greece and Rome,[42] who used puns, verses, riddles, songs, oddly funny appearances, and acrobatic skills.[43] Indeed, mime actors would receive invitations from nobles and emperors to perform in the homes.[44] Truly, we may encounter unattached buffoons occasionally perfoming in palaces, and court jesters performing in court-sponsored festivals both in the Ottoman world and elsewhere (see Figure I.3).

Figure I.4 – Performance of the *curcunabaz*es. From the album of Ahmed I compiled by Kalender Paşa, Topkapı Palace Museum, B 408; reproduced in Metin And, *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları 1: Minyatür*, [Istanbul]: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2002. (Image taken from Sabancı University Information Center [SUIC], Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection, available at http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/bm/eng/?opac/digital/ottoman.html.)

Music and dance formed an integral part of the jester's work.[45] A particular type of amusing dance in the Ottoman world was *curcuna*, which was usually performed during the festivals by masked buffoons with goatees and pointed caps who noisily made a parody of other dancers (see Figure I.4).[46] Their colourful garments and sartorial distinction from the rest of the society clearly reminds of the European court fool. *Curcuna* is also known to have been performed at court perhaps with similar garments.

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[42] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. 198.

[43] Ibid., p. 199.

[44] Ibid., p. 199.

[45] Ibid., pp. 6-13.

[46] Nutku, *IV. Mehmet'in Edirne Şenliği*, p. 124.

A recurrent connection is exaggerated sexuality: A type of ancient mime was the phallus bearer (*phallophoros*).[47] The Renaissance figure of the Arlecchino carried a phallic accessory in Commedia dell'Arte.[48] Karagöz, the famous mythical jester of Anatolia, used to be represented with a huge phallus in the shadow plays before he came to be 'sterilized' as a more decent figure from the mid-nineteenth century on.[49] De La Croix, a French eyewitness to the 1675 circumcision festival in Edirne, reports that some *tulumcu*s carried huge phalli, with which they saluted the spectators and caused embarassed giggles especially among women.[50] Unfortunately, no depiction of this festival exists, and the pictorial accounts of the other festivals do not record any similar instance. In time, the artificial phallus evolved into other phallic objects carried by buffoons. And suggests that the *şakşak* carried by Pişekâr in Ortaoyunu could be a later descendent of it.[51] As the European fool of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has a recognized connection with the phallic mime actors of the Antiquity, the bladder often attached to his bauble is deemed as "a clear representation of the phallus."[52] Ass and cock, the two animals that came to be associated with the fool are "famous for their sexuality as well as their silliness."[53]

As for household jesters, as has already been noted, physical deformity was a very desired characteristic that increased the value of the jester in his master's eye. There may be more than one reason for this. First of all, there is an ancient, apparently universal association of the physically or mentally deformed with the supernatural.[54]

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[47] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. 199.

[48] Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 11; And, "Soytarı: Tiyatronun Yaşam Suyu," p. 132.

[49] Metin And, "Soytarı: Tiyatronun Yaşam Suyu," *Sanat Dünyamız*, 74, Istanbul: YKY, 1999, pp. 131-132. This connection between Karagöz and the ancient mime has been noted by Helmut Reich in his *Der Mimus: Ein Litterarenentwicklungsgeschichtlicher*, Versuch I-II, Berlin, 1903.

[50] Metin And, *Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Türk Sanatları*, Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1982, p. 40.

[51] And, "Soytarı: Tiyatronun Yaşam Suyu," p. 132.

[52] On the fool's connection with the phallus, see Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, pp. 11-12, and pl. 10 on p. 37.

[53] Ibid., p. 37, pl. 10.

[54] Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 58. In Africa, albinos and dwarfs were seen as priests or magicians.

Dwarfs, hunchbacks, pygmies, negroes, bald heads, and so on were kept in households in different parts of the world as a safeguard against the Evil Eye. Secondly, it is possible to speak of a taste for oddities and 'monsters.' The ancinet Romans, for example, are said to have looked for freaks and monstrosities in the slave markets more eagerly than beautiful girls or boys. Accordingly, the price used to be proportionate to the degree of deformity.[55] As Welsford noted, dwarf-fools seem to have appealed more to the Romans' sensational taste than to any hunger for intelligent witticisms.[56] In fact, the Romans' fascination with the physically abnormal resembles to the curiosity for freaks of the more recent times.[57] But another reason can be taken in account as well: Rare individuals such as dwarfs, hunchbacks, and mutes were part of the insignia that demarcated elite status in societies where social distinctions needed conspicuous proofs.

Thus, the popularity of the physically deformed led to practices of artificial 'dwarfization' in as diverse regions as Europe and South America.[58] In classical Greece, where the supply of household dwarfs could not satisfy the demand, some parents used to lock their male children in special chests order to hinder their normal growth hoping that luckily they would end up at wealthy households.[59] A seventeenth century miscellany described a method of "anointing babies' spines with the grease of bats, moles, and dormice, while more palatable prescriptions used drugs such as the aptly named dwarf elder, knotgrass, and daisy juice and roots mixed with milk to stunt growth."[60] In continental Europe, kidnapping and buying children to create artificial dwarfs was most common in Italy and Spain.[61] Though the existence of such practises in the Ottoman world has not yet been documented, there was a similar drive to find the

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[55] Ibid., p. 59.

[56] Ibid., p. 59.

[57] Ibid., pp. 60-61: "It is true that interest in abnormality does not necessarily imply a degenerate state of mind, but among the luxurious classes of the Roman Empire primitive awe seems to have been almost entirely replaced by depraved curiosity. But even here mixed motives may have been at work, and the vogue of the dwarf-fool may have been due to superstition as well as to love of the bizarre."

[58] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. 29.

[59] Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," p. 61. The chest is called *gloottokoma*.

[60] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, p. 29. The book is *Miscellanea Curiosa, Medica, Physica* (Leipzig, 1670).

[61] Ibid., p. 29.

most physically deformed person as possible. As it will be noted in the second chapter, the 'perfect' deformation would be a combination of dwarfism, mutism, and eunuchism.

I.3. The King and the Jester

Based on the stereotypical court jester, we may now point out some characteristics of the nature of his relationship with the sovereign. Both the king and the jester were perceived as imbued with a religious and magical quality: the jester either utilizing the ambiguous connection of folly and sanctity or as a misshapen dwarf assigned by supernatural forces on the borderline between humanity and non-humanity; and the king as the semidivine generator of fertility.[62] Both seemed to have been touched by a divine hand, though one was elevated to the highest position and the other cast to the lowest depths:

> The elevation of the royal person and rule to a godlike station required the comic person and mock rule of the jester in order to preserve that delicate balance of power on either side of which were the pitfalls of tyranny and anarchy. If the king did not admit the jester to his court, the door was open to absolutism and despotism. If the jester's iconoclasm became too successful, the door was open to social disruption and political chaos.[63]

The jester was also "a creature without rank and power, from whom the king had, it would seem, nothing to fear;"[64] therefore, the jester's cricisms would not really be a problem for the king. On the other hand, it should be noted that the jester as a stereotypical abstract figure may be exterior and antithetical to the idea of hierarchy and rank, but the jester as a courtier did occupy a place at the very center of power, and often became the closest confidant of the person who topped this hierarchy.

The jester was the king's "comic alter ego" or "symbolic twin" that would remind the king of his ultimate humanity, and emancipate him, even if temporarily, from the lofty inhuman persona to which he was condemned.[65] In ancient Rome, a jester (mimus) would follow the funeral procession of the emperor in order to alleviate the

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[62] Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 151.

[63] Hyers, *The Spirituality of Comedy*, p. 112.

[64] Ibid., p. 112.

[65] Ibid., pp. 113-114.

gloomy atmosphere and could even mimic the deceased emperor.[66] For certain African kings, the connection between jester and king went one step further as instead of a jester playing their role, these kings periodically stripped of their majestic grandeur to descend to the level of a fool. Dressed in rags, and talking nonsense, the king would suffer the insults of his subjects during a ritual profanation of sacred kingship.[67]

Simultaneously as he alleviated the heavy burden of kingship for the ruler, the jester also provided a harmless channel where the intrinsic tension in the society would be played out and vapour without causing destruction.[68] The jester was the singular truth-teller in the immediate vicinity of the king that was entitled to tell him things that hardly could anyone else dare to. Moreover, the comic way in which he would tell them would mitigate the possible unpleasantness of the truth. Jesters rarely lost their heads for their boldness, since it was an acknowledged right of theirs to have a certain license of speech.[69] According to Hyers, it was due to the fact that the social distance between the two prevented the jester from posing any real threat to the king that he was paradoxically closer to the latter than anybody else.[70] Yet even more paradoxically, this proximity and immediate access to the royal person increased the jester's prospects to wield power.[71]

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[66] Ibid., p. 112. Suetonius relates an anecdote from the funeral ceremony of Vespasian, who was notorious for his stinginess: "Even at his funeral, Favor, a leading actor of mimes, who wore his mask and, according to the usual custom, imitated the actions and words of the deceased during his lifetime, having asked the procurators in a loud voice how much his funeral procession would cost, and hearing the reply "Ten million sesterces," cried out: "Give me a hundred thousand and fling me into the Tiber!"": Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Divus Vespasianus*, R. C. Rolfe (trans.), in Ancient History Sourcebook, available at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/suetonius-vespasian.html.

[67] Hyers, *The Spirituality of Comedy*, p. 114.

[68] Ibid., p. 114.

[69] Ibid., p. 115.

[70] Ibid., p. 115.

[71] Ibid., p. 115.

I.4. Dwarfs as Court Jesters: The Ancient Egyptian Case

The custom of employing court jesters is indeed as old as the state itself. Accordingly, t has become almost canonical to begin the history of court jesters with the pygmies employed at the courts of the Ancient Egyptian pharaohs.[72] There is some benefit in conforming to the custom, since this earliest case comprises certain themes that recur in later periods. The most important point is that a court jester permanently employed for this purpose is never merely an entertainer but laden with a significance that goes beyond his entertaining capacity. This significance manifests itself in the jester's dichotomous relation (as an 'outsider') to the world of 'normality' which is ordered, structured, hierarchically conceived, and moreover, subject to the regularization of the state.

First of all, the choice of pygmies on the part of the pharaohs is noteworthy as the first instance wherein 'people with difference' were used as court buffoons—a custom that was to survive at various parts of the world especially with the use of court dwarfs.[73] Pygmies, however, were not only marked with an unusual physique that most probably assigned them the border between humanity and non-humanity in the eyes of their patrons and hosts but they were also culturally 'outsiders' for the Ancient Egyptians. Moreover, pygmies were not simply 'foreigners' from 'another country', maintained because they were found 'exotic' or appealing to a sadistic curiosity; rather, they were from a land that was perceived as literally 'outside the world.' Coming from the so-called "Land of the Spirits" situated between the borders of this world and the Other World according to the Egyptian beliefs, pygmy dancers entertained the Egyptian kings with a particular dance that was used for pleasing a god (probably the chief god) of their native country. It has been noted that the figure of the dancing pygmy was connected to the dwarf-god Bes, who pleased the gods with his dance, a divine dance that the king hoped to learn from the pygmy so that he could please Osiris by dancing it

[72] See Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. 56-58; Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*, p. 14 and p. 154.

[73] M. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio: Mutes, Dwarfs and Jestures at the Ottoman Court, 1500-1700," *Disability & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, pp. 115-134; available at http://www.independentliving.org/docs5/mmiles2.html.

himself when he passed to the Other World.[74] The identification of the king with the buffoon dancer appears in a older text as well, that in the burial chamber of Pepi I, which declares that: "He [Pepi] is that pygmy of the dances of the god, Bringer of joy before his great throne!"[75] This case, thus, appears to be a very remarkable example to the jester's position as an 'outsider' par excellence and to the notion of the interchangeability of the king and the jester.

Not only pygmies but also native Egyptian dwarfs were employed as ritual dancers. One of the most remarkable works of all Ancient Egyptian art is the small basalt relief which shows the dancing dwarf Djeho "in almost clinical accuracy," leaving no doubt as to the identification of its owner as an achondroplastic dwarf and not a pygmy (Fig. I.5).[76] The characteristic features of achondroplasia, the most common type of dwarfism are there: normal trunk, short limbs, slightly bowed legs, prominent buttocks and abdomen, large head, bulging forehead, depressed nasal bridge, and prominent jawbones.[77] Djeho is known to have danced during a probably very "dionysiac" phase of the funeral of two sacred bulls,[78] and was buried in the same tomb as his patron (again an unusual situation), a wealthy high officer, who must have paid

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[74] E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Sudan: Its History and Monuments, Part One*, Kessinger Publishing, 2004, pp. 522-524. A correspondance between Pepi II (of the VIth dynasty of the Old Kingdom, reigned presumably in the period from 2221 to 2118 BCE) and an official who brought a pygmy with him on his return from an expedition, is indicative of the importance attached to these "dancers of the god."

[75] Bonnie M. Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," *KMT*, vol. 12, iss. 3, Fall 2001, p. 69. E. A. Wallis Budge notes that this identification was no disgrace since "the *rôle* of the buffoon was also that of a god, i.e. Bes": *The Egyptian Sudan*, p. 524. However, the connection with Bes is unlikely for this Old Kingdom text, given that Bes seems to have appeared in the Middle Kingdom period: Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," p. 71.

[76] Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," p. 69. Achondroplasia is the most common type of dwarfism, with a modern rate of incidence as about one in 34-40,000 live births.

[77] Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, pp. 9-10, Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs,"p. 62. A pygmy, on the other hand, has a well-proportionate albeit diminutive stature due to a constitutional deficiency in an insulin-like growth factor: Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, pp. 13 and 15.

[78] Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, pp. 151-152; Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," p. 69. There was a symbolic affinity between bulls and dwarfs as both were related to fertility; hence the presence of a dwarf in a ritual concerning the cult of bulls: see Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, p. 152.

for the dwarf's sarcophagus, revealing thus the high esteem he held for his servant.[79] This extraordinary depiction on the lid of Djeho's stone sarcophagus dated to the Late Period clearly shutters whatever idea one might have as to the conventions of the Ancient Egyptian art by rendering the figure with meticulous attention to detail. At the same time, it may be taken as a revelation of the fascination with the shape of the achondroplastic body. The nude figure is rid of symbols, which places the whole emphasis on his physical deformity. As a social being, Djeho derives his significance not from his rank within a hierarchy but from his deformed features which seal his connection with the sacred.[80]

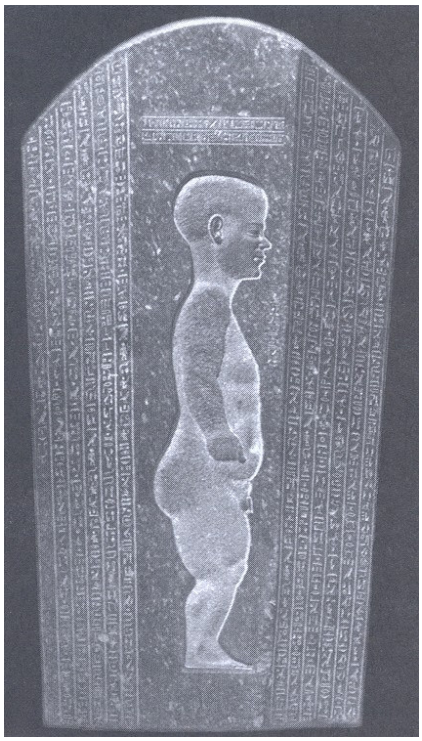

Figure I.5 – Djeho the Dwarf. 362-360 B.C.E. Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Photograph by George B. Johnson/Egyptian Museum, Cairo (Image taken from Betty M. Adelson, *The Lives of Dwarfs: Their Journey from Public Curiosity Toward Social Liberation*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 6)

[79] Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, p. 152.

[80] This is noted by Dasen as well:
"The pictorial rendering of Djeho seems to reflect his religious role. His full profile pose stresses his resemblance to Ptah-Pataikoi figurines: he has the same flat shaven head, with a small button nose, and the same half smile. Thus, besides being the attendant of a wealthy high official, Djeho was essentially a sacred dancer. The emphasis on his religious function is very significant, revealing that this position was the main constituent of his social identity; it gave a positive value to his abnormality" (Ibid., 152).

The significance of dwarfs in Ancient Egypt had a religious basis as well. Two of the Egyptian gods, Bes and Ptah, were dwarfs; and due to Bes, dwarfs also had a symbolic connection with fertility and childbirth.

The respect with which dwarfs were treated in Ancient Egypt is also evident in the case of the court dwarf Seneb, who is shown in a statue with his family (Figure I.6). Found in Seneb's tomb in the Giza necropolis, the statue aptly represents him as the father of a harmonious family including an average-sized wife, a daughter and a son, whose conventional gesture (finger held towards the mouth) suggests that they were children at the time.[81] Seneb was one of the most prestigious dwarfs in whole Egyptian history. He was holding several official titles, which showed that his status was beyond that of a jester's.

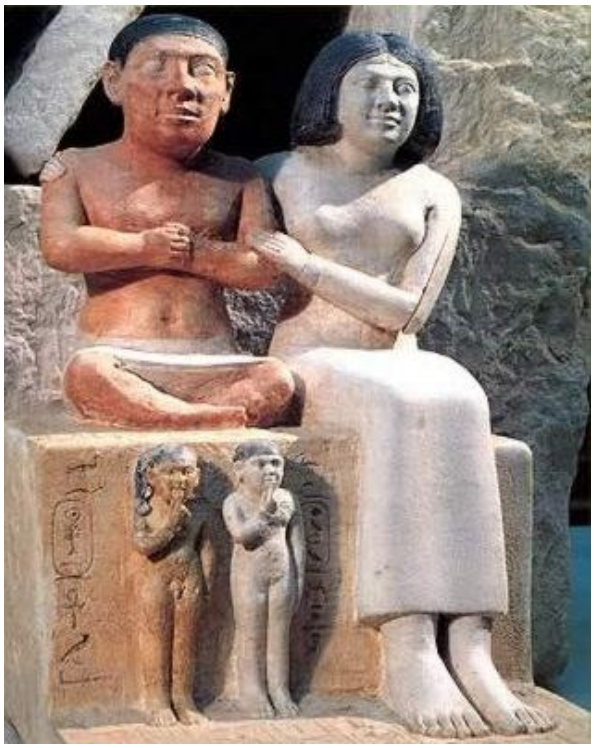

Figure I.6 – Dwarf Seneb and his family. Egyptian limestone statuary from the third millenium BCE (image taken from http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/dwarfs.htm).

Notably, the buffoon's status in Ancient Egypt does not really suggest the contemptuous treatment one would expect dwarf-jesters to have received at royal courts. Whereas the early modern European and Ottoman courts certainly did not (consciously

[81] Chahira Kozma, "Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt," *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, 140A, 2005, pp. 306-307: The apparently achondroplastic figure of Seneb nevertheless displays unrealistic facial features probably due to the conventions of the Ancient Egyptian art.

and explicitly) attribute their dwarfs any divine characteristic, the Egyptian case is still a useful (historical and argumentative) point of departure to illustrate the arguably universal tripartite connection amongst the physically or mentally abnormal buffoon, the king, and the supernatural/divine.

Yet, the history of court dwarfs reveal very humiliating treatments as well. Like Elizabeth I's dwarf named "Monarch,"[82] many dwarfs were given ridiculously grandiose names such as Socrates or Alexander the Great apparently in order to emphasize their inferior position vis-à-vis their masters.[83] Dwarfs as were sometimes seen as 'pets.' This attitude is most strikingly illustrated in one of the letters of Isabella d'Este written to a court lady, where he proposes to give away the dwarf child of her dwarf couple in the same manner as she would give a kitty:

> It was a promise of mine to give Madame Renée the first girl born to my dwarfs. The 'puttina' has now reached the age of two, and doubtless will continue to be a dwarf, though she hardly promises to be so small as my Delia. She can now walk alone without a guide, if the Duchess desires to have her. [84]

Peter the Great of Russia, who was also very fond of dwarfs and people with other kinds physical deformation, is known to have organized a wedding for his dwarfs. Indeed, Russia, along with the Ottoman Empire, is one of the countries where the custom of keeping court dwarfs survived much longer than in other countries in Europe. By the nineteenth century fools, jesters, and dwarfs had fallen "out of fashion" as members of royal and noble households, yet continued to be the objects of public curiosity at freak shows well into the twentieth century.[85]

To conclude, the overview presented in this chapter has suggested a primordial association of the physically abnormal with the supernatural that was placed at the disposal of royal persons apparently all over the world. Dwarfs, because of their relation to rites of fertility, proved to be the most appropriate among the physically abnormal—especially around the Mediterranean zone but at other places as well—to be associated

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[82] Bonnie M. Sampsell, "Ancient Egyptian Dwarfs," *KMT*, vol. 12, iss. 3, Fall 2001, p. 61.

[83] Betty M. Adelson, *The Lives of Dwarfs: Their Journey from Public Curiosity Toward Social Liberation*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 20.

[84] Christopher Hare, *The Most Illustrious Ladies of the Italian Renaissance*, Kessinger Publishing, 2005, p. 179.

[85] Hyers, *The Spirituality of Comedy*, p. 117.

with the cult of kingship and to become mascots to protect the royal body from the malicious effects of the evil eye. The semi-divine status of the king was accentuated by the presence of abnormal bodies at his vicinity who echoed his liminality to humanity.

The same points about people with physical anomalies can perhaps also apply to deaf-mutes, whose employment in the Ottoman court marked the difference of the Ottoman custom from other similar customs elsewhere in the world. The appearance of mutes at royal courts is not as frequent as that of dwarfs,[86] and due to the nature of their disability they seem to have been employed mostly as household attendants who would not be able to reveal to outsiders what his masters were talking about. The next chapter will look at the peculiarity of the Ottoman variant of the custom that lied mostly in the manner of mute employment.

[86] M. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio: mutes, dwarfs and jestures at the Ottoman Court 1500-1700," *Disability & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, p. 116.

Chapter II

JESTERS, DWARFS, AND MUTES AT THE OTTOMAN COURT

This chapter traces the origins and development of the custom of keeping jesters, dwarfs, and mutes at the Ottoman court with an effort to figure out its main aspects, both practical and symbolical. Though the aim is to understand the roles and functions of dwarfs and mutes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, evidence from other periods will be used for comparison and in order to complement deficiencies of data. The problems concerning non-European jesterdom that have been raised in the first chapter are carried in what follows into a discussion of how to define the Ottoman court jester and the extent of his licence. The first part of this chapter addresses the issue of Ottoman court jesterdom in general, bringing forward certain points that should be considered in any study that would aim to define 'the Ottoman jester,' and the second part concentrates on the mute and dwarf members of the Ottoman court, discussing their functions other than buffoonery and jesting as well as their ways of entertaining. First, the case of a particular early Ottoman jester is studied as it appears to be unique in the Ottoman context insofar as it closely parallels the jester stereotype who is both a critic and an entertainer. The difference between his example as represented in the early chronicles and the representations of the dwarf and mute jesters of later periods will be problematized. To be sure, the category of Ottoman court jesters and the category of the disabled at the Ottoman court do not fully overlap, as there were physically 'normal' jesters as well, while dwarfs and mutes had functions other than performing buffoonery. The chapter also discusses the possible symbolic functions mutes and dwarfs may have had within the framework of Ottoman court ceremonial that crystallized in the 'classical age.'

II.1. In Search of the Ottoman Court Jester

II.1.a. The Case of Mashara Arab

The first Ottoman jester ever mentioned in the sources is a companion of Bayezid I ("the Thunderbolt," 1389-1402).[87] Apparently being neither dwarf nor mute, he was still stamped, due to his "Ethiopian" origin,[88] with the kind of 'difference' that often characterized court jesters, which was suggested by his nickname "Mashara Arab" (meaning 'Negro Buffoon' or 'Black Buffoon'). Most probably inspired by a real person, the evidence about his character and his extraordinary licence as a jester is essentially anecdotal, leading us once more to the question of the inextricability of the 'historical jester' from the 'jester in popular imagination.' Therefore, this figure should perhaps be taken as yet another legendary Middle Eastern court jester, along with Haroun ar-Rashid's Buhlul and Tamerlane's Nasreddin, who seem close to the stereotypical European fool in the extent of their behavioural limits. The author of the *Anonymous Chronicle*, for instance, notes both Mashara Arab's great licence—which is contrasted with his being a poor black man—and his ability to say things in the proper way and in the proper moment.[89] In what follows, his anecdotes, which usually appear

[87] Mashara Arab is mentioned in a group of interrelated fifteenth and early sixteenth century chronicles: *Anonim Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman* [the Anonymous Chronicle], F. Giese (ed.), Nihat Azamat (prep.), Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1992, pp. 34-36; Âşıkpaşaoğlu Ahmed Âşıkî [Âşıkpaşazâde], *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osman*, Çiftçioğlu N. Atsız (ed.), Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1947, pp. 138-139; Mehmed Neşrî, *Kitâb-ı Cihan-nümâ: Neşrî Tarihi*, F. R. Unat, M. A. Köymen (eds.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 337-339; Oruç Beğ, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser, Nihal Atsız (ed.), Tercüman, 1972, pp. 53-55; and an early sixteenth century chronicle published as Yusuf bin Abdullah, *Bizans Söylenceleriyle Osmanlı Tarihi: Târîh-i Âl-i Osmân*, Efdal Sevinçli (ed.), Izmir: Eylül Yayınları, 1997, pp. 85-89. He is also mentioned as "nedim Arab" in Seyyid Lokman Çelebi, *Kıyâfetü'l-İnsâniyye fî Şemâili'l-'Osmâniyye* (facsimile), Istanbul: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Historical Research Publishing, 1987, fols. 29v-30r. He appears in the guise of a certain "Kör Hasan," who is not said to have been black, in an anecdote's seventeenth-century version in Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, Orhan Şaik Gökyay (ed.), Istanbul: YKY, 1996, vol. 1, p. 310.

[88] Information about his being Ethiopian (*Habeş*) is found in the *Anonymous Chronicle*, p. 34, in Yusuf bin Abdullah, *Târîh-i Âl-i Osmân*, p. 85, and also in Oruç Beğ, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, p. 53.

[89] *Anonymous Chronicle*, p. 36: "Yıldırım Han'un katında şunun gibi arab

in the early Ottoman chronicles, will be discussed with respect to the hidden political motive that made use of the figure of a witty and outspoken jester in order to reveal a certain political attitude.

The *Anonymous Chronicle*, for example, relates a story ("*latîfe*") which has an interesting implication about the relative powers of the jester and the viziers: One day at an encampment, Bayezid the Thunderbolt asks Mashara Arab to climb a high tree that was nearby. As soon as he climbs to the top, the sultan commands his guards to cut the tree. Alarmed to see that the tree is being cut, the jester implores the viziers to save him, yet nobody dares to intervene. He, thus realizing that no one would save his life other than himself, starts to defecate upon those who are cutting the tree, who, upon this, drop their axes and run away. The jester, who immediately comes down when they escape, turns to the viziers who have not had the courage to do anything, and rebukes them saying that they, though being viziers, have been unable to do what his shit has achieved ("*Fülanlayın sizün gibi vezîrleri kim bir bokum kadar sözünüz geçmedi*"), which makes the viziers laugh.[90] The implication that even the excrement of the jester had greater power than the viziers must have provided an opportunity to poke fun at the authority figures from ordinary subjects' point of view. For it is the social function of such popular jester anecdotes to placate feelings towards men of authority by making them an object of laughter. At the same time, being recorded by one of the early Ottoman chronicles, which in general tend to display the views of the frontier *gâzi* circles with centrifugal tendencies, the anecdote also has a political implication as it mocks the viziers who represented the centralist tendency; and this is the point that I shall come back in the following analysis.

The commonest one among the four anecdotes attributed to him, the one about the massacre of judges, is especially significant for bringing forward the interchangeable nature of the ruler and the jester. The following story also constitutes a rare instance in recorded history of an Ottoman ruler's being defeated by a jester's wit. While this marks a significant contrast with the greater absolutism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the sultan came to be a solitary, idol-like figure, aloof from ordinary human beings and detached from ordinary human intercourse, it is remarkable that the ruler in question is one that has the fame of a tyrant, and that it is precisely his

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şunculayın nedim idi. Nice olursa söylerdi. Evet, her ne söylese mahallinde söylerdi."

[90] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

tyrannical behaviour that is counterbalanced by the jester's emphasis on order. The opposition between tyranny and anarchy represented by the corresponding pair of the ruler and the jester is thus rearticulated in this anecdote as the ruler's tyranny bears the seeds of anarchy itself.

The basic plot shared by all sources is as follows: When the corruption and trickery of certain Islamic judges (qadi or *kadı*) come to a degree that can no longer be concealed, Bayezid I, who is notorious for his quick temper and cruelty, orders their execution in a moment of fury. The grand vizier Ali Paşa of the illustrious noble House of Çandar, who himself is an immoral man and the protector of the corrupt judges, desperately implores Mashara Arab to save them from being burnt alive. Insisting on that only the jester, the sultan's dear companion, can do that, the vizier promises him lavish gifts if he could convince the sultan. Thus, a vizier is represented once more as unable to solve a problem by his own authority.[91] Having accepted the offer, Mashara dresses himself up in precious garments and meets the ruler.[92] The conversation goes like this:

> Mashara Arab came to the khan and said, "My khan, send me to Istanbul in the capacity of an envoy." The khan said: "What are you going to do there, o inauspicious thing?" He said: "Let me go and ask from the emperor [lit. "governor"] to let me bring [Christian] monks from there." The khan said, "What are you going to do with monks?" Arab said, "Let us do away with the judges and let the monks occupy their posts." The khan said, "Doggish Arab, why would I give the posts to the monks instead of my own subjects?" Arab said, "Your subjects are illiterate [or not well-educated], whereas the monks have strived for so many years, there are [well-]educated." Bayezid Khan said, "Arab, what is the truth about them [i.e., the judges]? [What should I believe in?

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[91] For another such case, this time with a dwarf jester, see Chapter III.

[92] In Evliya Çelebi's version, Kör Hasan puts on a priestly dress ("tebdīl-i cāme bir ġūrūna kıyāfetli ve bir metrepolīd kıyāfetli bir papas olup"), because of which he needs a renewal of faith ("Kör Hasan parmak getürüp huzūr-ı Yıldırım'da tecdīd-i īmān getürüp") after getting the sultan's promise that he would not kill the judges. Evliya's version is clearly more religious in tone and more positive for the corrupt judges for it emphasizes the contrast between their authority and the 'wrong religion' of the Christians. However, after renewing his faith, Mashara Arab asks for permission to go and "restore the judges' belief in Islam" ("Pādişāhım varayım cümle kādıları da müselmān ideyim"): *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, p. 310.

The facsimile on Yusuf bin Abdullah, *Târîh-i Âl-i Osmân*, p. 86, suggests (as Hakan Erdem has noted) that he wore "a gorgeous garment and a pair of gorgeous shoes" ("bir çevük fistân ve bir çevük pâbûc"), and not "birçok fistan ve birçok pabuç" as Efdal Sevinçli read (p. 87). This chronicle narrates that, dressed as such, Mashara Arab met the sultan in an hour of diversion when he was in good humour, and leapt once or twice before him in order to attract his attention (pp. 86-87).

> What should be done?]" Arab said, "My khan, it is the pashas who know that." Bayezid Khan sent for Ali Pasha. [When Ali Pasha came] he said, "Ali, are these judges all educated?" Ali Pasha said, "My sultan, how could it be possible that judges not be educated?" The khan said, "If they are educated, then how come do they misbehave?" Ali Pasha said, "My sultan, they do because they have so little income."[93]

The story is concluded with the information that, from then on, new fees for judicial services were enacted in order to satisfy the needs of the judges. Âşıkpaşazâde is especially harsh: "…it was Ali Paşa who had caused the House of Osman to sin."[94] Part of this "sin" was legalizing the bribes as fees by introducing a totally new rule to Islamic legal procedures, and leaving the judges unchastised despite what they had done—and in making the sultan to do that the jester was instrumental. For the other part of the "sin," the chapter needs to be considered from the start. The Chapter 63 opens by recounting Bayezid's marriage with a Serbian princess. The marriage is planned and offered to Bayezid by her own family. After becoming his wife, she convinces him to grant certain territories to her sister. Having told these in an already negative tone, Âşıkpaşazâde—and, the *Anonymous Chronicle* and Neşrî as well[95]—asserts that it was that Serbian princess who introduced—"with the help of Ali Paşa"—the custom of drinking wine to the House of Osman, who up until then had been impeccable in their conduct.[96] This group of fifteenth century chronicles thus carefully avoid accusing the Ottoman ruler directly but argue that he was led astray by the ones around him. Bayezid's court jester Mashara Arab is presented in connection to the two main figures who led the ruler astray, the Serbian princess (a foreign Christian woman), and Ali Paşa (a corrupt vizier, who, apart from supporting wine-drinking and bribery, according to Âşıkpaşazâde, was "fond of indulging in pleasures,"[97] the implied meaning of which, i.e., sodomy, is revealed in the Anonymous Chronicle[98]).

Bayezid's court jester Mashara Arab is thus presented nearly as an accomplice of the corrupted centralist orthodox circles. It must be mentioned that both

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[93] Âşıkpaşazâde, p. 139.

[94] Ibid., p. 139.

[95] *Anonymous Chronicle*, p. 31; Neşrî, p. 333.

[96] Âşıkpaşazâde, p. 138.

[97] Ibid., p. 139.

[98] *Anonymous Chronicle*, p. 34. This account also disparages *devşirme* pages by associating them with homosexuality.

Âşıkpaşazade and the anonymous author were close to centrifugal *gâzi* circles, therefore they were critical about those who represented centralist tendencies and orthodox Islam. In their accounts, the jester seems to have been instrumental in securing the perpetuity of corruption. The association of jester with corruption recurs in the late sixteenth century account of Selânikî, on which there will be more information in the next chapter. So, those who lead the sultan astay are, a jester of foreign origin, an immoral and corrupt vizier, and an infidel woman—all three make a group of some significance. It is therefore possible to argue that those who were in one way or another unhappy with the central government used these attributes in order to accuse or belittle the court jesters or buffoons who were in the sultan's immediate environment: that they are unmanly, they are close to eunuchs, they are corrupt, they are immoral, they are alien elements inserted into the court. These seem to be themes that are recurringly relevant to the perception of the dwarfs, mutes, and buffoons (see Chapter III).[99]

There is, however, another equally striking motif in this anecdote, which is the utter ignorance attributed to the sultan as to what might be called worldly affairs or civilization—he does not know that judges receive education and are needed by the society. An even more scandalous instance of this ignorance, which borders on naivety and almost a childish innocence, is the episode wherein Bayezid's great-grandfather Osman happens to ask what 'tribute' means and finds the answer very odd.[100] There is something utterly foolish about a man who aspires to become a ruler and is totally ignorant about the exploitation mechanisms of the state. Same is the case with Bayezid I, who in another anecdote, comes to the verge of destroying the manpower at his disposal, and is once again dissuaded by Mashara Arab who mockingly offers him to fight together as an army of two when Timur attacks.[101] Yet another anecdote in Seyyid Lokman Çelebi's *Kıyâfetü'l-İnsâniyye fî Şemâili'l-'Osmâniyye*, a physiognomy book dedicated to Murad III, relates a similar story about Bayezid's cutting off his soldiers'

[99] In Evliya Çelebi's version, the story loses its political character to a great extent. Mashara Arab, being stripped of his foreign origin and assocation with the corrupted centralist circles, takes the name of Kör Hasan ("Hasan the Blind"), assuming thus another kind of physical difference. Evliya's Kör Hasan is an essentially positive character who saves the lives of the *ulemâ*: *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, p. 310.

[100] Âşıkpaşazâde, p. 104.

[101] *Anonymous Chronicle*, p. 35.

payments, which also ends with the jester's intervention.[102] Thus, in all stories, Bayezid is narrowly saved from foolishly losing the material basis of his kingship, which seems to imply something about his final defeat and loss at the Battle of Ankara: perhaps that his foolish alienation of some segments of the society undermined his own chances to survive as a ruler. This early group of Mashara Arab traditions employs a common pattern of king-jester relationship, which is also discernible in *King Lear*, namely the king's folly that costs him his kingship as opposed to the 'fool's wise advice under the guise of folly. Mashara Arab, too, applies the strategy of folly in order to imply and ridicule the folly of Bayezid. At the same time, and in contradiction to the negative implication of the ruler's folly for his kingship, these early Ottoman narratives present the ruler's 'natural' folly as something positive, maybe because of a subtle association with sainthood, while they associate the jester's 'artificial' folly with corruption. These two veins that intertwine in one group of stories represent an anti-centralist tendency (that associates tyranny with folly) on the one hand, and an anti-state tendency (that attributes to the Ottoman dynasty a pure and almost saintly folly that is not compatible with state founders) on the other.

The tradition of Mashara Arab is a remarkable one as it employs certain themes common in European and Middle Eastern traditions. At the same time, in the form in which it appears in early Ottoman chronicles, it serves as an expression of these sources' ambiguous attitude towards the Ottoman dynasty. The semi-legendary nature of Mashara Arab makes it difficult to establish with certainty that at least one Ottoman sultan allowed for criticism from a 'European type' of jester. On the other hand, there is a village in Bursa that used to be called Maskarahasan before its name was changed; and it is traditionally associated with this same jester.[103] This may allow us to assume that there was one buffoon by the name of Hasan, though his identification with the Ethiopian jester of Bayezid I and with the critical jester figure that survived in popular memory is still dubious.

Taking into consideration, however, that the 'European type' jester-critic is also—at least partly—a character of popular imagination, and that the evidence about

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[102] Seyyid Lokman Çelebi, *Kıyâfetü'l-İnsâniyye fî Şemâili'l-'Osmâniyye* (facsimile), fols. 29v-30r.

[103] See http://www.caglayankoop.org/ozgecmis.html; and "Çağlayan (Maskarahasan)" in *Bursa Ansiklopedisi*, Yılmaz Akkılıç (ed.), Bursa: Bursa Kültür ve Sanat Yayınları, 2002, vol.2, p. 465.

him is also generally anecdotal, there does not really seem to be much difference between and him and Mashara Arab in terms of historicity. Yet, if there is a germ of truth in those traditions of jester-critics, and if Bayezid I really allowed for some criticism like some other monarchs elsewhere, then how are we to explain the sharp contrast of the jester-sultan relations described here with what appears to have been in later periods with dwarf and mute buffoons? Was there a change in Ottoman sultans' tolerance and in jesters' licence? But before coming to these questions, certain concepts need to be clarified for an evaluation of Ottoman jesterdom.

II.1.b. *Musâhib*s and Others

In the Ottoman context, and in Islamic world in general, the stereotypical court jester, who is supposed to have a special, close relationship with the sovereign, is to be looked for among a sultan's *musâhib*s or *nedîm*s ("boon companions"). A word of Arabic origin, *musâhib* denotes a person capable of pleasant conversation.[104] Those who were to become a *musâhib-i şehriyârî* (a boon companion of the sultan) were chosen from among a wide range of office-holders and courtiers, including viziers and *ağa*s as well as dwarfs, mutes, and eunuchs.[105] It seems that in time it turned into an official post, which came to be abolished in 1834.[106] As a *musâhib* fulfilled a mixed function that lied between friendship and jesterdom, those who were witty and amusing and preferably also knowledgeable and wise had the chance to become the sultan's boon companions. Different from *mashara*, which referred simply to a "buffoon" or a "laughing-stock," *musâhib* indicated closeness to the sultan, which can also be implied by the term *mukarreb* (someone who is close, a confidant). Other relevant words included *mukallid*, meaning 'imitator, mimic,' alluding especially to theatrical performance, and *mudhik*, 'one that causes laughter, a comic,' both referring to a jester's functions and being applicable to court entertainers who may or may not enjoy the proximity to the sultan implied by the term *musâhib*.

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[104] "Musahib" in M. Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, [Ankara]: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993, vol. 2, p. 583.

[105] Ibid., p. 583.

[106] İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988, p. 75.

Figure II.1 – Selim II with his boon companions. Miniature by Nigârî (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

Figure II.2 – Selim II with his falconer. The sultan is throwing an arrow, as his falconer holds the target. Miniature by Nigârî (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

A visual representation of *musâhib*s at work, Figure II.1 is a double folio miniature depicting the prince Selim (later Selim II) during a gathering with his *musâhib*s. We may take this as a typical gathering where dwarfs and mutes could have taken part as well. As the image suggests, musicians and singers as well as poets and buffoons, anyone whose jocular, artistic or intellectual ability was enjoyed by the grandee could turn into a *musâhib*, which is clearly reminiscent of the blurred boundaries between jester and poet or minstrel. At the top right part of the picture is a falconer with his peculiar headgear and leopard's skin, who appears to be one of the *musâhib*s. In Figure II.2 another falconer figure is depicted in an even more jester-like fashion that anyone familiar with the particoloured costume of the European fool could immeditely recognize him as a jester. In fact these people who took care of the falcons that were used in hunting parties remind of the royal huntsmen of medieval European courts who also functioned as royal fools.[107] The animal skin they would wear and their proximity to dwarfs and mutes also support the possibility that jesters could also have been chosen from among them. Indeed, during his reception by the sultan at the Topkapı Palace in 1599, Thomas Dallam noticed the affinity or overlapping between them and mutes as he writes that he saw some of the mutes carrying hawks.[108]

Apart from that, we may perhaps also speak of a phenomenon of 'collective buffoonery' in the Ottoman world. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Hâfız Hızır İlyas Ağa, recording the daily life at the court of Mahmud II, relates special occasions when the *ağa*s of the inner court would struggle with one another to collect the coins dispensed by the sultan.[109] The ritualistic aspect of the event is obvious, however the funny appearance of the participants that Cahit Kayra decries as a loathsome display of servility[110] ensured that the event was repeated as an entertainment as well as a ritual. As we shall see, dispensing of coins was a common amusement at the court as it was also practised with mutes and dwarfs.

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[107] Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 115.

[108] M. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio: mutes, dwarfs and jestures at the Ottoman Court 1500-1700," *Disability & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, p. 125: According to Miles, this could be one of the occupations of dwarfs and mutes, who, just like pages, would acquire certain skills accoding to their ability.

[109] Cahit Kayra, "Letaif-i Enderun'un İçeriği: Enderun'da Yaşam," in Hafız Hızır İlyas Ağa (or Çuhadar İlyas Ağa), *Tarih-i Enderun / Letaif-i Enderun (1812-1830)*, C. Kayra (ed.), Istanbul: Güneş Yayınları, 1987, p. 47.

[110] Ibid., p. 48.

This mixed act of ritual and collective buffoonery also took place during imperial festivals with ordinary people. A similar ritualistic entertainment was what was called the 'scramble for dishes' (*çanak yağması*), which also involved the struggle of a crowd this time for food. The funny aspect of the ritual is evident in Mustafa Âlî's description of the one that took place during the 1582 circumcision festival. Having described the barbaric struggle of lower class participants to eat more, Âlî explicitly states the goal of the activity as to "scatter gloom."[111]

Dwarfs and mutes would fit into this picture often as *nedîm*s, the special companions who entertained the sultan, but—as will be shown—sometimes also practising similar patterns of behaviour with collective buffoonery. In fact, there were mutes and dwarfs who were not *musâhib*s or *nedîm*s,[112] and those are perhaps more apt to be employed in entertainments that involved a crowd scrambling for something. In the rest of this chapter, several aspects of the dwarfs' and mutes' life at the court will be explained.

II.2. Dwarfs and Mutes at the Ottoman Court

After these necessary notes on Ottoman jesterdom, which may be a guide for where to find Ottoman court jesters, we may now move on to map the major aspects of the mute and dwarf employment at the Ottoman court. We may indeed think of the topics of the two sections of this chapter—jesters on the one hand, and mutes and dwarfs on the other—as two overlapping planes, each having an area not covered by the other. Kept as buffoons and jesters, the roles and functions of the disabled members of

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[111] Ol lokma içün sunardı pençe
Bir pençe çıkup virürdi rence
Yağmacıların saçı sakalı
Destâr u libâs u destmâlı
Mustağrak olurdı bala yağa
Her sebelet ü riş dönüp şegâle
Bundan garaz in'idâm-ı gamdur
Hem def'-i kasâvet ü elemdür
Gelibolulu Mustafa 'Âli, *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr der Mecâlis-i Sûr*, Ali Öztekin (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996, p. 65.

[112] Özcan, "Dilsiz—Tarih," *TDVİA*, IX, p. 304.

the court were by no means restricted to their entertainment duties. In fact, although mutes were employed at other courts as well,[113] their occupation with buffoonery seems to be a rare phenomenon, which gave the Ottoman custom its peculiarity. Mutes in particular had manifold functions as reliable attendants in confidential meetings and as stranglers. Furthermore, they were the source and experts of the sign language, which in the sixteenth century came to be the common language of the whole court, in accordance with the Ottoman ideal about courtly grandeur. In addition, both dwarfs and mutes often carried messages and news among the members of the court. Therefore, the discussion in this section will not be confined to the nature of their jesterdom but will extend to outline their activities as a whole.

First of all, who were the Ottoman court dwarfs and mutes in the simplest sense? By the term 'mute' Ottomans clearly referred first and foremost to congenital mutism, which also included deafness, whereas 'dwarf' seems to apply to people with any kind of dwarfism. None of the textual or pictorial sources resorted to during this study identifies or depicts the type of dwarfism in any Ottoman dwarf. No evidence has also been found in the Ottoman context about artificial dwarfism, though we may conjecture that it might have happened especially in the possible case of slave dwarfs.

Several generalizing statements can be found in the secondary literature about mutes and dwarfs, based on the authors' personal impressions. To the knowledge of R. E. Koçu, "the court dwarfs and mutes were the dwarf and mute children and youths among the *zülüflü*s of the Seferli, Kiler ve Hazine Koğuşları,"[114] as if they were always necessarily young. According to Özdemir Nutku, most of the dwarfs were eunuchs,[115] and Abdülkadir Özcan seems to believe that all mutes were eunuchs at the same time.[116] It should be clear that such expressions reflect the impressions of these authors based on the limited data that they had access to. Though it is true that some mutes and dwarfs were castrated to be employed commonly in both the male and female sections of the

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[113] See Godfrey Goodwin's note on *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court*, Godfrey Goodwin (ed.), London: Saqi Books, 1996, p. 150n.

[114] Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Topkapu Sarayı: İçinde Geçen Vak'alar, Eski Saray Hayatı ve Teşkilatı ile Beraber Adım Adım, Köşe Köşe*, Istanbul: İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, 1960, p. 133.

[115] Nutku, "Cüce," *TDVİA*, VIII, p. 105.

[116] Özcan, "Dilsiz—Tarih," *TDVİA*, IX, p. 304.

palace, it is not possible at the present level of knowledge to claim any majority for the eunuchs or to reach a substantiated conclusion about the average age of dwarfs and mutes. Their recruitment patterns are also not really known. The late sixteenth century author Selânikî writes that some dwarf eunuchs were sent to their hometowns upon their expulsion from the court;[117] and only in such a case we may deduce that these dwarfs were not slaves but recruited in some other way, and castrated probably before their entrance in order to increase their chances to be accepted into the palace.

It is known that apart from the dwarf and mute eunuchs who had access both to female and male zones of inner court, there were also female dwarfs, mutes, and *masharas* at the imperial harem.[118] Their existence at least in the eighteenth century is documented: a *defter* read by Uluçay records a gift to the "*mashara* Zehbaz Bula from the harem" in July/August 1706, and a gift of seventeen pearls to the "*mashara* Arife Kalfa" in 1707/1708.[119] The same register records a belt given to "the mute concubine" (*dilsiz cariye*) in 1827/1828—apparently, there was only one female mute at the time.[120] Moreover, a document dated to the beginning of Selim III's reign (1789-1807) mentions a certain "Server dilsiz" and "Küçük dilsiz Rukiye" ("the little mute Rukiye") among the women of the imperial harem, who donated silver for war.[121] Apart from these, however, textual and pictorial sources are quite silent about female dwarfs and mutes, in accordance with their general reticence about women. Being bound by this limitation explains why the present study focuses exclusively on male mutes and dwarfs.

That there were also black mutes in the Ottoman palace is related also in a nineteenth century source. In his memoirs, Viscount de Marsellus writes that, as he accompanied the French ambassador during his reception by Mahmud II in July 1819, they were seized on both sides by two *kapıcıbaşı*s accoding to the custom—for this was how ambassadors were let into the sultan's presence—and passed between two rows of pages, and black and white mutes.[122] Halide Edib Adıvar's childhood memoirs also

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[117] See Chapter III.

[118] Uluçay, *Harem II*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971, p. 15.

[119] Ibid., p. 15, fn. 31; Topkapı Palace Archive, *defter* no. 23, fol. 114 and 119.

[120] Ibid., p. 15, fn. 30; the same *defter*, fol. 143.

[121] İsmail Baykal (ed.), "Selim III. Devrinde "İmdad-ı Sefer" İçin Para Basılmak Üzere Saraydan Verilen Altın ve Gümüş Avanî Hakkında," *Tarih Vesikaları*, vol. I, 6, Ankara: Maarif Vekâleti, 1941-1942, pp. 36-50.

[122] İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Merkez ve Bahriye Teşkilâtı*, Ankara:

attest to the presence of a black dwarf eunuch at Abdülhamid II's court in the late nineteenth century.[123] But from our period of focus hardly anything is found on black dwarfs and mutes other than Murad III's black dwarf eunuch Zeyrek Ağa, who is depicted in a miniature in the late sixteenth century.[124]

Ottoman sources refer to mutes as either "*dilsüz/dilsiz*" or "*bîzebân*," both terms meaning "tongueless or speechless," without needing to mention deafness. Therefore, in contemporary Western sources, these are rendered as "mutes," and not "deaf-mutes."[125] As for the dwarfs, there is no Ottoman word other than "*cüce*" to refer to them. The dwarfs are typically indicated with the word *Cüce* ("Dwarf"), which seems to have been used almost as a title before or after the personal name, such as Cüce Zeyrek or Habib Cüce, though this pair is sometimes accompanied by an additional title *Ağa*, as in Cüce Yusuf Ağa, which probably meant that the dwarf had a duty other than buffoonery—he was perhaps also a eunuch. When a dwarf was a eunuch at the same time, as was Cüce Zeyrek of Murad III and Habib Cüce of Mehmed III, the word 'eunuch' was more likely to be omitted when referring to him, probably because the more visible deformity prevailed.[126]

In what follows, several aspects of the dwarf and mute employment at the Ottoman court will be described, including the fascination with physical deformity, their activities as buffoons and jesters, other functions, as well as an overview of the history of the tradition.

Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1948, p. 305.

[123] H. E. Adıvar [Halidé Adivar Edib], *Memoirs of Halidé Edib*, Hülya Adak (intro.), Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004, pp. 83-85.

[124] For Zeyrek and his depiction see Chapter III.

[125] "Deaf-mute" was a 19th century neologism: see Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Framed: The Deaf in the Harem," *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, Jennifer Terry, Jacqueline Urla (eds.), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 57.

[126] Cf. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," pp. 129-130n.

II.2.a. "The Perfectest Creature in the World": The Lure of the Deformed

The first chapter demonstrated that, as a rule, all around the world, the ranks of court jesters were very often filled with physically or mentally deformed people, and the jester's value was proportionate to the degree of deformation. For reasons that are not quite clear, the kinds of deformity that the Ottomans preferred were dwarfism and mutism, and not, for instance, mental abnormalcy. There are indications that dwarf and non-dwarf hunchbacks could also be employed as buffoons,[127] although they never constituted a group as dwarfs and mutes did. The employment of mutes at the court was, for sure, due in the first place to the need for reliable servants at confidential meetings.

Like other courts elsewhere, the Ottoman court eagerly sought 'prodigies' combining different sorts of deformity. Ali Ufkî or Wojciech Bobowski, a Polish convert writing in the mid-seventeenth century on the life at the Ottoman court of which he had first-hand experience,[128] reports that the favour that a dwarf received was proportionate to the shortness of his stature, and the most valuable gift for the sultan would be one who is mute, dwarf and castrated at the same time. He relates that one such person was found while he was living in the palace; that mute and castrated dwarf was immediately granted the most precious of garments and the honour to be a boon companion of the sultan and his mother. Naturally, he could freely enter the female as well as the male sections of the palace.[129] As he copied the passage into his own account of the "seraglio," Sir Paul Rycaut—English diplomat in the Ottoman Empire in 1660s and 70s—defined the creature who combined dwarfism, mutism, and eunuchism in his

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[127] The dwarf in Halide Edib's memoirs, for example, is also a hunchback: *Memoirs of Halidé Edib*, pp. 83-85.

[128] Bobowski, who was known alternatively as Albertus Bobovius, born to Polish noble family, was captured and brought to the Ottoman court probably in the 1630s. After a career as a court musician, he left the palace around 1657, and wrote his account of the Ottoman court in 1665. For more information on his life and the story of his account, see Stephanos Yerasimos and Annie Berthier's introduction to Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam: Albertus Bobovius ya da Santuri Ali Ufki Bey'in Anıları* [Life in the Topkapı Palace: The Memoirs of Albertus Bobovius or Ali Ufkî], Stephanos Yerasimos, Annie Berthier (eds.), Ali Berktay (trans.), Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2002, pp. 12-16.

[129] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, p. 30. Olivier too notes the demand for people who were both dwarf and mute: Olivier, *Türkiye Seyahatnamesi: 1790 Yıllarında Türkiye ve İstanbul*, Oğuz Gökmen (trans.), Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası A.Ş., 1977, p. 15.

own self as "the perfectest creature in the world," arguably capturing what the Ottomans themselves might have thought about such a person.[130]

Clearly, the possession of such rare creatures as a castrated mute dwarf was desired not merely because of an ancient association with the supernatural, but also to satisfy the more immediate need to display wealth and power. Similarly, exotic animals were exchanged between monarchs as gifts,[131] and the Ottomans had their own zoo made up of such animals as giraffees and elephants. Collections of animal and human rarities, apart from being 'interesting,' underlined the monarch's far-reaching hand that was able to bring such creatures from distant parts of the world and accommodate them in his seat of government, thus perhaps implying his exalted status as a world ruler.

The mechanisms through which dwarfs and mutes were recruited for the Ottoman court are obscure, but we may conjecture that there were more than one means, probably including slave trade—though in general they seem to be free.[132] On the other hand, deformity could well have been a desired characteristic in a slave, as it was in ancient Rome. For instance, the grand vizier Sinan Paşa's gifts to the crown prince Mehmed (later Mehmed III) on the occasion of his circumcision in 1582 included six slaves one of whom was mute. Âli seems to have noted this attribute as a remarkable characteristic that would increase the slave's price. Having mentioned the "angelic faces" of the other five, the expression he used for the mute ("*bî-zebân-ı turfe-beyân*")

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[130] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, Westmead: Greek International Publishers, 1972, p. 35: "And if one of these have that benefit, as by natures [sic] fortunate error to be both a Dwarf, and dumb, and afterwards by the help of Art to be castrated and made an [sic] Eunuch, he is much more esteemed, then if nature and Art had concurred together to have made him the perfectest creature in the world; one of this sort was presented by a certain *Pasha*, to the Grand Signior, who was so acceptable to him and the Queen Mother that he attired him immediately in Cloth of Gold, and gave him liberty though [sic] all the Gates of the *Seraglio*." Rycaut's work was published first in 1668.

[131] For example, during the circumcision festival in 1582, a European ambassador brought a strange animal the body of which looked like that of a dog but its head like that of a monkey: Gelibolulu Mustafa 'Âli, *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr der Mecâlis-i Sûr*, p. 57.

[132] According to Colin Imber, dwarfs and mutes were among the few legally free members of the imperial household, along with the sultan and his family, teachers and religious instructors, prayer leaders and doctors (Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 148). Also see Chapter III for the return of two expelled dwarfs to their homelands, Malatya and Bosnia.

implies that it was the appeal for the extraordinary that elevated the mute to an object of wonder to be sought after.[133]

In keeping with the habits at other parts of the world, dwarfs were kept not only in the imperial household but also at the households of grandees—though there is no way to understand the real dimensions of this phenomenon. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, British traveller Julie Pardoe saw a dwarf at the house of the *reisü'l-küttab* Yusuf Paşa.[134] Princes in the provinces and governors, anyone who was able to maintain a fairly large household could well have kept dwarfs and mutes, as Mehmed II's son Mustafa seems to have kept a dwarf named Nasuh (or "Nasuf"), who attended his master's funeral procession to Konya.[135]

No matter what percent of the available dwarfs and mutes were kept by lesser households, the greatest employer of dwarfs and mutes must have been the imperial court. An additional motivation may be a desire to show off mercy and piety by saving the disabled from an otherwise miserable life—but then, we may again ask, why not all disabled ones but only dwarfs and mutes? Pious mercy could have been the guise masking this ancient court custom, and noone would wish to be seen devoid of it. Therefore, Koçi Bey, who is otherwise critical about dwarfs and mutes, advised Sultan İbrahim in early 1630s to grant a golden coin to each dwarf and mute in the Privy Chamber because they were essentially "helpless poor creatures."[136]

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[133] "Beş nefer hod firişte-hu gılman / Bir dahi bî-zebân-ı turfe-beyân": Gelibolulu Mustafa 'Âli, *Câmi'u'l-Buhûr der Mecâlis-i Sûr*, Ali Öztekin (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996, pp. 29, 138.

[134] Nutku, "Cüce," *TDVİA*, VIII, p. 105.

[135] Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, Bollingen Series 96, William C. Hickman (ed), Ralph Manheim (tr.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 330.

[136] Koçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risâlesi*, Zuhuri Danışman (ed.), Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1972, p. 96. Also see Chapter III.

II.2.b. The Early Phase

It is from the fifteenth century onwards that the Ottoman court began to employ dwarfs and mutes.[137] Clearly, dwarfs involved in buffonery from the very beginning.[138] However, although mutes are known to have served at the time of Mehmed II as attendants in confidential meetings and as stranglers,[139] there is no way to be sure whether they became boon companions at that time or later.

The earliest foreign witness to report the presence of dwarfs at the court is Bertrandon de la Brocqière, who accompanied a Milanese ambassador to Murad II's palace in Edirne. Writing in 1433, Brocqière noted that when he received the ambassador Murad was accompanied by two pages and a dwarf.[140] After the consolidation of the 'classical' ceremonial code, dwarfs—unlike mutes—seem to have disappeared for good from such solemn occasions as reception of ambassadors. As a result, the chances of foreign witnesses to see dwarfs next to the sultan dwindled unless they took a boat to see the sultan entertaining at seaside gardens.

Dwarfs and mutes appear in payment accounts from the reign of Mehmed II, along with other entertainers,[141] although this sultan had a reputation for his dislike of coarse buffoonery. At least two non-Ottoman sources approvingly note his unfavourable attitude for buffoons. These are worth noting as they demonstrate the relation between a sultan's image and his relationship with his jesters. Having praised Mehmed II's generosity towards his warriors, Theodore Spandounes proceeds to relate an anecdote

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[137] Abdülkadir Özcan states that mutes may have begun to be employed from the time of Bayezid I onwards ("Dilsiz—Tarih," *TDVİA*, IX, p. 304), and Emin Cenkmen describes the garments of dwarfs during the reign of Orhan (*Osmanlı Sarayı ve Kıyafetleri*, Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1948, p. 213). Both claims seem dubious as these authors do not specify their sources.

[138] Ottaviano Bon, for example, never uses the word "dwarf" but constantly speaks of "Mutes and Buffons," the latter referring perhaps mostly (if not only) to the dwarfs: see *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court*, Godfrey Goodwin (ed.), London: Saqi Books, 1996, p. 79.

[139] "Bîzeban" in M. Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, [Ankara]: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993, vol. 1, p. 237; B. Lewis, "Dilsiz," *EI*, II, p. 277.

[140] Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 17.

[141] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 117.

revealing the sultan's low opinion of court buffoons (probably as opposed to military ambitions and intellectual pursuits):

> He did not waste his money on maintaining buffoons, actors and other useless persons. One day at a banquet when he was a young man and flushed with wine a jester came into the hall and began his buffoonery, which gave Mehmed great pleasure. He said to the jester, 'Go to the treasury and they will give you 500 ducats.' The jester replied, 'No they will not, without your authority.' Mehmed said, 'Just go and demand it and insist. If they refuse, come to my court in the morning with the treasurer and I will make him do it.' Off he went to the treasurer and asked him for the money. The treasurer said, 'I cannot give it to you without other authority. Wait till the morning when I go to the court, and if my lord orders me to do so I shall willingly give the money to you.' The jester passed the night in happy anticipation of getting it. In the morning the treasurer mentioned the matter to the Emperor. Mehmed laughed and said, 'You did well not to give it to him.' When the jester heard this he was furious. Mehmed summoned him and asked what he was complaining about. 'You,' he said, 'gave me an hour's pleasure. I gave you a whole night's pleasure. It's a fair deal. You are indebted to me, not I to you. Go your way.'[142]

Spandounes goes on to remark that "he preferred to spend his money on warfare and the support of troops, his nobles and other useful and honourable purposes,"[143] alluding to the hackneyed uselessness of jesters. The other one is a sixteenth-century Spanish book written in 1557 and attributed to Cristóbal de Villalón:[144]

> PEDRO: ...They also have buffoons whom they call "mazcara," though the sultan Mehmed, the conqueror of Constantinople, who was the great-grandfather of the present one, said the best about those.
> JUAN: What did he say?
> PEDRO: One day, they asked him why he did not use buffoons like other rulers, and he asked what they were used for. He was told that they were to enjoy and have fun with. He said: "For this purpose, bring me a moor or a Christian who has just began to speak our language, for that would cause more laughter than all the buffoons in the world."[145]

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[142] Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, Donald M. Nicol (trans., ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 51-52.

[143] Ibid., p. 52.

[144] Cristóbal de Villalón (attr.), *Viaje de Turquía*, Antonio G. Solalinde (ed.), Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2005 (the 1965 edition of the same book is available at http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/01593307980143888550035/index.htm). There is also an abbreviated Turkish translation: *Kanunî Devrinde İstanbul: Dört asır yayınlanmadan köşede kalmış çok önemli bir eser*, Fuad Carım (trans.), Istanbul: Yeni Savaş Matbaası, 1964. The account is in the form of a conversation among three characters Pedro, Juan and Mata, wherein Pedro, who is said to have served as a physician to Sinan Paşa, relates his adventures and observations to the other two.

[145] Villalón (attr.), *Viaje de Turquía*, online version; *Kanunî Devrinde İstanbul*,

Whether true or not, Mehmed II's reputation for his dislike of buffoonery seems to be an integral part of his image as "an enlightened *tyrannos*"[146] who is both frightening and respectable. This is certainly different from those of later sultans whose relationship with pleasure was imagined in a rather different way by foreign observers.

The very scrappy and sporadic nature of the available evidence does not allow to say much about the sultans' relationship with their jesters, dwarfs, and mutes before the second half of the sixteenth century, though we can imagine that they continued to keep disabled jesters. An anecdote (to be analyzed in Chapter III) recorded in a seventeenth century source about a dwarf of Selim I (r. 1512-1520) who is said to have been beheaded because of his innocent interference in state affairs cannot be really taken as an indication that a dwarf was indeed executed during his reign; for being written with the concerns of a different age in mind, it cannot be considered as a reliable evidence on the early sixteenth century. This once again leads to the question of the reliability of anecdotes as historical evidence, since each anecdote (whether about Mashara Arab, Mehmed II, or Selim I) provides a representation that is shaped by a certain political attitude. Therefore, its political implication apart, the anecdote about Selim I's dwarf does not do much beyond strengthening the sense that there must have been a more or less continuous employment of dwarfs at the Ottoman court.

Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566) is also known to have kept dwarfs (see Figure II.3), and beginning with his reign, relatively more reliable and detailed data become available. Part of the reason is that, with the increase of diplomatic relations from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, European reports on dwarfs and mutes became more frequent. As Miles notes in the only scholarly article studying the mutes' activities and signing system, writings of contemporary foreign observers remain important sources for the daily activities of Ottoman dwarfs and mutes for they provide details uncovered by official court records.[147] Miles rightly protests the 'anti-Orientalist' dismissal of travellers' reports as it hinders the appraisal of the mutes' communication achievements, noting that as an outcome of the assault on Orientalism, "some historical activities by deaf people have been reduced to mere reference points in arguments about the beliefs

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p. 169.

[146] The expression belongs to Julian Raby ("A Sultan of Paradox: Mehmed the Conqueror as a Patron of the Arts," Oxford Art Journal, 5:1, 1982, p. 6).

[147] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 117.

and prejudices of nineteenth century French intellectuals."[148] In what follows, foreign accounts are assessed together with the available Ottoman sources to unveil as much as possible the historical experiences of the disabled at the Ottoman palace.

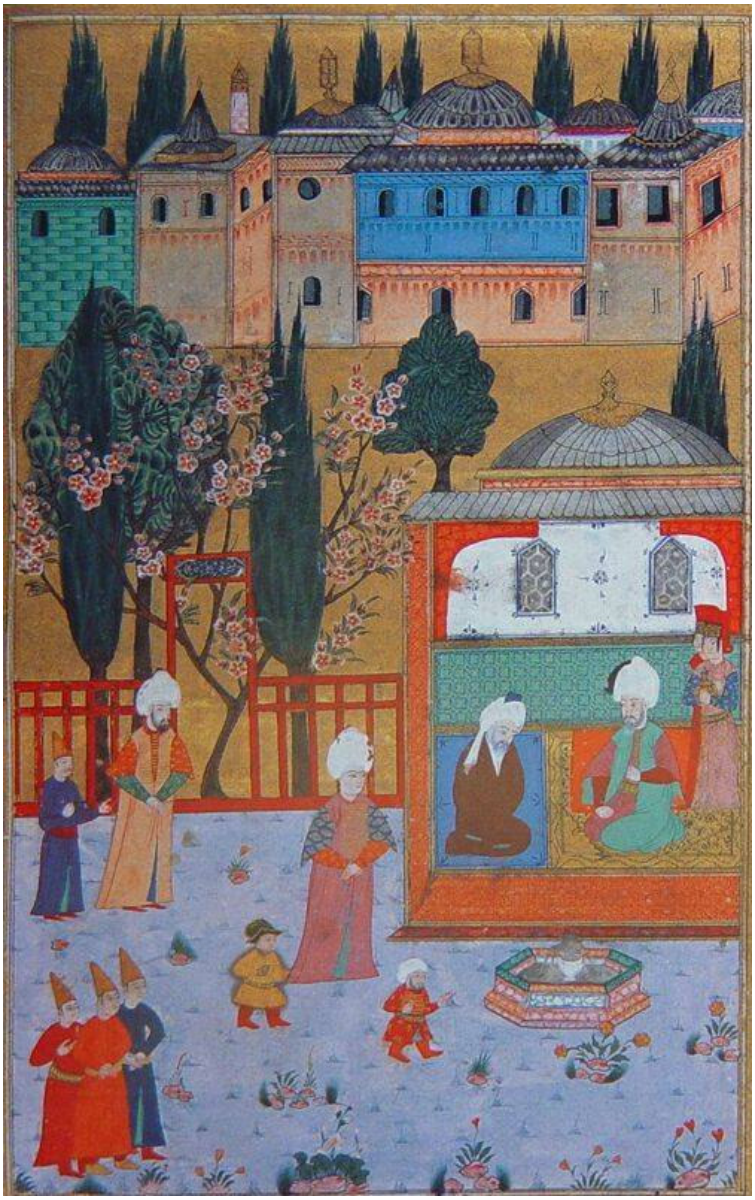

Figure II.3 – Two dwarfs of Süleyman I. Miniature by Nakkaş Osman depicting Süleyman I with his sheikh Abdüllatif, in a domed pavilion in front of the harem. Two dwarfs are seen in the picture. From the *Hünername*, vol. II, ca. 1587-1588, TSM, H 1524; reproduced in And, *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları 1: Minyatür*, p. 215 (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

[148] Ibid., p. 116.

Much of what can be discovered about dwarfs and mutes date from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards. Süleyman I's son Selim II (r. 1566-1574) appears to have been very fond of dwarfs, mutes, and buffoons in general, as was noted by foreign observers, among whom was the Venetian ambassador Constantino Garzoni.[149] According to the French diplomat Philippe du Fresne-Canaye, Selim used to take his young favourites, his buffoons, dwarfs and mutes as he would go to his gardens for recreation. He actually saw the sultan from a boat on 24 May 1573, and wrote that he was on horseback in a garden and was enjoying the company of "two or three chosen servants, some mutes and two dwarfs, the smallest and handsomest that I ever saw." In order to see better, Fresne-Canaye failed to keep a tolerable distance from the shore; consequently, his boat was stoned by palace guards as a warning.[150]

II.2.c. Mutes and Dwarfs as Court Buffoons

A probable result of the imperial seclusion that increased in the second half of the sixteenth century was the sultans' extended leisure hours, which they could prefer to spend with their boon companions. Selim's son Murad III (r. 1574-1595) shared and even surpassed his father in his predilection for dwarfs. There are a number of miniatures in the illuminated manuscripts that were produced in abundance during his reign, which show him with dwarfs (Figures II.4-8). In these scenes, dwarfs are not depicted as performing buffoonery but like other ordinary courtiers. Nevertheless, these pictures attest to the fact that they were very much present in the sultan's daily routine.

[149] Ibid., p. 120.

[150] Ibid., p. 120.

Figure II.4 – Two dwarfs next to Murad III on the shore. Detail from a miniature showing the fortresses on the Asian and Rumelian shores of the Bosphorus, 1597, from *Şehinşahnâme*, vol. II, Topkapı Palace Museum, B200; reproduced in And, *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları: 1 Minyatür*
(Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

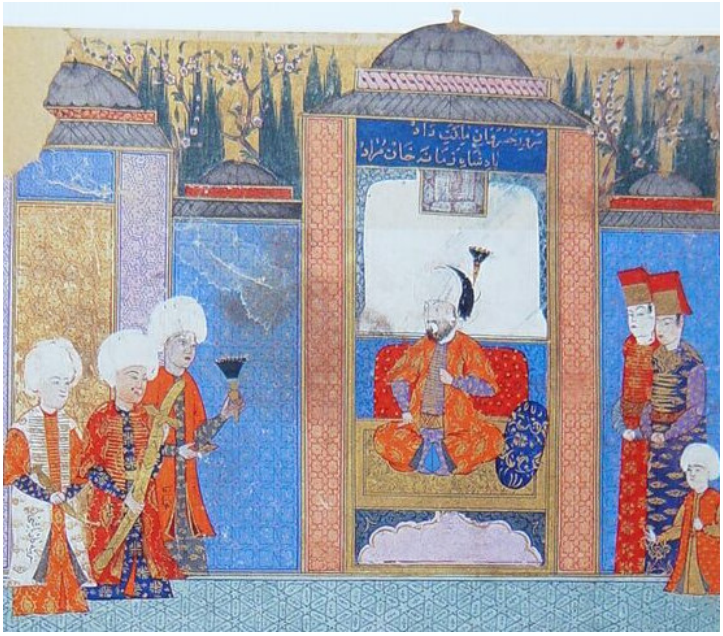

Figure II.5 – A dwarf of Murad III, on the right side. Detail from a miniature, 1584, from *Nusretname*, Topkapı Palace Museum, H1365; reproduced in *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları: 1 Minyatür* (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

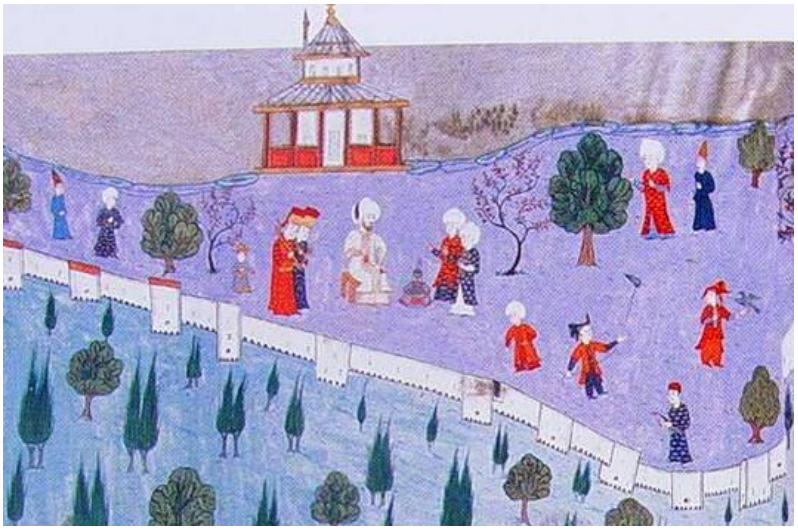

Figure II.6 – Murad III with his boon companions. Detail from a miniature where the sultan Murad III is seen seated at the area of kiosks and gardens lying beyond the third courtyard of the Topkapı Palace. There is at least one possible dwarf among the sultan's companions: the one to the left of the two guards. From the *Hünernâme*, vol. I, ca. 1587-1588, TSM, H 1524; reproduced in And, *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları 1: Minyatür*, pp. 246-247 (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

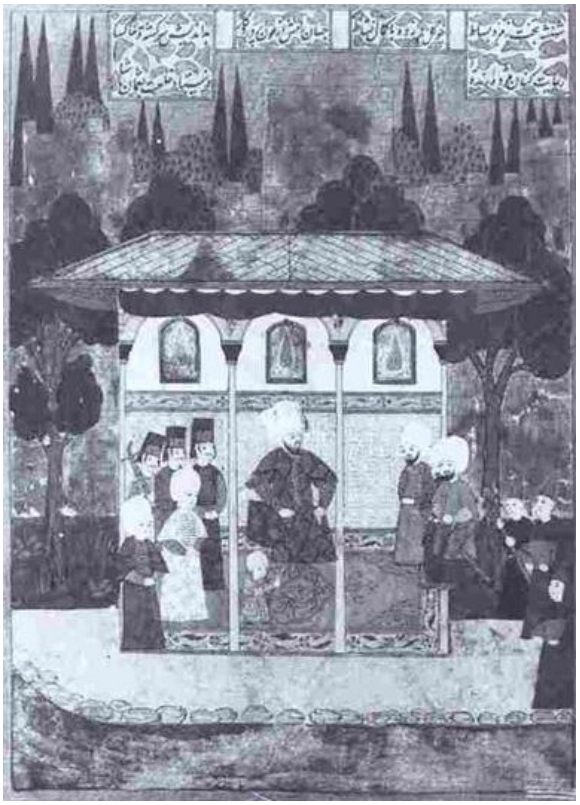

Figure II.7 – A dwarf of Murad III at the Shore Kiosk, present while the sultan is rewarding the vizier Osman Paşa with a robe of honour. From Lokman's *Şehenşahnâme*, 1592, TSM, B 200, fol. 149r (Image taken from Necipoğlu, p. 220, ill. 124b).

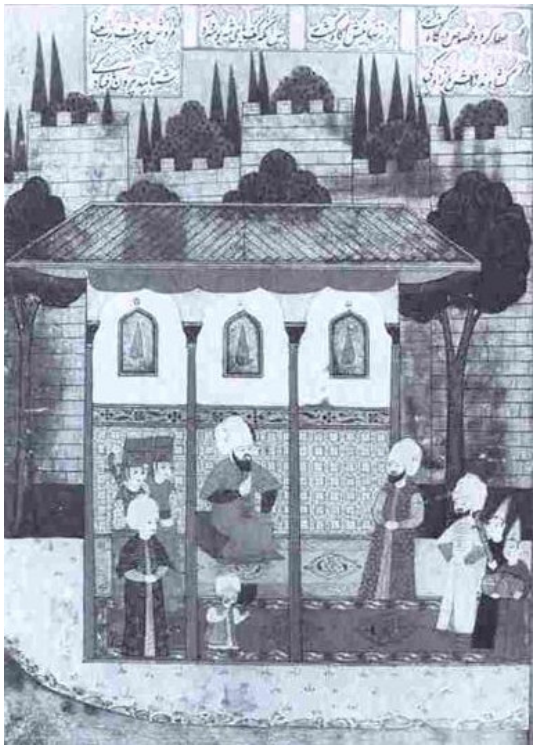

Figure II.8 – A dwarf, Murad III, and Osman Paşa. The sultan is interrogating his vizier Osman Paşa at the Shore Kiosk. From Lokman's *Şehenşahnâme*, 1592, TSM, B 200, fol. 156v (Image taken from Necipoğlu, p. 220, ill. 124a)

According to Domenico Hierosolimitano, Murad used to spend a considerable amount of time every day with his "dwarfs and buffoons":

> The Grand Turk's manner of life in the Seraglio is as follows: in the morning he rises at dawn to say his prayers for half an hour, then for another half an hour he writes. Then he is given something pleasant as a collation, and afterwards sets himself to read for another hour. Then he begins to give audience to the members of the Divan on the four days of the week that this occurs, as has been said above. Then he goes for a walk through the garden, taking pleasure in the delight of fountains and animals for another hour, taking with him the dwarfs, buffoons and others to entertain him. Then he goes back once again to studying until he considers the time for lunch has arrived.
>
> He stays at table only half an hour, and rises (to go) once again into the garden for as long as he pleases. Then he goes to say his midday prayer. Then he stops to pass the time and amuse himself with the women, and he will stay one or two hours with them, when it is time to say the evening prayer (*vespero*). Then he returns to his apartments or, if it pleases him more, he stays in the garden reading or passing the time until evening with the dwarfs and buffoons, and then he returns to say his prayers, that is at nightfall (*nel vedere le stelle*). Then he dines and takes more time over dinner than over lunch, making conversation until two hours after dark (*fino alle doi hore di notte*), until it is time for prayer, that is the last (prayer). He never fails to observe this schedule

every day.[151]

An anecdote recounted by Mustafa Sâfî, the imam of Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617), in his *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh* confirms in a more precise manner the amount of time Sultan Ahmed shares with (at least) one of his dwarfs. As he rebukes his dwarf Hüseyn, Ahmed I reveals that eveyday he spends four or five hours with him.[152]

How then were all those hours spent? Late sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts written for foreign audiences recurrently mention horseplay which involved the buffoons kicking, beating, tumbling each other, scrambling for golden coins, flinging themselves into water, often during entertainments around the pool at the fourth courtyard of the Topkapı Palace. According to Ali Ufkî, the sultan would make his dwarfs and mutes turn sommersaults in the pool, throw coins on them if he is content with their jokes and be amused by watching them as they fell upon the coins and struggled to collect them.[153] Ali Ufkî seems to imply that mutes were more likely than dwarfs to be used as such, as he primarily mentions mutes as the sultan's boon companions and adds that the sultan would entertain with both mutes and dwarfs when he wanted an even greater amusement.[154] In Rycaut's account—where the section about mutes and dwarfs is basically taken from Ali Ufkî—buffoonery is said to have been the only occupation of mutes: "who only serve in the place of Buffones for the Grand Signior to sport with, whom he sometimes kicks, sometimes throws in the cisterns of water, sometimes makes fight together like the combat of *Clinias* and *Dametas*."[155]

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[151] Domenico Hierosolimitano, *Domenico's Istanbul*, Michael Austin (trans., intro. and commentary), Geoffrey Lewis (ed.), Warminster: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2001, pp. 30-32.

[152] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," vol. 1, in Dr. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (ed.), *Mustafa Sâfî'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârîh'i*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003, vol. 1, p. 38. For a translation of the passage see Chapter III.

[153] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, pp. 29-30.

[154] Ibid., p. 30.

[155] Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 35.

Figure II.9 – Dwarfs entertain the sultan. Topkapı Palace Museum, H. 2169; reproduced in *Osmanlı Tasvir Sanatları: 1 Minyatür*, p. 200 (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

Figure II.10 – Dwarfs and musicians entertaining Mehmed III. Miniature by Ahmed Nakşî, c. 1620, from *Dîvân-ı Nâdirî*, TSM, H. 889 (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

One such fight—not of mutes but of dwarfs—is depicted in an Ottoman miniature (probably from the seventeenth century) showing five dwarfs 'fighting' with each other using sticks in front of the sultan, who appears in the typical tranquil pose, his two guards and the Chief Eunuch of the Harem, all of whom retaining their seriousness as a funny event is going on in the lower part of the picture (Figure II.9).

Another miniature from the first half of the seventeenth century depicts two dwarfs[156] wrestling with each other during an hour of entertainment that combined music with horseplay (Figure II.10). One of them has dropped his turban to reveal his hair shaven in a special way, while two other figures, possibly dwarfs, watch them on the right side. Sultan Mehmed III enjoys the scene as he sits calmly on his throne. The tranquil pose of the sultan with a handkerchief in his hand on both miniatures is quite conventional, and need not to be taken 'literally' as a realistic depiction of a sultan's attitude in such an occasion. Surely, the sources' inclination to show the sultan as ever serious and calm, not meddling with the buffoonery is an obstacle to any effort to unveil the true relationship between Ottoman sultans and their jesters.

There are, however, indications that sultans actively participated in horseplay, though probably still retaining a delicate distance from buffoons. Murad III's "frenzied diversion"s with mutes were reported by foreign witnesses, according to whom he used to chase on horseback a number of mounted mutes, whipping both the riders and their horses. In summer 1583, however, one such entertainment ended due to an epileptic fit that caused the sultan to fall from his horse.[157]

As has already been noted, sultans also used to kick their buffoons and throw them into water. In the writings of Ottaviano Bon, the Venetian representative (bailo) in Istanbul from 1604 to 1607, are found similar details on the nature of the entertainment as those recorded by Ali Ufkî and Rycaut. Ahmed I, who was a teenager by the time, would entertain with his buffoons in the rectangular pool at the fourth courtyard of the Topkapı Palace:

> And in the lake there is a little boat, the which (as I was informed) the Grand Seignor doth oftentimes go into with his *Mutes*, and *Buffoons*, to make them row up and down, and to sport with them, making them leap into the water; and many times, as he walks along with them above upon the sides of the lake, he throws them down into it, and plunges them over head and ears.[158]

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[156] The identification of these figures in two miniatures as dwarfs is taken from the source.

[157] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 120.

[158] Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, pp. 30-31. The translation in Penzer's book, however, adds an "aqueduct" into the picture: "On the lake was a tiny little boat into which I was told his Majesty was wont to enter with buffoons to sail for recreation and to divert himself with them on the water, and very often, walking with them on the aqueduct, he would push them in and make them turn somersaults in the lake" (N. M. Penzer, *The Harem*, London: Spring Books, 1965, p. 38).

The pool and the entertainments around it are repeated by several authors writing for foreign audiences, and apparently it came to be almost conventional to mention the activities of mutes and dwarfs in the pool.

In fact, far from being just a child's game, as Ahmed I's childhood might suggest, such crude shows in and out of water were an integral part of court entertainments, as, for example, Abdülhamid I (r. 1774-1789), who was nearly fifty when he ascended the throne, was also amused by watching his mutes throwing each other into water during the trips to various excursion sites out of the palace.[159] A nineteenth century source, İlyas Ağa's *Letaif-i Enderun* records the tragic death of a mute of Mahmud II who drowned as he wanted to entertain the sultan by jumping into the water.[160]

A sultan's meals were also typically enlivened with this kind of buffoonery. Ottaviano Bon's account of Ahmed I's court includes a description of the weird juxtaposition of dignified silence and undignified amusement during the meals:

> All the while that he is at table, he very seldom, or never, speaks to any man; albeit there stand before him many *Mutes*, and *Buffons* to make him merry, playing tricks, and sporting one with another *alla Mutescha*, which the King understands very well. For by signs their meaning is easily conceived: and if peradventure he should vouchsafe to speak a word or two, it is to grace some one of his *Aghas* standing by him, whom he highly favoureth; throwing unto him a loaf of bread from his own table: and this is held for a singular grace, and especial favour; and he distributing part of it amongst his companions, they likewise accept of it at the second hand, and account it as a great honour done unto them, in regard it came from their Lord and King.[161]

The passage attests to the use of sign language, which from the sixteenth century was used by the whole court as a means of courtly grandeur and as an expression of respect to the sultan, even during the buffoonery hours.

A parallel albeit shorter description is provided by Ali Ufkî for the meals of this sultan's son İbrahim (r. 1640-1648) and grandson Mehmed IV (r. 1648-1687). Ufkî also strengthens the conviction that the "Buffons" that Bon refers to were 'dwarfs.' The detail of sharing bread in Bon turns out to be part of the diversion as Ali Ufkî tells that

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[159] Fikret Sarıcaoğlu, *Kendi Kaleminden Bir Padişahın Portresi: Sultan I. Abdülhamid (1774-1789)*, Istanbul: Tatav (Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı), 2001, p. 43.

[160] İlyas Ağa, *Tarih-i Enderun / Letaif-i Enderun*, pp. 98-100.

[161] Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, p. 95.

the sultan would sometimes throw pieces of food to the dwarfs and mutes and amusingly watch their scrumble for those.[162]

The entertainment used to be carried on after the meal, but still in silence:

> The meat which remains of that which was at the *Grand Seignor's* table is immediately carried to the *Aghas* table, who wait upon him; so that they, what with that, and their own diet together, are exceeding well provided. Whilst the *Aghas* are eating, the King passeth away the time with his *Mutes* and *Buffons*, not speaking (as I said) at all with his tongue, but only by signs. And now and then he kicks, and buffeteth them in sport; but forthwith makes them amends, by giving them money. For which purpose his pockets are always furnished, so that they are well contented with that pastime.[163]

Bon's description curiously draws the sultan into the game with the statement that the sultan "kicks, and buffeteth them in sport," as he has done before by saying that the sultan himself pushes the buffoons into the pool, which is something more than the interactive gesture of throwing coins upon them. And to the modern reader's surprise, who might find this rather contradictory, according to Bon, while the sultan was playing these now childish games with his dwarfs and mutes, he was completely mute himself.

An interesting anecdote that confirms the use of sign language among the sultan and his companions even during joyful gatherings is found in an Ottoman source, in the first volume of Mustafa Sâfî's *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh*, on which more information will be found in the third chapter. Sâfî says that he "heard this anecdote from some boon companions" ("*ba'zı nüdemâdan istimâ' olunmışdur ki*"), yet the anecdote is told in first person singular from an anonymous companion's mouth. Once, during a gathering in Çatalca, Ahmed I asked this companion—in order to try him—to do something that he found impossible to do. What the sultan wanted him to do is not revealed in the text, but the companion says that it was an order that his humanity did not permit him to fulfill ("*bana bi tarîkı'l-imtihân bir nesne teklîf buyurdılar ki, beşeriyyet muktezâsı üzre anı tahammül nev'an müşkil ve nefs-i cemûh râh-ı imtisâlinde pâ der-gil idi*"). Thus, he refused and consequently was rebuked by the sultan, whose face he could not see for the next few says. At another occasion, Ahmed promised to give him a precious robe if he could chase and catch one of the other companions. However, the other companion was too fast for him, and when he realized that would not be able to catch him, he asked the sultan for help. Ahmed accepted, and asked the other one to come nearer. When he did, the narrator of the anecdote rushed to catch him but failed as the other understood the

[162] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, p. 90.

[163] Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, p. 96.

trick and stayed away from the sultan. The companion reproached him for not coming nearer although the sultan called him. Upon this, Ahmed turned him, and reminding of his previous behaviour, told him in sign language, "Perhaps he saw your refusal on that day in Çatalca, and learnt from you!" ("*bî-zebânlar işâreti ile Çatalca'da sen itdügüñ muhâlefeti görüb, ögrenmişdür deyü işâret buyurdılar*").[164]

This anecdote, like others in Sâfî's book that will be discussed in the third chapter, vividly illustrates the entertainments the Ottoman sultan had with his buffoons. The author Mustafa Sâfî himself was an insider to the court life—he was the imam of Ahmed I—and recorded several anecdotes related to him by his dwarf acquaintances. In this one, though the narrator is not identified, we may conjecture that he could have been a dwarf as well. The story attests both to the use of sign language in such gatherings and to its possibilities of expression. An interesting detail is the *nedîm*'s refusal to do the sultan's order on the grounds that it would be a shameful act that his humanity would not permit him to perform. What could that have been is left to the reader's imagination. Yet, it is significant that this anecdote confirms some of the information given by foreign sources as to the nature of these entertainments.

It must be clear by the evidence presented up to here that there is a sharp difference between the kind of jester we have in the Mashara Arab tradition and the mute and dwarf buffoons that we encounter in the sources pertaining to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ottoman court might have produced both kind of jesters, one being a witty and sharp-tongued companion is able to criticize and mock the sultan, and the other performing apparently only a crude kind of buffoonery which ridicules only him but never the sultan himself. How are we to make sense of this difference? Was there a shift over time in the nature of Ottoman jesterdom, a shift in the object of ridicule from someone other than the jester to the jester himself?

Though it is very hard to chart any such change in the relationship between the sultan and the jester from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, we may perhaps still speak of a certain change in the society's ability to produce a stereotypical jester-critic at least in popular imagination. Mashara Arab appears to be the only such figure in all Ottoman history, as in the later periods there is no indication—to my knowledge—of a stereotypical jester that was able to defeat the sultan by his wit at least in anecdotes.

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[164] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," vol. 1, in Dr. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (ed.), *Mustafa Sâfî'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârîh'i*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003, vol. 1, pp. 68-69.

This, in itself, can be taken as a proof of the change in the sultan's public image towards an aloof and invincible figure. On the other hand, there are also indications in the 'classical age' as to the existence of jesters who would use verbal skills and wit rather than—or in addition to—performing the crude type of buffoonery. Zeyrek, for instance, a eunuch dwarf of Murad III, was known for his intelligence and wit; and Habib's conversations would make the sultan Ahmed I laugh.[165] Although mutes were unable to utter words, they could also have had witty remarks thanks to the sign language well-known by the entire court. Still, the content of verbal jokes are unknown, and no recorded instance has been discovered as to any jester similar to Mashara Arab in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

II.2.d. Servants, Buffoons, and Stranglers: Court Mutes

Apart from their role as court buffoons or jesters, dwarfs and especially mutes used to have some other functions in the imperial household. This section is devoted to Ottoman court mutes, who would fulfill a very peculiar range of functions that in fact constituted the major difference of the Ottoman custom of keeping people with disability at court from similar customs at other parts of the world.

Although they probably always outnumbered the court dwarfs because of their additional functions, the mutes resident at the Ottoman palace are somewhat relatively underrepresented or passed 'silent' by the extant sources. This can perhaps be explained by the role of speaking ability in elevating one to some importance within the power configuration of the court elite, no matter how adequate or advanced the Ottoman sign language could have been. Thus, despite the fact that we know more than ten dwarfs by name or personal epithet,[166] rarely can one come across a mute who would appear as a

[165] See Chapter III.

[166] Among them are Nasuh, Ca'fer, Zeyrek and Cehûd Cüce ("Jewish Dwarf") mentioned by Selânikî; Habîb, Hüseyn, Yûsuf, Ebû Bekr and Mûsâ mentioned by Mustafa Sâfî; Cüce Kasım, whose retirement constitutes the subject of a *ferman* by Mehmed III (E. 9285/1-23, see İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, İ. K. Baybura, Ü. Altındağ (eds.), *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Osmanlı Saray Arşivi Kataloğu*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985-1988, vol. 1, p. 19); and Cüce Kurt Ağa, a dwarf eunuch at Murad III's court, who entered Venetian ambassadorial reports for having killed in October 1591 a girl from the harem that he loved—he got jealous when he saw her talking with another dwarf

tangible historical figure beyond the impersonal classification. In this sense, Hadım Süleyman Ağa, often called "Dilsüz Ağa," "Ağa-i Dilsüz" or "Ağa-i Bîzebân," was an exception, who owed his high status and fame to his castration that enabled him to establish connections across the gender barrier. Being castrated, therefore, in addition to the speaking ability, appears to have been a major factor for a successful career, as is confirmed as well by the cases of such dwarfs as Zeyrek Ağa,[167] though the highest echelon of *Dârü's-sa'âde Ağalığı* never seems to have been available for dwarfed or mute eunuchs. Apart from the castrated ones who could operate as the agents of women in the imperial harem especially at the time of the latters' ascendancy during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[168] information about most court mutes is communal and impersonal rather than individual-specific.

Nevertheless, it is possible to dwell on the employment of mutes at the Ottoman court and discuss how they were perceived on the basis of the information at hand. The functions of mutes were more varied and in certain cases more vital than those of dwarfs, although these two groups are usually treated as very close and even inseparable. Indeed, mutes had an interesting range of duties, and although we may assume that they have been specialized in certain tasks, mutes are usually referred to as an undifferentiated community.

Apparently, mutes began to be employed at the Ottoman court above all for practical purposes, most importantly as attendants in confidential meetings. This function continued at the palace to the end of the sultanate.[169] Mutes served as attendants also at the Sublime Porte, and in the nineteenth century at the Meclis-i Hâs.[170] Olivier's account from the eighteenth century also mentions that they were employed for this purpose in the households of grandees.[171] D'Ohsson, alluding to a certain restriction in the ability to keep mutes at one's household, writes that, apart from

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eunuch (Maria Pia Pedani-Fabris, "Veneziani a Costantinopoli alla fine del XVI secolo," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 15, "Veneziani a Costantinopoli, Musulmani a Venezia" (suppl.), 1997, pp. 67-84).

[167] See Chapter III for further information about him.

[168] See M. Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica*, 32, 2000, p. 11; and Chapter III.

[169] Lewis, "Dilsiz," *EI*, II, p. 277.

[170] Özcan, "Dilsiz—Tarih," *TDVİA*, IX, p. 304.

[171] Olivier, *Türkiye Seyahatnamesi*, p. 25.

the imperial household, the grand vizier, the "*Kehaya Bey*" and the pashas, i.e. provincial governors, were the only people who were able to maintain mutes at their service.[172] Even today, as a part of the Ottoman heritage, only mute attendants can work during the confidential meetings at the national parliament of Turkey.[173]

Nevertheless, in the writings of two eighteenth century authors the reliability of mutes are seriously challenged. Dimitrie Cantemir, who wrote that the major occupation of the court mutes was to keep the curtain of the hall closed in order to prevent anyone to come in while the sultan was having a confidential meeting with a high official, also recorded it as a matter of fact that mutes could read the lips of speaking people, thus arousing suspicion about mute's being possible spies.[174] Olivier, the French doctor who came to the Ottoman Empire between 1792 and 1798, relates a striking story about a mute spy that the French ambassador Descorches used to rely on: this mute, who would bring news to the ambassador from time to time, would communicate with the French through writing in Turkish. However, one day, Olivier noticed his attention to the French conversations, and it later turned out that besides not being mute, the man could in fact understand several other languages apart from French.[175] It may have been that the man was a spy of the Ottomans who was ordered to learn about the ambassador.

But what made mutes notorious and raised them to a significance within the Orientalist descriptions of the Ottoman palace was an additional duty that may be unexpected from this peacefully silent group: They were stranglers who carried out the bloodless execution of notables and dynasty members with bow-string.[176] This is known from various Western and Ottoman sources. Although Miles, who focusing only on Western accounts of the court, wrote that "if the mutes were, indeed, sometimes secret executioners on the Sultan's nod, Turkish historians valuing their necks had reason to be reticent about it."[177] Yet this function of mutes was in fact recorded by Ottoman

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[172] D'Ohsson, *Tableau Général*, p. 177.

[173] See Metin Yüksel, "Meclis'in 11 Kara Kutusu," *Hürriyet Pazar*, 8 Nov. 2003, available at http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2003/11/08/369041.asp.

[174] Dimitri Kantemir, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Yükseliş ve Çöküş Tarihi*, Dr. Özdemir Çobanoğlu (trans.), Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1980, vol. 3, p. 442.

[175] Olivier, *Türkiye Seyahatnamesi*, p. 25.

[176] Being strangled by bow-strings was thought to be an appropriate way of death for royal persons: Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 118.

[177] Ibid., p. 119.

writers as well, including Selânikî and İbn Kemal. One such execution was even depicted in a miniature (Figure II.11), attesting to the fact that the Ottomans did not see any reason to be silent about mute executioners. What was common to these executions was that they were not the result of any court verdict but of the sultan's own decision. When a legal sanction would be obtained for the execution, then the killing would be carried out not by mutes but by non-mute official executioners.[178] It is important to note that mutes stranglers were the instruments directly of the sultan's will rather than of any other authority.

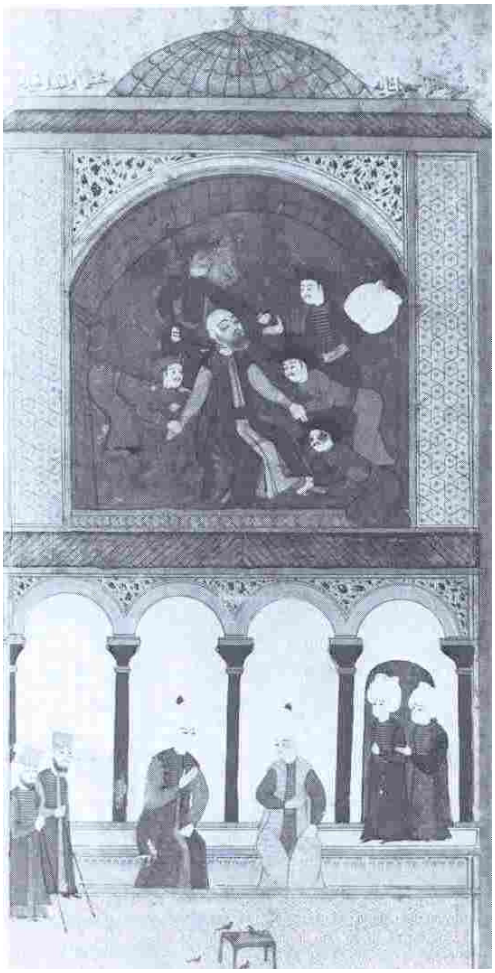

Figure II.11 – Execution of the grand vizier Ahmed Paşa by mute stranglers in 1555, under the vestibule of the third gate, in front of the Chamber of Petitions. From the *Hünernâme*, ca. 1587-1588, TSK, H 1524, fol. 177v (Image taken from Necipoğlu, p. 108, ill. 68).

Mute stranglers at work were described by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq in his account of the murder of Prince Mustafa, a son of Süleyman I:

[178] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 118.

> But there were in the tent certain mutes—a favourite kind of servant among the Turks—strong and sturdy fellows, who had been appointed as his executioners. As soon as he entered the inner tent, they threw themselves upon him, and endeavoured to put the fatal noose around his neck. Mustapha, being a man of considerable strength, made a stout defence, and fought...Solyman felt how critical the matter was, being only separated by the linen hangings of his tent from the stage, on which this tragedy was being enacted. When he found that there was an unexpected delay in the execution of his scheme, he thrust out his head from the chamber of his tent, and glared on the mutes with fierce and threatening eyes; at the same time, with signs full of hideous meaning, he sternly rebuked their slackness. Hereon the mutes, gaining fresh strength from the terror he inspired, threw Mustapha down, got the bowstring round his neck, and strangled him.[179]

Such accounts of the frightening and disturbing image of the Ottoman sultan ordering mutes to strangle his own son had a long-lasting effect in Orientalist conceptions of the Ottoman court, which are out of the scope of this study. However, some other passages can be quoted here from Western sources in order to illustrate how such executions were carried out. To quote Withers' addition to Ottaviano Bon's text (which originally did not include any mention of strangling):

> …when his Majesty shall resolve with himself to put a Vizir to death, or some one of their rank; and that he be willing to see it done with his own eyes in the Seraglio; he then having called him into one of his rooms, and holding him in discourse whilst his Mutes are in readiness (the poor man peradventure suspecting nothing) he makes but a sign on them, and they presently fall upon him, and strangle him, and so draw him by the heels out of the gates.[180]

Mute stranglers also involved in the much abhorred practice of fratricide, which was probably perceived as a regular phase of the accession ceremony in the 'classical era.' Perhaps it was not accidental that Mehmed II, who seems to have initiated the custom of maintaining court mutes, was also the sultan who legalized fratricide. This 'method' of succession became increasingly unpopular towards its abandonment in the early seventeenth century, as will be noticed in its last two applications mentioned here. Domenico Hierosolimitano writes the following about the accession of Murad III, who is known to have been quite reluctant to do what the custom required:

> But Sultan Murat, who was so compassionate as to be unable to see blood shed, waited eighteen hours, in which he refused to sit on the Imperial throne or to make public his arrival in the City, seeking and discussing a way first to free his nine brothers of the blood who were in the Seraglio. He consulted on this with his teacher and the Mufti and with other great men of letters (but) in the end he

[179] Quoted in Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 119.

[180] Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, p. 80.

> was unable to find any way to leave them alive. In order that he should not break the law of the Ottoman state as set out above, weeping, he sent the mutes to strangle them, giving nine handkerchiefs with his own hands to the chief of the mutes, also showing them his father, who was dead, so that they should believe him and attend to their duty.[181]

Domenico thus adds the interesting detail that the new sultan showed the mutes his father's corpse in order to make sure that they understood their duty.

The massacre of Murad III's nineteen sons at the time of Mehmed III's accession in 1595 turned out to be even more traumatic because of the unprecedented number of the victims. The whole event was carried out in a ceremonial manner; in the morning of 28th January 1595, the state officials, the viziers, and the *ulemâ* gathered at the Audience Hall waiting the end of the mutes' task while coffins were made ready in the third court.[182] Selânikî Mustafa Efendi calls the executioners "irreligious mutes" (*dinsiz ü dilsiz*)—a designation he repeats elsewhere in the book—and says that they did not hear the screams of the innocent princes.[183] Deafness thus becomes in Selânikî's rhetoric a sign of mercilessness and lack of religious/moral values. He puts the whole blame of the unpleasant duty on the mutes, which is quite unlike what Domenico and other European authors do when they stress the moral responsibility of the sultan.

Another writer, Ali Ufkî, who does not mention that mutes were executioners, makes an interesting slip of the pen when writing about mutes and instead of writing *bî-zebân*, which meant "mute, without speech," he writes "*bi zebany*" (i.e., *bî-zebânî*),[184] thus alluding to the *zebânî*s, the devils that take the sinful to the hell in Islamic terminology. It is not clear whether this association between devils and mutes is an unconscious or conscious one—maybe it was a popular word in circulation among those who disliked the mutes.

The attribute of irreligiousness and devilish character could at least partly have stemmed from the difficulty posed by the condition of mutism to the performance of

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[181] Hierosolimitano, *Domenico's Istanbul*, p. 37.

[182] Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî*, Prof. Dr. Mehmet İpşirli (ed.), Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1989, vol. 2, pp. 435-436.

[183] Ibid., p. 436. He once more calls the mutes as "irreligious (or heathen)" ("dinsiz dilsizler") on page 441.

[184] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, p. 29. This is also noted by the editors S. Yerasimos and Annie Berthier: see ibid., p. 114, fn. 44. The same mistake is repeated in Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 34 ("*Bizebani*"), and even in Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 116.

religious duties. Indeed, it is also possible to speculate that the employment of mutes as stranglers might have been the result of a consideration of their problematic condition from a religious point of view. Mutes' inability to vocally articulate the basic precepts of Islamic belief and vocal parts of daily prayers as well as the legal difficulties caused by this disability are known to have led to some discussion among Muslim scholars and required the imposition of certain special regulations that recognized the validity of signing by jestures and written declaration.[185] However, the predominant views in Hanefî and Şâfiî schools of law do not accept a mute to bear witness.[186]

Their function as stranglers seem to have came to an end by the turn of the eighteenth century, for at least two writers of that period refuse the idea that mutes were executioners. One of them, Dimitrie Cantemir, who lived in Istanbul from 1687 to 1710, knew them only as attendants in the sultan's audience hall and buffoons, and believed that mute stranglers were only a myth made up by the Europeans. Cantemir wrote that he could not imagine the reason for this mistaken view, for it had never been heard that the mutes, dwarfs, and buffoons at the court were used for such serious duties.[187] Likewise, Olivier too takes it as a European myth, arguing that it was in fact *kapıcıbaşı*s who acted as stranglers.[188] If the function of mutes as stranglers had really come to an end by the eighteenth century, then it could be noted as a unique feature of the 'classical age' in the history of dwarf and mute employment.

The knowledge that there were mute stranglers at the Ottoman sultan's court, however, served to instill much fear to Europeans. The presence of mutes during the sultan's reception of ambassadors evoked the hearsay about their past executions. Fresne-Canaye, French diplomat at the time of Selim II, mentioned the frightening sight of mutes, whom he could only glimpse as he was taken to the sultan gripped between two officers: "All around this chamber were hidden I don't know how many mutes, who are the most loyal and the most experienced executioners of the atrocious

[185] For these discussions and regulations in different Islamic schools of law see Salim Öğüt, "Dilsiz," *TDVİA*, IX, pp. 303-304.

[186] Ibid., p. 304.

[187] Dimitri Kantemir, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Yükseliş ve Çöküş Tarihi*, Dr. Özdemir Çobanoğlu (trans.), Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1980, vol. 3, p. 442.

[188] Olivier, *Türkiye Seyahatnamesi*, p. 25.

commandments of this tyrant."[189] However, as Gülru Necipoğlu comments, those executions had a very different significance in the Ottoman mentality:

> To a Western observer the sultan's executions appeared arbitrary and tyrannical, but from the Ottoman point of view they were performed within well-established norms of proper and improper conduct and represented the justice of their ruler. Those transgressors executed in the prison in the Middle Gate had been tried and found guilty in the Council Hall of the second court, which was a tribunal of public justice; those executed at the third gate were the judges themselves, who were sentenced by the sultan, as supreme judge of the empire. Therefore, to cross the threshold of the Gate of Felicity meant to suspend control over one's destiny, as one approached the omnipotent sultan. There was the danger of never coming out again, but also the enticement that one might emerge raised to the riches of still higher office, with accompanying robes of honor and other signs of status.[190]

Thus, mutes were the instruments of the sultan's own will in the site of the sultanic court, where different rules applied. In another way, too, mutes contributed to the mechanism of symbolic legitimation of the sultan: they gave their sign language as a common tongue to the imperial court, which was thus marked by the silence that surrounded the sultan's semi-sacred body.

From the reign of Süleyman I onwards, when two mute brothers introduced sign language to the palace,[191] mutes came to have a different kind of significance as they began to contribute to the solemn dignity of the court life. Sign language provided the courtiers with a respectful kind of communication, and by the sultan's order, it began to be used in the Privy Chamber. Soon, except for three favourite pages, everyone in the palace came to be obliged to communicate through signs.[192] The Venetian bailo Ottaviano Bon wrote in 1608 on the widespread use of the mute language:

> It is worthy the observation, that in the Seraglio both the Grand Seignor, and divers that are about him, can reason and discourse with the Mutes of any thing, as well and as distinctly, alla Mutescha, by nods and signs, as they can with words; a thing well befitting and suiting with the gravity of the better sort of Turks, who cannot endure much babbling. Nay, the Sultanas also, and many other of the King's women do practise it, and have many dumb women and girls about them for that purpose.[193]

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[189] Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, pp. 107-108.

[190] Ibid., p. 108.

[191] Ibid., p. 26.

[192] Ibid., p. 26.

[193] Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, p. 79.

Moreover, according to Bon, the chief reason for the employment of mutes at the court was to preserve this respectful silence around the sultan:

> This hath been an ancient custom in the Seraglio, to get as many Mutes, as they can possibly find; but chiefly for this one reason, which is, that they hold it a thing unbefitting the Grand Seignor, and not to suit with his greatness, to speak to any about him familiarly; wherefore he takes this course, that he may the more tractably and domestically jest, and talk with the Mutes, and with others that are about him, to make him pleasant, with diversity of pastime.[194]

Ali Ufkî mentions a room in the inner palace where mutes would stay whole day long, and where the senior ones would teach the "beauties" and intricacies of the sign language to the younger mutes[195]—and perhaps to the non-mutes as well. In Rycaut's words:

> in the day time [they] have their stations before the Mosque belonging to the Pages, where they learn and perfect themselves in the language of the *Mutes*, which is made up of several signs in which by custom they can discourse and fully express themselves; not only to signifie their sense in familiar questions, but to recount Stories, understand the Fables of their own Religion, the Laws and Precepts of the *Alchoran*, the name of *Mahomet*, and what else may be capable of being expressed by the Tongue.[196]

According to Ufkî, all pages at the inner court could communicate with the sign language, though their level of knowledge probably varied. For those at the Privy Chamber, it was an obligation to know it perfectly since the sultan would speak usually only with gestures, and in front of the sultan they could speak with each other only in sign language.[197]

As for the sign language's capacity of expression, Miles states that though it is clear from various sources that their sign language enabled them to express many things with ease, the data at hand do not really allow a modern linguistic assessment.[198] D'Ohsson relates that mutes "expressed themselves with rapid gestures," and that the sign language was known by the people in the court, by the harem women, and by the sultan himself.[199]

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[194] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[195] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, p. 103. Also see the plan of the Topkapı palace on p. 31. The mutes' room was to the right of the Chamber of Petitions.

[196] Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 34-35.

[197] Ali Ufkî, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Yaşam*, p. 109.

[198] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 120.

[199] D'Ohsson, *Tableau Général*, p. 177.

Sign language thus came to be used even among those who could speak in order not to disturb the reigning silence that imposed an imperial grandeur to the heart of the palace. At the same time, a strange situation came to occur, as the tongueless minority came to provide the tongued majority with their common tongue, and the disability was spread to the normal ones.

II.2.e. Other Activities of Dwarfs and Mutes

Apart from their functions noted above, dwarfs and mutes also used to act as messengers and intermediaries.[200] Though it may seem strange that mutes were employed as messengers as well, this may perhaps have an explanation on the basis of their reliability. On example involves Hadım Süleyman Ağa, often called "Dilsüz Ağa", "Ağa-i Dilsüz" or "Ağa-i Bîzebân," a mute particularly close to Safiye, mother of Mehmed III. The historian Hasan Beyzâde mentions him twice, the first being when he brought letters to Mehmed III from his mother in Istanbul and "explained her wishes by sign language" ("*sifâriş itdükleri umûrı işârât ile tefhîm eyledüğinde*") while the sultan was at the halting spot in Harmanlu near Edirne on his way back from a campaign.[201]

Similarly, dwarfs eunuchs were employed in the communication between the sultan and the harem women.[202] Moreover, eunuch mutes and dwarfs also acted as intermediaries between the imperial harem and the outside world, along with other *musahib*s, eunuchs, and *kira*s.[203] Three documents from 1644-1645 noted by Çağatay

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[200] Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 121.

[201] Hasan Bey-zâde Ahmed Paşa, *Hasan Bey-zâde Târîhi*, Şevki Nezihi Aykut (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004, vol. III, p. 544. The second reference is on ibid., p. 616: "ve havâss u mukarrebînden olmağla mezkûr, "Ağa-yı Dilsüz" dimekle meşhur Süleyman Ağa dahı, Saturcı muhallefâtından Hâssa-i hümâyûn'a lâyık murassa' âlât u esbâb ve serîr-i a'lâya tahrîr olunan telâhîs-i levâzım u mühimmât ile fermân-ı âlî üzre, Der-i devlet'e revâne oldı."

[202] Nutku, "Cüce," *TDVİA*, VIII, p. 105.

[203] Çağatay Uluçay, *Harem II*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971, p. 8. For the *kira*s—the Jewish women who attended the "sultanas"—who would buy goods for the harem from Venetian merchants, see M. Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica*, 32, 2000, p. 12.

Uluçay record the purchase of jewellery and perfume for the harem by "Buzağı Dilsiz," "musahib Halil Ağa," and "Zeyrek Cüce."[204]

According to Uluçay, birth of a prince or princess was also heralded to the grand vizier by one of the dwarfs or *musahib*s.[205] For instance, the good tidings of the birth of Esma Sultan to Abdülhamid I were given to the grand vizier by the sultan's *musahib* Cüce Abdullah Ağa.[206]

Their role as messengers is likely to have enabled them to establish contacts with various people in and out of the court, which in turn, may have contributed to their involvement in court cliques and state affairs. A couple of passages from the sources can be cited as telling examples. For instance, in 1704/5, a certain Cüce Hamza acted as the intermediary in the secret communication between the grand vizier and Hazînedâr Mehemmed Ağa, whom the former hoped to establish as the new Chief Harem Eunuch (*Dârü's-sa'âde Ağası*) instead of the queen mother's chief ağa Süleyman, who appeared as a strong candidate for the office.[207] In that particular confrontation, the dwarf seems to have aligned himself with the grand vizier against Süleyman Ağa and probably also the queen mother. Secondly, Dimitrie Cantemir recorded that it was a mute by the name of Mehmed Ağa who informed the grand vizier Köprülüzâde Fâzıl Mustafa Paşa of the conspiracy against him during the early days of Ahmed II's reign (1691-1695). The mute had understood the conversation between the sultan and the Chief Eunuch of the Harem from the movements of their lips and hands.[208] Apparently, mutes could have been less reliable attendants than the Ottomans thought them to have been.

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[204] Uluçay, *Harem II*, pp. 8-9, fn. 17. The documents are found in the Topkapı Palace Archive, No. 4155.

[205] Ibid., p. 75.

[206] Ibid., p. 85, fn. 184.

[207] Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-i Vekayiât: Tahlil ve Metin, 1656-1704*, Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1995, p. 843.

[208] Dimitri Kantemir, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Yükseliş ve Çöküş Tarihi*, Dr. Özdemir Çobanoğlu (trans.), Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1980, vol. 3, pp. 211-212.

II.3. Conclusion: The Relationship between the Sultan and His Dwarfs and Mutes

This chapter has noted, in the first place, the contrast between the case of the early Ottoman jester Mashara Arab and the dwarf and mute jesters or buffoons of the subsequent centuries. The discrepancy between the representations of these two may have stemmed from a certain change in the public image of the sultan that hindered the production and/or written record of anecdotes where the sultan would be shown as outwitted by a critical jester. But taken as a truthful representation, the Mashara Arab stories do suggest a certain change in the actual relationship between the jester and the sultan, which is significant, but difficult to prove in a definite way.

However, dwarfs and mutes also had other functions within the practical and symbolic functioning of the court. As messengers and intermediaries, both groups were part of the daily life at the court. In the case of mutes, these functions were manifold, including strangling and serving. But, for sure, we do not need to assume that each of the mutes living in the palace took part in each of the activities associated with mutes.

As for their symbolic functions, the Ottoman court ceremonial of the "classical age," which took its definitive shape during the reign of Süleyman I, used the silence of mutes in order to reinforce the sultan's difference from ordinary humans, as a creative variance to the repertoire of strategies that ensured the connection between kingship and divinity. The varying degrees of silence that corresponded to the layout of the Topkapı Palace culminated in the inner court, which was thus defined as a zone where the norms of the ordinary human relations and behaviour did not apply.

But we may perhaps speak of another way in which dwarfs and mutes contributed to the legitimation of the sultan, as well. For instance, in *The Imperial Harem*, Leslie P. Peirce makes the following comment on the people living at the immediate vicinity of the sultan:

> With the exception of the sultan, only those who were not considered to be fully adult males were routinely permitted in the inner worlds of the palace: in the male harem household, boys and young men, eunuchs, dwarves, mutes; and in the family harem household, women and children.[209]

According to this, the Ottoman sultan was the only person who could exist as a physically normal adult male within the confines of his palace, in order to be marked by

[209] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 11.

his contrast with the 'imperfect' people who surrounded him. This assumption of a symbolic relation between him and those who lived together with him has been developed further by M. E. Meeker:

> But paradoxically, having become an almost god in an almost cosmic setting, the sovereign was now unfit to engage in any form of reciprocity even as he remained a symbol of hospitality and sociability. In the inner court, his servants, forbidden to speak out or to reveal themselves, communicated in signs and hid behind columns. His personal assistants, eunuchs, mutes, and dwarfs, featured physical disabilities. His personal companions—youths who were not men, men without social origins, mothers who could not be wives, wives who could not be mothers—featured status debilitations. The sovereign as the fount and origin of an imperial normativeness, could not himself partake in horizontal social engagements, at least by the representations of official ceremony and protocols. The personal presence of a world ruler reduced every other being in his immediate environment to something less than fully human. No one "whole in being" was to be found close or near to him. The principle of sovereign oversight had in effect blasted away the imperial family. From the standpoint of ceremony and protocol, the sultan could not be a father, a son, a husband, a brother, a lover, a companion, or a friend. He could only be an ascendant or a descendant. The crossing from outer to inner palace was not a matter of entering a familial space and time, or a communal space and time. It was architecturally and ceremonially marked in order to symbolize the personal presence of the sovereign."[210]

Though it is not perhaps possible to prove at our present level of knowledge that this is how the Ottomans themselves made sense of the physically imperfect at the court, this may be noted as another possible way in which dwarfs and mutes have contributed with their imperfection to the legitimation of the sultan as a perfect being.

[210] Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 133.

Chapter III

IMPERFECT BODIES, DECAYING POLITY: THE STATUS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF COURT DWARFS AND MUTES IN THE POST-SÜLEYMANIC AGE

Beyond their symbolic functions and entertaining duties, there is a different dimension of the existence of dwarfs and mutes at the imperial household, which will be addressed in the present chapter. Focusing on their representations in the Ottoman writings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this chapter aims to provide insight into their economic and political activities as well as the patrimonial and intimate relations that they engaged in during this period. In what follows, the scrappy pieces on dwarfs and mutes in some major textual sources of the time, namely the *History* of Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, the advice treatises (particularly *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* and that of Koçi Bey), and the first volume of Mustafa Sâfî's *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh*, are introduced and evaluated with an aim to suggest the lines along which future research can advance.

The material to be examined, in fact, falls into two different categories according to the attitudes they adopt towards the disabled members of the Ottoman court. Mustafa Sâfî, writing for a completely different aim and in a different genre, provides a view that contrasts with the other sources' negative representation of dwarfs and mutes. The larger part of this chapter is, indeed, devoted to the latter view, which conceives dwarfs and mutes from within a discourse of decline, and which should be taken as only one of the ways in which mutes and dwarfs were seen in this period, as is suggested by the existence of Mustafa Sâfî's alternative representation.

A considerable part of the Ottoman writings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century—including Selânikî's *History*, *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, and Koçi Bey's treatise—were haunted by a discourse of decadence that often operated through the metaphors of deficiency, excess and corruption applied onto corporate as well as physical bodies. Acknowledging the all-encompassing character of that discourse, which translated the

entire process of transformation within the polity into a pessimistic language of decline and illness, the present chapter discusses the status and representations of the court dwarfs and mutes in this era with reference to the simultaneously changing conceptions of the empire and sultanic image and to the increasing political power of another group that was associated with a different kind of physical (and consequently mental) imperfection, namely the palace women and eunuchs.

A number of highly inimical passages on dwarfs and mutes in the *History* of Selânikî Mustafa Efendi (known as *Târîh-i Selânikî*)[211]—a particularly rich source on the topic—provides the main problematic of this chapter: How should we make sense of these and of several supporting statements by other authors of the same period? To what extent is it legitimate to speak of an ascendancy of dwarfs and mutes in that era? To what extent was a particular author's attitude towards dwarfs and mutes affected by his political standpoint and personal (dis)satisfaction with regard to the power configuration at a given time? And to what extent was his attitude rooted in a biased view about perfection of the human body and soul? What needs to be emphasized is that what these authors wrote about dwarfs and mutes, however faithful to reality they may be in reporting the latters' deeds and position within the court, are essentially representations that should not be taken for granted as disinterested observations.

Significantly, it is only in the writings of this period that I was able to find information on individual dwarfs beyond the anonymous figures and impersonal generalizations. This, in itself, can be taken as an indication that the disabled companions of sultans came to acquire a unique level of importance in this era. Still, a conclusive result would require a more detailed research and a deeper consideration of certain questions within the broader context of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which saw an unprecedented increase in the power exercised by the imperial harem, a major change in succession practices, further seclusion of sultans, and a growing feeling of decline that, being based on actual observations of the deterioration of the economy and military, was reflected in the advice literature of the period.

In addition to presenting a number of details pertaining to the life of the disabled court jesters, this chapter proposes to consider, first, the relation between the representations of dwarfs and mutes and a mental change that took place with regard to

[211] Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî*, Prof. Dr. Mehmet İpşirli (ed.), Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1989, vols. 1-2 [hereafter: Selânikî].

the sultan's body image, and second, the role and share of dwarfs and (to a lesser extent) mutes in the rise of imperial harem. The discussion in what follows will hopefully add a new dimension to the broader question of what were the behavioural limits, the role and functions of the physically different Ottoman court jester. Assessing the dwarfs and mutes of this era, we may then come back to the question of what kind of a jester the Ottoman jester was.

III.1. The Royal Body and the Change in Its Perception

In the fifty-first chapter of his book on etiquette and mores titled *Mevâ'ıdü'n-Nefâis fî-Kavâ'ıdi'l-Mecâlis* ("Tables of Delicacies"[212]), the sixteenth century author Mustafa Âlî, having stated that rulers should choose their companions from among wise people (*'ukalâ*), particularly literati (*üdebâ*) and elders (*kudemâ*), goes on to comment on the dangers of having other kinds of people as companions:

> Women's proximity causes lack of wisdom in the sultan. Being close to mutes results in his being silenced and confounded all the time. Likewise, social intercourse with dwarfs leads to lack of majesty and sitting together with eunuchs to failure in virility.[213]

This passage constitutes one of the rare keys to understand how mutes and dwarfs were viewed in Ottoman society. Here Mustafa Âlî identifies the four groups of 'imperfect' people whose proximity to the sultan would do more harm than good. As will be seen below, Âlî was not the only one who lumped together these particular four groups, and this grouping, indeed, was not uninformed by the historical reality. What is significant in these words is that the author defines each in terms of a certain lack which is supposed to be contagious like an infection. Leaving aside the Freudian implications of defining women through a 'lack,' it can be noted that while in the case of women and

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[212] The title's translation is taken from Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âlî (1541-1600)*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 181.

[213] Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, *Gelibolulu Mustafa 'Âli ve Mevâ'ıdü'n-Nefâis fî-Kavâ'ıdi'l-Mecâlis*, Mehmet Şeker (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997, p. 346: "Zenlerün takarrubu 'akl eksikliğini mûcibdür. Bî-zebânlarun yakîn olması dâyimâ mülzem ve mebhût olmasını müstevcibdür. Niteki cücelerün ülfeti naks-ı mehâbeti ve tavâşîlerün mücâleseti noksân-ı recûliyyeti müstelzimdür." Please note that in all quotations the punctuation, italics, etc. are reproduced as they appear in the source.

eunuchs the 'lack' infects the sultan as it is, in the case of mutes and dwarfs it infects him—for understandable reasons—only in a metaphorical sense. Mutes' inability to speak transforms in the sultan into a silence of bewilderment and confusion, and dwarfs' short stature acts as a visual image of deficiency in kingly majesty. Obviously, the observation that the Ottoman sultan was surrounded for symbolic reasons by people who could be defined in terms of a 'lack' had a certain basis in the Ottoman mental world. On the other hand, this passage refers only to a specific group inside the court, the *musâhib*s, the people who were the closest to the sultan, and captures a certain uneasiness among the Ottomans about the physical proximity and intimacy of the sultan with physically different and otherized people. It is possible that Âlî repeated a piece of common wisdom, a prejudiced saying that was in circulation—one which is less metaphorical than the proverb "who lies with the blind gets up cross-eyed"—and used it to support his argument in that chapter that the sultan should have wise, knowledgeable, and useful companions rather than those who are useful only to have fun with. If we leave aside the power of the hackneyed popular wisdom, how can we make sense of these words by Âlî whose cordial relations with at least one eunuch—Gazanfer Ağa—and at least one dwarf—Zeyrek—are known to us?[214]

At the same time, keeping in mind that *Mevâ'ıdü'n-Nefâis fî-Kavâ'ıdi'l-Mecâlis* was meant to be an expanded version of *Kavâ'ıdi'l-Mecâlis* ("Etiquette of Salons"), which was written for Murad III,[215] one may sense in these words a hidden agenda that goes beyond popular superstition. Murad was notorious for spending too much of his time with his *musâhib*s, who included dwarfs, mutes, women, and eunuchs.[216] These

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[214] Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, pp. 110, 112n, 150, 170, and 182-184. For "Cüce Zeyrek" see below.

Also, Âlî compares the keeping of 'useful' companions to "*salavât-ı vâcib*," and the keeping of 'useless' companions to "*farz u sünen*," which indicates that he does not totally forbid the latter (Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, *Mevâ'ıdü'n-Nefâis*, p. 347).

[215] Ibid., pp. 127, 181. The translation of the title is taken from ibid. The question is whether this passage appeared in *Kavâ'ıdi'l-Mecâlis*.

[216] Unfavourable judgements on his fondness of buffoons and women were adopted by later historiography, often with a misogynist tone. For instance, İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995, vol. III, part I, p. 44: "Sultan Murad caused the deterioration of the government affairs and state order under the influence of his women and *musâhibe*s [female *musâhib*s], because of their unnecessary and harmful interventions. Sultan Murad would spend his time with entertainers, dwarfs, and buffoons that he gathered around himself, and with women at night. Although he was merciful by nature, his extreme indulgence in women had jarred

words, therefore, can be taken as a warning if not to Murad himself then to his successor Mehmed III, to whom it was dedicated after being written in 1599.[217] On the other hand, Âlî is known to have asked to be made a *musâhib* of Murad,[218] and his recommendation of literati for companionship could be relevant.

Most importantly, the passage has a certain implication concerning the sultan's body. Whether it was inspired by a popular saying or not, Âlî displays with this statement a particular concern in protecting the sultan's body from the malicious effects that might spread from his boon companions. Independent of his own personal proximity to the 'imperfect,' Âlî probably found a germ of truth in this cliché. It may thus be taken as an indication of a certain anxiety in that era concerning the Ottoman sultan's physical and mental imperfection.

Thus, before dealing with the main body of primary material, it may be useful first to consider a transformation which took place with respect to the image of the sultan's body, which especially from Murad III's reign (1574-1595) onwards frequently departed from the ideals of military prowess and mature manhood. The reconception of the royal body accompanied the anxious observations as to the decay of the classical order in what is now called the 'post-Süleymanic' era, and implied an inevitable shift in the patterns of imperial legitimation. It can also be suggested that, as it lost its claim to physical and moral perfection, the sultan's body was dissociated from sanctity to such an extent that it ultimately came to be perceived as somewhat ordinary and even disposable.

The 'corruption' of the image of the sultan's body can indeed be traced back to the time when sultanic legitimacy began to be sought in the ruler's aloofness and invisibility instead of a visual proof that he was alive and well. The notion of imperial seclusion prevalent from Mehmed II (r. 1451-1481) onwards curtailed the access of public gaze to the sultan's body. While the carefully planned architecture of the New Palace (Topkapı) underlined the sultan's power to see without being seen and projected a royal image that was at once aloof, invisible, omniscient, and ever vigilant against injustice, the *kanunname* of Mehmed II codified in the late 1470s effectively restricted

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on his nerves."

[217] Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, p. 185.

[218] Ibid., p. 135.

the sultan's appearance in public.[219] The general inclination of the sultans after Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566) was to spend more time in the capital and especially in the palace, while the campaigns personally led by the sultan became less frequent.[220] Although it is possible to see it from today as the indication of a positive development towards a more complicated state mechanism that relied less on the personal participation of the ruler, this less martial and more sedentary type of sultan was much lamented by the *nasihatname* writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a source of the problems that were troubling the state and society.[221]

To this we may add the succession of sultans most of whom coincidentally displayed mental and physical incapacities to rule. The reign of Murad III represents a turning-point in that as well as in other respects. The body image of that sultan was associated with epilepsia and sexual licentiousness. The fear that the former might be discovered confined him to the palace further preventing the access of the public gaze (hence his "lack of majesty," for he renounced majestic appearance in public), while the latter became part of an intra-court rivalry. Furthermore, the sultan's body came to be the site of political contestation as the power struggle between his mother Nurbânu and his consort Safiye was fought over the body of Murad III. According to the historian Peçevî, Nurbânu and her daughter İsmihân (or Esmâhan) sought to break his faithful attachment to Safiye by supplying him beautiful concubines, but constantly failed first because of the sultan's disinterest in any other woman and then because of his impotence (hence his "failure in virility"). To the reader's surprise, Peçevî explicitly relates Murad's failure in an attempt of sexual intercourse, the reason of which was attributed by the queen mother to a work of magic by Safiye. Following the interrogation and torturing of some concubines close to Safiye, the 'spell' was finally 'broken,' resulting, however, in the sultan's inclination this time to extreme sexual activity, which eventually caused his death. Thus, the sultan swayed from sexual

[219] Gülru Necipoğlu, "Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Palaces," *Ars Orientalis*, 23, 1993, pp. 303-305; and *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fiftenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1991, pp. 15-22.

[220] Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 168.

[221] Ibid., p. 168.

impotence to promiscuity, i.e., from a condition of deficiency to a condition of excess, none of which seems to have been a desirable situation.[222]

Due to pure coincidence, the seventeenth century saw a succession of child and adolescent sultans under the tutelage of *valide sultan*s,[223] and mentally abnormal ones whose reputation as rulers was naturally damaged. Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617) ascended the throne when he was only fourteen years old, his son Osman II 'the Young' (r. 1618-1622) when he was fifteen, his other son Murad IV (r. 1623-1640) at the age of eleven, and his grandson Mehmed IV (r. 1648-1687) when he was as young as seven. Mustafa I (r. 1617-1618 and 1622-1623) was clearly mentally incapable of ruling, and İbrahim 'the Mad' (r. 1640-1648) suffered a certain ill-defined neurotic disorder. In this century, perhaps only Murad IV can be considered successful in restoring the martial and manly image of the Ottoman sultan in his later years. Moreover, reinforcing the sultan's becoming a more ordinary and deposable figure, the seventeenth century saw the depositions and assasinations of Osman II and İbrahim, and the depositions of Mustafa I (twice) and Mehmed IV. During the tragic events of his deposition that led to his regicide, Osman II was subjected to unprecedented insults, which attested to the desacralization of the sultan's body.[224] While the conception of the ideal royal body (as male, adult, with unimpaired physical and mental functions, and maintaining a certain balance in his behaviour) probably remained the same, the depreciation of the sultan's body image may have worked as an analogy to the decaying polity.

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[222] Peçevî İbrahim, *Peçevi Tarihi*, Bekir Sıtkı Baykal (ed.), Istanbul: Neşriyat Yurdu, 1981, vol., 2, pp. 2-3.

[223] One indication that the sultan's being a child caused unease is a miniature from the reign of Ahmed I that shows Mehmed I in an unusual fashion as a beardless youth: Banu Mahir, "Extending the Tradition (1600-1700): Portraits in new context," in *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, Selmin Kangal (ed.), Priscilla Işın (trans.), Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2000, p. 302. The youth of an illustrious ancestor must have been emphasized as a soothing parallel to Ahmed I's young age at the time of his accession to the throne.

[224] Nicolas Vatin and and Gilles Veinstein use the term "désacralisation" in their account of the descent of the semi-divine Ottoman sultan to earth in the first half of the seventeenth century; see their *Le Sérail Ébranlé: Essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans, XIV^e^-XIX^e^ siècle*, Fayard, 2003, pp. 218-251. Peirce interprets these events in terms of a shift of the subjects' loyalty from the individual sultan to the dynasty: *The Imperial Harem*, p. 263.

Also note that after his assasination, the physical integrity of Osman's body was violated as his ear was cut to be a proof of his death.

A certain amount of Ibn Khaldûnism among the Ottoman literati must have further strengthened the association of the sense of decline with a body image. The anthropomorphic understanding of the life-span of the state suggested that decline was inevitable. In his *Düstûru'l-amel li-ıslahi'l-halel* ("The Rule of Action for the Rectification of Defects") written in the 1650s, Kâtib Çelebi, recognizing that the Ottoman Empire has passed its stage of growth long ago, however, argued that it is possible to prolong the period of stagnation (which the Ottoman Empire was in) by certain precautions.[225] As he explains his diagnosis, he further biologizes the state and society by alluding to the four elements in human body that have counterparts on the social scale, the excess and deficiency of which cause maladies.

The trope of old age and illness relevant to the decaying state, the notions of excess and deficiency which corrupted the royal body and the body of the state, and the failure of successive sultans to meet the requirements of the ideal royal person arguably added up to a certain state of mind in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The suggestion is that the feeling about the departure of the royal body from the ideal and of the body politic from its ideal state contributes to and is contributed by the dissatisfaction from the increased political power wielded by the harem staff (eunuchs, women servants, dwarfs, and mutes) who, due to the growing imperial seclusion, enjoyed the proximity of the sultan more in this period. The notion of the infectiousness of disability and imperfection in the above quotation from Mustafa Âlî makes sense in this context. It is with reference to this frame of mind that Selânikî's remarks about dwarfs and mutes should be considered.

III.2. Selânikî's *History*: Dwarfs and Mutes as the Source of All Evil

III.2.a. The Sultanate of "the Incomplete Ones"

On 10th February 1595 [16th Cemâziyelevvel 1003], Mehmed III, who had ascended the throne just a couple of weeks ago, had to cancel the regular Friday

[225] Kâtip Çelebi, *Bozuklukların Düzeltilmesinde Tutulacak Yollar (Düstûru'l-amel li-ıslahi'l-halel)*, Ali Can (ed.), Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1982, pp. 20-21.

procession due to the extreme chill and snow that virtually paralyzed life in the capital city. Recording the event in his *History*, Selânikî Mustafa Efendi remembered the times of the late sultan Murad III, who was forced to seclude himself in the palace not by any natural phenomenon but by the threats of "those who are among the world's harmful creatures, the incomplete specimens of mankind, the dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs and senior concubines,[226] who had a powerful presence during the reign of the late and blessed sultan Murad." In all his bitterness, Selânikî recalled that they prevented the sultan from attending Friday prayers for more than two years menacing him that he would be dethroned by the conspiracy of the Slaves of the Porte if he dared to leave the palace. They thus ran the state, he goes on to say, by means of bribery, manipulating imperial mandates (sultanic writs) in the way they wanted, until the new sultan, thanks to God, expelled them all from the palace.[227]

The author's extraordinarily harsh tone was evidently encouraged by the demise of Murad III and by the seemingly drastic action taken by Mehmed against the hated clique of harem staff and confidants that had grouped around his father. A digression though it is, this passage constitutes a sincere revelation of what Selânikî actually thought about the reign of Murad, who is portrayed here as a weak, vulnerable, and cowardly—note the word "*tahvîf*" ('frighten') that underlines the element of fear in this menace—ruler living almost as a hostage within the confines of the palace. This depiction is counterbalanced by the image of the new sultan who is said to have bravely contested what was much later designated as the "sultanate of women, *nedim*s and *musahib*s".[228]

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[226] The word is *bula* ('elder sister'), which was used to refer to senior concubines in charge of the imperial harem until it came to be replaced by the term *kalfa* in the course of the sixteenth century: Ç. Uluçay, *Harem II*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971, p. 142.

[227] Selânikî, pp. 444-445: "...ve haşerât-ı arzdan nev'-i benî insânun nâkısâtı cüceler ve dilsizler ve hadımlar ve bulalar, ki sultân Murad Han-ı mağfur devrinde küllî zuhurları var idi, eyledükleri evza' ve etvârları hakîkaten bekâ-i izzete delâlet itmezdi. Ve iki yıldan mütecâviz zemân Pâdişâh-ı mağfûrı cum'a namazına çıkmağa mâni' olup, ‹‹Çıkarsın ammâ Sarây-ı Âmire'ye giremezsin, kul tâ'ifesinin ittifâkı vardur, hâşâ hal'iderler›› diyü tahvîf idüp, istedükleri üzre hatt-ı hümâyûn ile rüşvetler alup, maslahatlar görürlerdi. El-hamdü li'llâh ta'âlâ Pâdişâh-ı sa'âdet-intibâh hazretleri mülhem bi's-sevâb olub cümlesin dergâhdan sürüp çıkardı. Allâh ta'âlâ re'y-i âlem-ârây-ı isâbet-pezîr üstine dâ'im ü sâbit idüp avn-i İlâhî karîn-i devlet-i nâ-mütenâhî ola."

[228] İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995, vol. III, part I, p. 43. As an example of the uncritical treatment of such excerpts in

How are we to make sense of this passage, which seems to express a unique burst of hatred towards dwarfs and mutes in Ottoman history? Selânikî not only signals that there was a clique of dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs and women that interfered in state affairs, but also claims that those were so powerful as to practically imprison the reigning sultan and prevent him from performing his religious (and sultanic) duty. Here he seems to suggest that the physical imperfection of this group was coupled by their moral imperfection which is manifest in their insolence (for they overtly threaten the sultan in an unseemly manner: "*Çıkarsın ammâ Sarây-ı Âmire'ye giremezsin*…" ["If you leave once, you shall never be let again into the Topkapı Palace…"], at which Murad is supposed to have remained "silenced and confounded" ["*mülzem ve mebhût*"] like a mute, to quote Mustafa Âlî) and in their implied irreligiousness (for they are an obstacle to the performance of religious duty). It is necessary to note that Murad III indeed avoided going to the Friday procession in the last two years of his reign, yet the alternative explanation that circulated as rumour was his desire to conceal his worsening epilepsia, which, as has already been suggested, could have been considered as another failure in sultanic merit. What is particularly striking in Selânikî's passage is the claim that the dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs and women took bribes in return for sultanic writs ("*istedükleri üzre hatt-ı hümâyûn ile rüşvetler alup, maslahatlar görürlerdi*"), which casts tremendous doubt on the segregated sultan's 'free will,' thereby indirectly criticizing the practice of seclusion, for it means that those mandates were heavily influenced by this clique, if not actually dictated by them. What was bad about imperial seclusion was that it was hard to know what was going on inside; and here we have a clue on how things could have been perceived by outsiders.

If we are to believe in Selânikî, we should accept that the reign of Murad III was in fact the sultanate of dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs, and concubines, which ended—or he then hoped that it would end—with the accession of the new sultan. To be sure, "the sultanate of women" was suggested long ago, and has since then proved to be quite a popular designation for a period in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[229] It is

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historiography, in a section on the "characters of Ottoman sultans" in his *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı*, Uzunçarşılı notes this passage along with a quotation of the insolent threat "Çıkarsın ammâ Sarây-ı Âmire'ye giremezsin…"—without mentioning the source—as a piece of neutral information and a matter of fact: Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988, p. 88.

[229] "The Sultanate of Women" is the title of a work by Ahmed Refik (Altınay), which is marked by its misogynist approach: *Kadınlar Saltanatı*, Istanbul, 1332/1913-

understandably not difficult to associate eunuchs with "women's sultanate," but 'dwarfs and mutes' is definitely a new addition. The probability that dwarfs and mutes could have partook this power concentrated in the imperial harem goes virtually unnoticed not only in Ahmed Refik Altınay's work but also in Leslie P. Peirce's acclaimed study on the women at the Ottoman court.[230] Given the present level of knowledge on the period, the dwarfs and mutes' share in this 'sultanate' must certainly be a relatively minor one. Why then does Selânikî attribute them such an undue significance that seems to eclipse that of women and eunuchs?

A possible answer may lie in his careful avoidance of overtly criticizing the most powerful women in the harem. Indeed, Peirce has pointed to the fact that Ottoman writers tended to be quite reticent about women in general due to "an etiquette that mandated silence with regard to women."[231] Selânikî, however, does reveal his dissatisfaction about the ascendancy of women by mentioning some albeit anonymous "senior concubines" together with the (other) "incomplete" and "harmful creatures," whose "behaviour would not indicate any trace of honour" ("*eyledükleri evza' ve etvârları hakîkaten bekâ-i izzete delâlet itmezdi*"). Still, he does not say anything unfavourable about the *kethüdâ* Canfedâ Hâtun but about her brother,[232] and not about Safiye Sultan, who was Murad III's consort and Mehmed III's mother, but about her *kira*.[233] Likewise, by emphasizing in his account the role of dwarfs and mutes, and to a

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14, 4 vols.

[230] Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

[231] Leslie P. Peirce, "Shifting Boundaries: Images of Ottoman Royal Women in the 16th and 17th Centuries," *Critical Matrix*, 4, 1988, pp. 65-66.

[232] Canfedâ was the superintendent of the harem (*kethüdâ*) and one of the four most powerful women at that time, apart from the sultan's mother Nurbânû, his sister İsmihan, and his *haseki* Safiye Sultan. She was initially allied with the first two, then (in İpşirli's words) "ensured the trust" of the latter after the death of Nurbânû. Upon the dismissal and imprisonment of her brother, the governor of Diyârbekir İbrâhim Paşa 'the Mad' ['Deli' or 'Dîvâne' İbrâhim Paşa], whom Selânikî presents as an oppressor hated by people, she used whatever means she could afford to save her brother from that difficult situation: Mehmet İpşirli, "Canfedâ Hatun," *TDVİA*, vol. 7, p. 150. See Selânikî, pp. 247, 256, 302, 351, and 436.

[233] The word *kira* (from the Greek word "lady") refers to the Jewish women who were the contacts of the royal women outside the harem. Only three of them are known by their names: Fatma Hâtun (*kira* of Hafsa Sultan, mother of Süleyman I), Esther Handali (*kira* of Nurbânu, and after her death of Safiye), and Esperanza Malchi (*kira* of Safiye) (M. Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica*, 32,

less extent eunuchs, he seems to mean to direct his criticism towards the unmentioned royal women. After all, blaming the associates could make the criticism more palatable and 'politically correct.' Selânikî's choices about whom to blame and whom not, moreover, give us an idea about what was palatable and what was not, from which it is possible to deduce the political weight of each individual within the map of power.[234]

In fact, on the surface, the sequence of "dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs, and senior concubines" can perhaps be conceived in terms of an emotional decrescendo that goes from the most explicitly hated to the least. It is, indeed, not so clear whether the designation "those who are among the world's harmful creatures, the incomplete specimens of mankind" ("*haşerât-ı arzdan nev'-i benî insânun nâkısâtı*") is meant for the senior concubines as well, for the force of this degradatory utterance seems to (and perhaps intended to) fade away towards the last term (i.e., "senior concubines"), which it may seem to describe only barely. Yet, given Mustafa Âlî's previously quoted warning, where the very same group of four are defined in terms of 'lack' ("*eksiklik*," "*naks*," or "*noksân*"), one may justifiably assume that "the incomplete" ("*nâkısât*") comprise the women as well, though less emphasized by means of a little syntactical trick. As will be seen below, among all dwarfs are the ones that Selânikî attacks the most, even mentioning their individual names. As reflected in his account, for Selânikî, the dwarfs of Murad III are the arch-enemies, the 'other' par excellence. The mutes are merely their less significant associates, the silent and anonymous shadows of dwarfs.

Then, the question is: what was the nature of the relationship of dwarfs and mutes with the women of the imperial harem? How could they be associated with women and eunuchs? It is crucial to note that whenever Selânikî mentions 'dwarfs and mutes,' he most probably refers first and foremost to the male, and moreover, castrated ones; which automatically means that he uses the term eunuch (*hadım* or *tavâşî*) for only those who were neither dwarf nor mute. This is inferred from the fact that two out of the four dwarfs whose names he mentions are explicitly referred to as eunuchs as well, and one among the other two is also introduced as from the imperial harem.[235] The

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2000, pp. 11-13, 22).

[234] He does not direct any criticism to Hadım Süleyman Ağa (often called "Dilsüz Ağa", "Ağa-i Dilsüz," or "Ağa-i Bîzebân"), for example, who used to contact the Venetian bailo on behalf of Safiye: Pedani, "Safiye's Household," p. 20. See ibid., p. 20n for the documents in the Venetian archives concerning Süleyman.

[235] Ca'fer and Zeyrek are described as "eunuch dwarfs" ("*hadım cüceler*"), and

other one, being identified as an "*Ağa*," was also probably a eunuch *ağa* from the harem.[236] Moreover, in a passage relating the removal of dwarfs and mutes from the palace following the death of Murad III, Selânikî seems to consider only those who resided in the harem.[237] In any case, it is more plausible for eunuch dwarfs and mutes to have been in such a powerful position at a time of women's ascendancy since their eunuchism would make it possible to establish contacts both in and out of the imperial harem. The roles of dwarfs and mutes as messengers within the court and as procurers for the harem, which has been seen in the second chapter, reinforced their function as intermediaries between various parties, thus enabling them to contact with outsiders as well as with male and female residents of the palace.

Thus, the observation that dwarfs, mutes, eunuchs, and the women servants of the harem were closely associated with one another is not simply the expression of an irrational hatred towards the physically different but probably based on a real situation that was experienced disapprovingly by some. It is quite likely that at the time of the ascendancy of the harem women, mutes and dwarf eunuchs formed part of the group of intermediaries who acted as the agents of the harem at the outside world and therefore on whom the women's ability to execise power partly depended. M. P. Pedani points out that, in the late sixteenth century, along with eunuchs, women servants, and *kira*s, dwarfs and mutes too had contacts with foreign ambassadors on behalf of the royal women.[238] Indeed, the British ambassador Edward Barton, with whom Murad III's dwarfs maintained relations, lamented the 'expulsion' of dwarfs and mutes from the palace upon Mehmed III's accession, which Selânikî welcomed so happily, on the grounds that "the eunuchs, the dwarfs and the women of the harem he [Murad III] had used in his diplomatic game were now swept away to the Old Seraglio like so much lumber."[239] It is significant that the ambassador recognized the dwarfs (and the eunuchs,

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Cehûd Cüce as from the harem. See below.

[236] For "Cüce Nasuh Ağa" see below. Fleischer introduces him as "a dwarf of the Harem" only on the basis of the passage in Selânikî (*Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, pp. 108).

[237] Selânikî, p. 441: "…mashara kalıb cücelerden ve dinsiz dilsizlerden Harem-i muhteremde kimse kalmayup…"

[238] Pedani, "Safiye's Household," p. 11. She also adds the female relatives of eunuchs, dwarfs, and mutes to this list of intermediaries.

[239] Quoted in Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio," p. 120, from S. Mayes, *An Organ for the Sultan*, London: Putnam, 1956, p. 63.

and the harem women) as the agents of Murad III and not (only) of his mother and of his consort. Understandably, the ascendancy (or "sultanate") of the women does not necessarily mean that Murad III was merely cast aside as a powerless doll, as Selânikî's comments seem to imply. But what is certain is that dwarfs and mutes played a role within the "diplomatic game" at this period, even though its unrecorded details we may never know.

Moreover, by suggesting that dwarfs were also transferred to the Old Palace (*Eski Saray* or *Saray-i Atik*), where a deceased sultan's family would be lodged, Barton's words point to the possibility that the displacement of dwarfs in the early days of Mehmed III's reign that Selânikî presents as an 'expulsion' due to their corrupt behaviour may well have been part of the regular replacement of the former sultan's household with that of the new one. Nevertheless, as will be seen below, Mehmed III may have initially desired to keep at least some of his father's disabled jesters (as his son Ahmed I would keep his dwarf Habîb[240]), but for some reason decided not do so. Even if we accept that this was not because he was motivated to gain God's reward for good conduct ("*mülhem bi's-sevâb olub*") as Selânikî claims, we may imagine that while some of the dwarfs and mutes were sent away as part of the regular displacement process, others—or some of the others—who remained eventually left the palace because of some other reasons, which will be discussed in the following section.

Mehmed III, of course, continued the tradition to keep dwarfs and mutes, as textual and pictorial evidence suggests. Although his accession apparently produced a break in the individual careers of dwarfs and mutes, by the way cutting off some informal diplomatic connections that had been established in the previous period, it is misleading to assume that the relation between women and dwarfs and mutes changed in an fundamental way in and after 1595. Mehmed did not launch any substantial change in the structure of the harem, and what has been termed as "the sultanate of women" (and of eunuchs, dwarfs, and mutes) did not come to an end with his coming to the throne. In the following century, Evliya Çelebi accused a group including dwarfs and mutes as well as eunuchs, women, and other *musâhib*s of leading Sultan İbrahim astray and of bribery.[241] Apparently, the influence of dwarfs and mutes—though

[240] See below.

[241] Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, Orhan Şaik Gökyay (ed.), Istanbul: YKY, 1996, vol. 1, p. 112: "İcmāl-i salṭanat kār-ı 'āḳıbet sa'īd-i şehīd Sulṭān İbrahīm Ḫān ibni Sulṭān Aḥmed Ḫān … tārīḫinde pādişāh-ı maġfūr cülūs itdükde Ḳara

probably with ups and downs that cannot be charted at this stage of research—was not unique to the reign of Murad III and continued afterwards, as dissatisfaction with their position was not unique to Selânikî.

III.2.b. Cases of Individual Dwarfs and Their Expulsion from the Palace

It needs to be noted that Selânikî's remarks about dwarfs and mutes—but again, mainly about dwarfs—are distributed in an uneven fashion in his *History*, which in its entirety comprises the period 1563-1600. Apart from one brief and neutral note on how mutes lamented the death of Süleyman I in 1566,[242] there is one passage concerning a dwarf for the year 1582, and the remaining majority of the passages concentrate between the years 1591 and 1595, i.e., from the year 1000 after Hijra to the expulsion of Murad III's dwarfs from the palace after his death.[243] It is also crucial to mention that Selânikî seems to have written every passage in his work more or less immediately after the event it relates to, as is indicated by a number of clues within the text. This makes it necessary to take his reactions as his responses to contemporary developments.

III.2.b.i. Cüce Nasuh Ağa and the bribery scandal

The earliest note about dwarfs in Selânikî's *History* involves a bribery scandal that erupted sometime between the end of the circumcision festival of the crown prince Mehmed and Sinan Paşa's first dismissal from the office of grand vizirate, i.e., between

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Muṣṭafā Paşa ṣadr-ı aʿẓam bulunup ḫayırḫāh-ı devlet bir vezīr-i dilīr idi. Anı atl idüp cümle muṣāḥibin ve cüceler ve bīzbānlar [sic] ve ṭavāşī ʿArablar ve ḫāṣekī ve nisvān ve ṣāḥib-i ʿışyān ve muṣāḥibeler ve ġayrı muṣāḥib Cinci Ḫoca ve Hezārpāre Vezīr-i aʿẓam Aḥmed Paşa ṭaraf ṭaraf furca bulup ol pādişāh sāde dilince biñ tatlı dil ile ʿurūḳına girüp gūna-gūn hevā-yı hevese düşürüp vezīre ve vükelā ve ʿulemā ve ṣuleḥālarından celb-i māl içün rüşvet almağa başlatdılar. Ve pādişāhı zenān ṣoḥbetine dadandurup…"

[242] Selânikî, p. 50.

[243] Thus, all significant passages about dwarfs and mutes were written after the death of Sokollu Mehmed Paşa in 1579, to whose clique Selânikî was attached.

July-December 1582.[244] A certain Cüce Nasuh Ağa, who is introduced as a "*mukarreb*" (someone who is close to, a confidant) of the sultan Murad III, was accused of having undesired connections with people from outside. First, he lost his status as a companion of the sultan; he fell from favour, and his personal contact with the sultan was cut off ("*nazardan dûr u mahcûr*"), while the final decision about him was pending. At that stage of the affair, when there was a possibility that he might be totally rejected and sent away ("*belki redd ü tard olmak üzre*"), he was transferred from the palace to the house of the governor of Rumeli (apparently until they decide what to do with him), and moreover, a *ze'âmet* of no less than 40,000 *akça*s was taken away from him, which is a striking piece of information that confirms the complains about *timar*-holding dwarfs and mutes to be mentioned below.[245]

Up to here, everything seems to be a petty affair about one insignificant dwarf—though one of a considerable income. Nevertheless, the narrative suddenly takes a serious turn when Selânikî relates that those occupying the highest echelons of the empire's finance administration were altogether dismissed (because of their

[244] Selânikî, p. 136: "**Cüce Nasuh Ağa'nın merdûd olduğu ve mürebbîlerinün hizlânıdur.** Ve bu esnâda mukarreb-i hazret-i Pâdişâh-ı âlem-penâh, Cüce Nasuh Ağa'nun ‹‹Taşra halkıyle eli olup küllî ihtilâtı vardur›› diyü nazardan dûr u mahcûr ve belki redd ü tard olmak üzre Dergâh-ı âlî müteferrikalığı ile Anatolı Beğlerbeğisine ‹‹Düşenden kırk bin akça ze'âmet tedârük idesin›› diyü hükm-i şerîf virilüp ve Rûmili Beğlerbeğisi İbrahim Paşa hazretleri evine çıkup ve Baş-defterdâr Okçı-zâde Mehmed Çelebi ve Anatolı Defterdârı Sinan Efendi ve Şıkk-ı sânî Defterdârı Süleysî (ثلیثی) Ahmed Çelebi cümleten ma'zûl buyurılup vilâyet-i Haleb Defterdârı İbrahim Efendi Baş-defterdârlığa gelmek buyurıldı. Ve Baş-rûznâmeci Mahmud Çelebi Şıkk-ı sânî defterdârı olmak fermân olundı. Ve Hazîne-i Âmire kâtiblerinde silsile oldı. Ve ‹‹Ma'zûl olan Okçı-zâde Efendi'de mâl-i rişvetden küllî mebâliğ vardur›› diyü Cüce Nasuh Ağa'nun temessükât kîsesinde ba'zı defâtir ve tezâkir-i rüşvet bulunmağla Yeniçeri Ağası Ferhad Ağa habsine virilüp teftîş fermân olundı. Rûmili kadıaskerliğinden mütekâ'id Bostân-zâde Efendi müfettiş buyuruldı. Ve Anatolı Defterdârı Sinan Efendi dahi mezbûr Cüce'nin yed-i rişveti olduğı zâhir olup, ba'zı müdde'îler zuhûr idüp hakk taleb eylemeğin Rûmili Beğlerbeğisi İbrahim Paşa hapsine virilüp ve Anatolı Kadıaskerliğinden mütekâ'id Molla Çelebi Efendi müfettiş buyuruldı. Ve Cüce Nasuh Ağa Yedi-kulle'ye habs olundı. Teftîş olunan defterdâr efendilerden odun yığını altında ve dahi pinhâh [sic] olması kâbil olan yerlerde birer mikdâr altun ve guruş çıkardılup zabt olundı. Ve Nasuh Ağa'nın murassa' u mücevher esbâbları Mîr-âhûr Kurd Ağa eliyle kabz olundı. Ve bi'l-cümle niçe ırz eksikliğiyle cem' olan esbâbun ekseri zecr u kahr ile meydâna gelüp âşikâr oldı. *Ne'ûzü bi'llâhi min şurûri enfüsinâ ve min seyyiâti a'mâlinâ*."

[245] Cf. Ağa Dilsüz's *ze'âmet* of around two hundred thousand *akça*s: see Orhonlu, Cengiz (ed.), *Osmanlı Tarihine Âid Belgeler: Telhîsler (1597-1607)*, Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1970, p. 9.

involvement in the affair), and the financial bureaucracy was shaken by a chain of dismissals and promotions ("*silsile*"). However biased Selânikî may be about Murad III's dwarfs, there is no reason to assume that he made up the connection between those dismissals and the dwarf's affair. What is, however, noteworthy is his obvious preference to put the emphasis on the dwarf's role rather than the others'. If he is describing here one and the same affair that involved Nasuh and the directors of finance, what kind of a consideration was it that led him to present the former, instead of the latters, as the main actor of the whole scandal?

Indeed, the title announces that the passage relates how Cüce Nasuh Ağa was rejected and his "educators" or "trainers" were abandoned (by the sultanic favour), putting thus the dwarf to a primary position vis-à-vis "his trainers" ("*mürebbîleri*"), i.e., those who taught him these immoral ways of conduct, those who encouraged him to be outsiders' bribed intermediary within the court. This word, however, also reduces the dwarf to a childish position, which brings to mind not an unexpected association between dwarfs and children or childishness, and at the same time, perhaps evokes the dwarf's relative innocence—maybe in Selânikî's view, he was essentially a helpless creature inclined to do evil by his nature, and urged to do so by some greater minds.

According to the text, those provokers were the highest bureaucrats in the financial administration that seem to have received bribes with the help of the dwarf, who probably was the intermediary between "outsiders" or "commoners" ("*taşra halkı*") and the bureaucrats who were inside the state apparatus. Therefore, this instance can be telling—apart from any consideration of the history of dwarfs—for any attempt to understand how the bribery mechanism operated at the Ottoman court. It is certainly easier to associate dwarfs with women who were supposed to be out of the state, but how could we possibly imagine the connection—or 'business partnership'—between a director of finance and a dwarf jester (who is in theory the antithesis of what the former represents) if it were not for this passage in Selânikî?

The rest of the story relates the discovery of the immense wealth accumulated through bribery. It turned out that the dismissed chief director of finance Okçı-zâde Mehmed Çelebi had acquired a considerable amount of money in this way, and Cüce Nasuh Ağa's account papers indicated that he took bribes, upon which he was imprisoned. It also came to be understood that the finance director of Anatolia too was involved in this dirty business, as the expression "*mezbûr Cüce'nin yed-i rişveti olduğı zâhir olup*" seems to mean that he was taking bribes through the hand of (or through the

intercession of) the dwarf, who was an intermediary. Upon the appearance of certain claimants who apparently bore witness against him, the finance director of Anatolia was also imprisoned. An investigation was started, and the dwarf was transferred to the dungeon of Yedikule. The money that the directors were hiding in secret places were found and disclosed; the dwarf's jewelled possessions were seized; in short, all the wealth accumulated through immoral means were uncovered and taken away by force.

There might be a chronological confusion in this passage, for the directors of finance may have been dismissed after their connection with the dwarf was discovered, and not before.[246] In any case, this passage does not answer possible questions that may come to mind: If there was an alliance between the bureaucrats of finance and the dwarf, what did they achieve? What were those bribes given for? Who were the claimants, and what did they really claim? These points are left in obscurity. Selânikî being the only narrative source on the affair, his presentation cannot be compared with anything—perhaps only with archival material if there is any. For the time being, we may conclude that there was such an affair in which a dwarf took part, but the author's emphasis on his role might partly stem from his own prejudice against dwarfs.

III.2.b.ii. Dwarfs, mutes, and the year 1000

For almost ten years after this affair, Selânikî did not write anything related to dwarfs or mutes. Our scarce knowledge on Selânikî's life does not really permit to any hypothesis that may link his personal condition at a given moment to his concern about dwarfs at that time. However, since the main group of his hostile remarks begins with a passage revealing his worries stemming from the anxious expectations concerning the year 1000 AH, apocalyptic expectations that prevailed around the date could have triggered his concerns about certain social problems that could have eventually brought about the downfall of the state.

In that passage, what he mentions is precisely those problems and the anxiety they caused in people. Like Mustafa Âlî, with whom he shared probably a common

[246] This probably stems from Selânikî's preference to provide first a summary of what happened, and the details later.

intellectual milieu and definitely common complaints,[247] Selânikî "may have intellectually rejected the notion that the world would come to an end," yet "he had at least subconsciously participated in popular expectation that great events and calamitous changes would come about in the year 1000."[248] Thus, he does not mention any expectation about apocalypse but the general belief among people that "the year 1000 is the time for great events."[249] In this passage, he captures the popular fear that a rebellion may break out at any time.[250] After this, he comes to the complaints about widespread corruption and favouritism. According to Selânikî, nobody was doing his job with integrity and fear anymore, but all bureaucrats connected themselves to mutes, dwarfs and eunuchs to whom they gave gifts every month. High offices were being purchased by bribes. As a result, he observes, everybody is bewildered and desperate in the face of this situation, and could not do anything but pray for an improvement in the state of affairs.[251]

III.2.b.iii. Cehûd Cüce, Favouritism and Impudence

But the next mention of a dwarf's name comes only in 1592, in a passage that brings to mind the possibility that Selânikî's inimical attitude may stem from his personal problems with dwarfs.[252] According to this, on 16th April 1592 [4th Receb

[247] On the common points between the two bureaucrats and the parallelisms between their works and outlook see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, pp. 130-131.

[248] Ibid., p. 138.

[249] Selânikî, p. 257.

[250] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

[251] Selânikî, p. 258: "Sıdk ü istikâmet ve havf u haşyet ile hidmet ider kimse mukayyed olmayup, cemi'-i erbâb-ı kalem ve küttâb, dilsizler ve cüceler ve tavâşîlere ihtisâs u intisâb eyleyüp, pîşkeş ü hedâyâların mâh be-mâh maktû' tarîkile virilüp, menâsıb-ı aliyye hod alâniyeten rüşvet-i azîm ile bey' olunup, hiç bir tarîk u sınıfda lezzet kalmadı. Her kişi hayretdedür. ‹‹*Allâhümme yâ Muhavvilü'l-ahvâl, havvil hâlenâ ilâ ahseni'l-hâl*›› dimekdedür."

[252] Selânikî, p. 266: "Ve der-akab şehr-i recebün dördünci güni Anatolı Muhâsebeciliğinden bu fakîr u hakîr ref' buyurulup, kerrât u merrât hıyânet ü habâset-i nefs ile meşhûr u benâm olup, cezîre-i Kıbrıs'a sürgün olan Koca Işık Ali Çelebi, ki bu def'a dahi kat'-ı yedden halâs olup, Cezâ'ir-i Garb'a sürgün olmak fermân olunup, on beş gün gemide yatup, alâkasın kat' eylemek şartıyla çıkmış iken hıyânet ve iftirâ vü

1000], Selânikî was dismissed from his post as the Chief Accountant of Anatolia,[253] which was then re-occupied by a certain Koca Işık Ali Çelebi, whose "perfidy and villainy" had been evident in many occasions. Selânikî was especially embittered by the fact that a man with such a past record of punishments was delivered by means of bribery and deceit. He accuses the new Swordbearer and a dwarf called Cuhûd [sic] Cüce (Cehûd Cüce, the 'Jewish Dwarf') for interceding and bearing false witness on Ali Çelebi's loyalty and honesty. Thus, beyond all disinterested condemnations of favouritism that appeared in the writings of the period, this passage shows that Selânikî himself was personally harmed by such practices that elevated undeserving people to high positions. The involvement of a dwarf in the affair surely must have reinforced his already unfavourable opinion about the vertically challenged.

In the next relevant passage, the name of a significant dwarf *musâhib* of Murad III is mentioned for the first time. On 10th November 1593 [15th Safer 1002], Cüce Zeyrek's brother was appointed to the governorate of Rakka.[254] This appointment, according to the author, was once more a result of the dwarf's personal influence and intimacy with the sultan. Given the dwarf eunuch Zeyrek's prestige in the eyes of the sultan, Selânikî was cautious at that point to appear neutral in his report of the event, although this particular dwarf was going to be the object of his very hostile remarks after the death of Murad.

A remarkable event took place in January 1594 [late Rebî'ulâhir 1002], as the dwarf known as Cehûd Cüce (the 'Jewish Dwarf') from the imperial harem —though not explicitly stated, most probably the very same one that had involved in Selânikî's dismissal about two years ago—was expelled for having uttered shamelessly offensive words about the chastity of the harem women and about the viziers.[255] The dwarf was

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bühtândur, sâdık u müstakîm nâmına yeni Silahdâr Ağa ve Cuhûd [sic] Cüce rüşvet virüp şefâ'at itmeğle sûret-i rastda arz olunup, tekrâr Anatolı Muâshesebiliğine [sic] getürdiler. Fî 4 recebülmürecceb, sene-i elf."

[253] He does not mention in this passage, but his dismissal seems to be closely connected to the dismissal of Ferhad Paşa from grand vizirate (M. İpşirli, "Giriş," in Selânikî, p. XIV).

[254] Selânikî, p. 338: "Ve Harem-i muhteremde Hadım Cüce Zeyrek Ağa kurb-ı Pâdişâh-ı sa'âdet-destgâhda makbûlü'ş-şefâ'a olmağla karındaşı Rakka Beğlerbeğisi olup Dîvân-ı mu'allâya geldi. Vüzerâ-i izâm — *edâme'llâhu ta'âlâ iclâlehû* — hazretleriyle girüp pâye-i serîr-i a'lâya yüz sürdiler. Fî 15 şehr-i safer, sene 1002."

[255] Selânikî, p. 353: "**Harem-i şerîfden Cehûd Cüce taşra bırağılduğıdur.** Ve evâhir-i şehr-i rebî'ullâhirede bi-inâyet-i'llâhi ta'âlâ halk-ı âlemün Rabbü'l-izzet

apparently an unconverted Jew, which reminds of the fact that in the Ottoman Empire many buffoons, especially those performing in the festivals, were traditionally Jewish.[256] Selânikî Mustafa Efendi did not conceal his joy for this 'divine' retribution, as he took the event as an indication that people's prayers were accepted by God.

The wording is noteworthy; for example, the expression that describes the dwarf, "[*pâdişâhın*] *nazar-ı kimyâ-i sa'âdet-eserlerinden*," brings together three words, the combination of which is hard to translate though individual words may give an idea: *kimyâ* alludes to the dwarf's being a 'rare and precious "thing;"'[257] *nazar* ('gaze' or 'look') might be meant to emphasize the visibility of this rare quality, and *sa'âdet-eser* may perhaps be understood as a mark of sovereignty. Thus, the expression may indicate what a dwarf meant for a monarch *in theory*—since a dwarf could be more than a rare, precious, and spectacular mark of sovereignty. Selânikî also describes the dwarf as a *mashara* (buffoon), and once again refers to a dwarf's expulsion with the formula "*dûr u mahcûr eylemek*" ("to send away and banish"), adding to it this time "*taşra bırakmak*" ("to cast out"). As a dwarf did not really have an official position, he was not 'dismissed' (for which *ref'* or *'azl* would be used) but simply sent out of the palace.

Truly disgusted by the dwarf's insolence, Selânikî remarks that as he got nearer and nearer to the throne, he had overstepped the limits and carried his impertinence to excess. The punishment for having joked about the harem's sexual conduct was not only expulsion but also confiscation of movable and immovable property. Eventually, the dwarf apparently ended up in the same situation as he was before his entry to the sultan's court. The author's scornful attitude is evident in the phrase "he was mingled again with his own folk" ("*kendüzi yine aslına karışdırılup*"), yet there is not really any

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dergâhında du'âları hayyiz-i kabûlde olup Pâdişâh-ı zemîn ü zemân—*hallede'llâhu ta'âlâ hilâfetehû*—hazretleri nazar-ı kimyâ-i sa'âdet-eserlerinden Cehûd Cüce nâm masharayı dûr u mehcûr eyledi. Saltanat dâmenine karîb oldukca nedîmlik mertebesinde küstahlığı hadden efzûn ider olmışdı. Sadr-ı izzetde vüzerâ-i izâm ve harem-i muhteremde perde-i ismet cânibine dahi hürmetsizlik eyleyüp bî-edebâne ağzına düşmez söz söylemekle taşra bırakıldı. Esbâb u emlâki zabt olunup kendüzi yine aslına karışdırılup Has köyde anası ve sâ'ir ta'allukatı yanına gönderdiler. Ve kimseye buluşmayup [sic] uzlet-nişîn olmag-içün muhkem yasak u tenbîh buyuruldı. Ve ‹‹Yanlış poh yedi›› (يكلش بوخ يدى = 982) târîh oldı." The year must be 992, not 982—in any case, it is wrong because the event took place in 1002, as is understood from the next passage.

[256] See Chapter I.

[257] Compare with "*turfe-beyân*," which appeared in Chapter II.

clear sign that his being a Jew exacerbated Selânikî's contempt—though possibly it did. Cehûd Cüce was sent to Hasköy to live with his mother and other relatives in complete isolation as measures were taken to make sure that he did not get involved with anybody. Apart from all those little details that give flesh and blood to the narrative (the identification of his hometown as Hasköy, his mother living there, etc.) the principle of reclusion is a significant piece of information. The measure must have been taken because he, being a former companion of the sultan, had intimate knowledge of what was going on within the court.

The passage that comes immediately after this reveals striking information about the dwarf's associates who were dismissed as a result of his fall from favour.[258] However, this time the associates are not his "educators" or "trainers" (*mürebbî*) but "those who are connected with him" ("*mensûbâtı*"), and even "his adherents" ("*tevâbi'i*"), suggesting a higher and independent position for the dwarf vis-à-vis his contacts. It seems that some dwarfs were really well-entrenched within the web of patrimonial relations so that whenever one was removed from his position a crater was created around him for he would not go alone but his associates would also lose their positions due to his fall. Cehûd Cüce's expulsion was accompanied by the dismissals of the finance director of Sivas, the trustee of the waqf of Ayasofya (who may have come from a converted family of Jewish origin), the trustee of Mehmed II's waqf, and a muhtesib. Selânikî also noted that some of the vacant positions were filled according to the wishes of Safiye, "the mother of the crown prince."

[258] Selânikî, p. 353: "**Merkûmun mensûbâtı ve tevâbi'i tebdîl ü tagyîrâtıdur.** Ve mezbûr cüce Pâdişâh-ı cihân-penâh hazretlerine tekarrüb itmekle çok kimsenün tuhaf ü hedâyâsın celb ü ahz idüp terbiye eyledükleri tevâbi' ü mensûbâtından ma'zûl olanlardan Sivas Defterdârı Yahya Çelebi Efendi ref' buyuruldı. Yerine tekrâr Mu'allim-zâde Mehmed Efendi Şehzâde hazretleri vâlidesi şefâ'atıyle defterdâr oldı. Ve Cehûd Kemal oğlı Ahmed Çelebi Ayasofya-i Kebîr mütevellisi iken azl buyurulup teftîş fermân olundı. Yerine Rûmili muhâsebeciliğinden bilâ-sebeb ref' buyurulan Mehmed Emin Efendi mütevellî olmak fermân olundı. Ve Sultân Mehmed Han-ı Fâtih—*tâbe serrâhu*—mütevellisi mürebbâlarından Eftas azl buyuruldı. Yerine sâbıkā Sultân Süleyman Han Gāzî mütevellisi Abdurrahman Çelebi mütevelli olmak buyuruldı. Ve Muhtesib Şeytân Ahmedî Çavuş ref' buyuruldı. Şehzâde Vâlide şefâ'atiyle Kemal oğlı Mehmed Çavuş muhtesib oldı. Fî sene 1002."

III.2.b.iv. "Their bodies smeared with evil": The expulsion of dwarfs and mutes

The remaining dwarfs and mutes at the court of Murad III were finally ousted from the palace upon the death of the sultan in January 1595.[259] As has already been suggested, although Selânikî's account aims to give the impression that Mehmed III's decision to expel his father's boon companions was due to their notoriety, it is also possible to understand the act as part of the routine replacement of the late sultan's court by that of the new sultan. This is indeed implied by the expression "*zevâ'id-i ruzgâr*," i.e., "the remains of the previous period." According to Selânikî, all these remnants were cast out following the accession of Mehmed, and no one was left in the harem from Murad III's dwarfs and mutes—this claim is obviously belied by the later passages which indicate that at least some of them managed to stay in the palace for some time. Those who left were given monthly wages probably proportionate to their seniority.

The death of Sultan Murad, and perhaps his initial optimism that things would change for better, gave Selânikî a certain self-imposed liberty in expressing his opinions. Therefore, in the passages written in early 1595, he freely disdains not individual dwarfs anymore but the disabled companions in general. He thus calls one group "buffoon-like dwarfs" ("*mashara kalıb cüceler*"), and the other "irreligious mutes" ("*dinsiz dilsizler*"). *Mashara* apparently had a scornful connotation, and the designation *dinsiz* rhymed well with *dilsiz*. Yet, as we have seen, irreligiousness was a slander that he used in an implicit way in another passage in February; therefore, it was not mentioned merely for the sake of rhyme. Selânikî wrote *dinsiz dilsizler* when he narrated how they did not hear the cries of the nineteen innocent princes they were strangling in the last and bloodiest fratricide in Ottoman history that was part of this

[259] Selânikî, p. 441: "**Cüceler ve dilsizler zevâ'id-i ruzgâr ne denlü varise taşra çıkduklarıdur**. Ve merhûm ve mağfûrun-leh Sultân Murad Han meclisine tekarrub iden mashara kalıb cücelerden ve dinsiz dilsizlerden Harem-i muhteremde kimse kalmayup hallerine göre kimine Şehr-emîni cânibinden ve kimine rûznâme-i hümâyûndan müşâhere ulûfeler fermân olundı. El-hamdü li'llâh ta'âlâ dâmen-i saltanat anların vucûd-ı habâset-âlûdlarından tathîr olundı. ‹‹Deryâ nâ-pâki taşra atar›› meşhûrdur."

very succession.[260] The attribute of irreligiousness probably alluded, on the one hand, to their cruelty as stranglers, and on the other, their inability to articulate the shahada.[261]

In this passage, the author also utters his harshest insult about dwarf and mute bodies, when he thanks God as the vicinity of the throne was "cleansed from their bodies smeared with evil" ("*dâmen-i saltanat anların vucûd-ı habâset-âlûdlarından tathîr olundı*"). As a concluding piece of wisdom, he adds the saying that "the sea casts out the unclean." He, thus, makes a mental connection between their physical features and their moral imperfection.

After this comes the striking passage discussed in II.2.a, which is perhaps one of the most critical passages ever written about the reign of Murad III. Despite Selânikî's—probably rhetorical—claim there that the new sultan Mehmed III cast out all of them from the court, it turns out that some of them had remained inside. However, the declining fortune of the remaining dwarfs became evident when Dwarf Zeyrek's brother was discharged from the governorate of Tbilisi in mid-February 1595 [early Cemâziyelâhir 1003].[262] This is probably the same brother of Zeyrek who had been appointed as the governor of Rakka in November 1593—his appointment from Rakka to Tbilisi is not recorded by Selânikî.

In late June or early July of the same year, Zeyrek and another dwarf eunuch called Ca'fer, both of whom seem to have remained in the palace since the death of Murad III, finally had to leave, and what Selânikî viewed as the 'cleansing' process thus came to a conclusion as far as his account is concerned. On 26th June 1595 [18th Şevvâl 1003], one of the last remnants of the reign of Murad III, Cüce Ca'fer Ağa was sent away after having stayed 'inside' during the first six months of Mehmed's reign.[263]

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[260] Selânikî, p. 436.

[261] See Chapter II.

[262] Selânikî, p. 447: "Ve evâ'il-i şehr-i cumâdelâhirede Zeyrek Cüce karındaşı Tiflis Beğlerbeğisi azl buyuruldı. Yeri Habeş'den ma'zûl Tat Ali Beğ'e fermân olundı. Dîvân-ı âlîye gelüp pâye-i serîr-i saltanata yüz sürdi. Memâlik-i mahrûsa mahsûlünden nakd virilen beğlerbeğiliklerdendür. Sekiz yüz bin akça olur."

[263] Selânikî, p. 485: "**İçerüden Cüce Ca'fer Ağa taşra bırağılduğıdur.** Ve Harem-i hümâyûnda mashara makâmında Pâdişâh-ı mağfûrdan kalmış, mukarreb-i pâdişâh olan cücelerden Ca'fer Ağa taşra halkıyle ihtilâta mu'tâd ve mâl-i rüşvet iktisâbında üstâddur ve bâ'is-i fesâd diyü nazar-ı âtıfet-i Pâdişâhîden dûr u mehcûr olup taşrada idindüği evlerine çıkmak fermân olundı. Ve Mevlânâ Müftilenâm istenüp Cüce merdûd olmak te'sir ve tasarrufât-ı Lala Mehmed Paşa hazretlerindendür didiler. Fî 18 şehr-i şevvâl, sene 1003."

Once more, Selânikî explains the reason as the dwarf's habit to mingle with outsiders and his mastery in collecting bribes ("*taşra halkıyle ihtilâta mu'tâd ve mâl-i rüşvet iktisâbında üstâddur*"), but he also adds that he was "an inciter of sedition (or corruption)" ("*bâ'is-i fesâd*"). Clearly, there was no serious charge brought against him, for he was ordered to leave the palace in order to stay in "the houses he had acquired outside." Even if there was an impression or conviction that he was a corrupt man, there was no confiscation or imprisonment at this stage. This is also the only time that Selânikî gives credit to the person who ensured the dwarf's 'expulsion': Lala Mehmed Paşa, who was a vizier at that time[264] and seems to have achieved to have the dwarf expelled with the help of the *Şeyhülislâm*.[265]

Again around that time (i.e. late June or early July 1595 [late Şevvâl 1003]), after the discharge of Zeyrek's brother from Tbilisi, this time a relative of Cüce Ca'fer Ağa was dismissed from the governorate of Bosnia.[266] This relative called Potur İsmail Bey is related to have been a finance director before his governorate.

The last passage concerning dwarfs comes immediately after this one, and relates the order that the dwarf eunuchs who had been cast out from the palace should leave Istanbul and move to their hometowns.[267] Selânikî may have failed to record one event before this, since only from this passage we learn that Zeyrek was sent away—but not when really this happened. With this passage, it also becomes clear that there indeed was a charge, for which they were punished with confiscation, and Zeyrek was even imprisoned. Moreover, it is only in this passage—and only in this source within the

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[264] For his appointment to the vizirate see Selânikî, p. 437.

[265] The *Şeyhülislâm* was Bostanzâde Mehmed Efendi; see İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995, vol. III, part II, p. 456.

[266] Selânikî, p. 487: "**Yeniçeri Ağalığından çıkan Ahmed Ağa'ya Bosna Beğlerbeğiliği virildüğidür**. Ve bu esnâda Cüce Ca'fer Ağa akrabâsından, Defterdârlıkdan Bosna Beğlerbeğiliğine yetişen Potur İsmail Beğ azl olunup, Beğlerbeğilik çıkan Yeniçeri Ağası Ahmed Ağa'ya şefâ'at ile fermân olundı. Velâkin çendân mahall-i kabûlde olmayup, gitmeğe iktidârum yokdur diyü te'allül ü bahâne olunduğı şâyi' oldı. Fî evâhir-i şehr-i şevvâl, sene 1003."

[267] Selânikî, p. 487: "**Taşra çıkan cüce hadımlar İstanbul'da turmasun buyurulduğıdur.** Ve taşra bırağılan hadım cüceler Zeyrek Ağa ve Ca'fer Ağa İstanbul'da turmayıp, sılalarına biri Malatya'ya ve biri dahi Bosna'ya gitmek buyuruldı. Ve Pâdişâh-ı mağfûr zemânında idündükleri mükellef binâlu evleri satılup, hak taleb idenlere ba'de's-subût şer' ile virilüp, şer' u şûrları halkdan def' u ref' olmak fermân olundı. Ve Zeyrek Cüce Kapucılar Kethüdâsı habsinde kaldı. Fî evâhir-i şehr-i şevvâl, sene 1003."

scope of this research—that the hometowns of dwarfs are mentioned: (if it is to be read respectively) Zeyrek is from Malatya, and Ca'fer is from Bosnia.[268] Both dwarfs had invested their riches in great houses that they acquired during the reign of Murad. These appear to be more than one for each. They were taken away and sold or given to claimants in accordance with the legal procedure. In the end, people got rid of "their evil and clamour."

By the way, there are a few things more to be said about Dwarf Zeyrek in particular. Given the scarcity of material, it is very hard to conduct a prosopographic study of dwarfs, yet Zeyrek appears to be a good candidate for a future study to be based on more extensive research. Apart from the information in Selânikî (that he was from Malatya; his brother(s) was/were appointed as governor(s); and he lost his wealth, expelled, and imprisoned for an unknown period after the death of his patron Murad III), what can be said about Zeyrek are limited. He is mentioned once in Mustafa Sâfî's *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh* as one of the two memorable jesters of the past along with Sultan Selim (probably I)'s *musâhib* Mîrek.[269] Sâfî compares Ahmed I's dwarf Ebû Bekr with these two, saying that he surpassed Dwarf Zeyrek in comprehension and in uttering witticisms ("*ḫôş fehmi ve nâdire-gûylikde*"), and Mîrek in companionship and playfulness ("*nedîmi ve şûḫlıḳda*").[270] Obviously, Zeyrek was particularly renowned for his intelligence and verbal skills, as a 'European type' jester would be.

Secondly, Zeyrek is the only dwarf that can be identified in miniatures. The postscript to the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn* ("Book of the Imperial Procession")—a book prepared to commemorate the 1582 circumcision festival—mentions his name as Zeyrek Ağa (apparently without noting his dwarfism) and the name of the Chief Black Eunuch Mehmed Ağa: "The Surname's author tells us that he consulted both aghas, who were noted for their intelligence, loyalty, and access to the sultan's ear, and that he produced this book with the material and moral support that they gave."[271] Since the rest

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[268] Note that Ca'fer's relative was appointed to the governorate of Bosnia, and Zeyrek's brother(s) to the governorates of Rakka and Tbilisi, both in the east.

[269] Mustafa Sâfî. "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," vol. 1, in Dr. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (ed.), *Mustafa Sâfî'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârîh'i*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003, vol. 1, p. 56. For an introduction and discussion of this source, see below.

[270] Ibid., p. 56. Mîrek is listed as "Mîrek Çelebi" among Selim's companions during his princely days in Mustafa Âlî's *Künhü'l-Ahbâr* (Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, p. 38n).

[271] Nurhan Atasoy, *1582 Surname-i Hümayun: An Imperial Celebration*,

of the page and the following ones are missing, we do not know what else the author İntizâmî wrote about Zeyrek. A miniature at the end of the manuscript, however, depicts a scene that is supposed to illustrate what was written (Figure III.1). Here, the Chief Black Eunuch Mehmed Ağa is shown sitting opposite to a black dwarfish figure, who is identified as Zeyrek.[272] This miniature is the only evidence that I could find indicating that Zeyrek was black. It also needs to be added that he seems to be a free man as he was sent to his hometown Malatya after the exposition of his deeds.

Moreover, according to Fleischer, Mustafa Âlî had "close connections" with Zeyrek ("Zirek Ağa"), and wrote to him while he was writing his *Nusretnâme* (i.e., around 1580) addressing him as "my son."[273] Perhaps Âlî also wanted to consult his knowledge while he was writing his book.

Finally, the Topkapı Palace Archive includes some documents from that time about the waqf of a certain Zeyrek Ağa. One of them is a *fermân* dated to August 1603 [mid-Rabîu'l-evvel 1012] by Mehmed III. According to this, Zeyrek was dead by that time.[274] The second one is a *berat* of a trustee appointed to the waqf of Zeyrek Ağa, issued by Murad III and dated 10th June 1584 [1st Cemâziye'l-âhir 992].[275] It is not certain that these documents refer to Dwarf Zeyrek Ağa, but it is quite likely that they do, given his prominence as an especially favourite dwarf *musâhib* of Murad III. These documents, indicating that he devoted property to the *tekke* and *türbe* of a certain "Şeyh Yorganlı" or "Yorgânî," give us a clue about the dwarf's possible attachment to this sheikh.

Istanbul: Koçbank, 1997, p. 15.

[272] Ibid., p. 15. It is not clear whether the identification depends on the idea that the two central figures in the picture must be the two men who contributed to the production of the *sûrnâme*, or it is explicitly stated in the book that the dwarf figure is Zeyrek.

Also note that the relative statures of the two central figures clearly indicate that one of them is a dwarf, though both of them are slightly magnified vis-à-vis the others, one of whom is most probably a white dwarf eunuch (because he is beardless).

[273] Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, p. 112n. The letter is in Âlî's correspondence collection *Menşe'ül-inşâ*, 240a-241a.

[274] İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, İ. K. Baybura, Ü. Altındağ (eds.), *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Osmanlı Saray Arşivi Kataloğu*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985-1988, vol. 1, p. 20, item no. 196. According to this, Zeyrek devoted property to a certain "Yorgani tekkesi" in Üsküdar. Also see ibid., p. 21, item no. 202 and 203.

[275] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 159, item no. 1531.

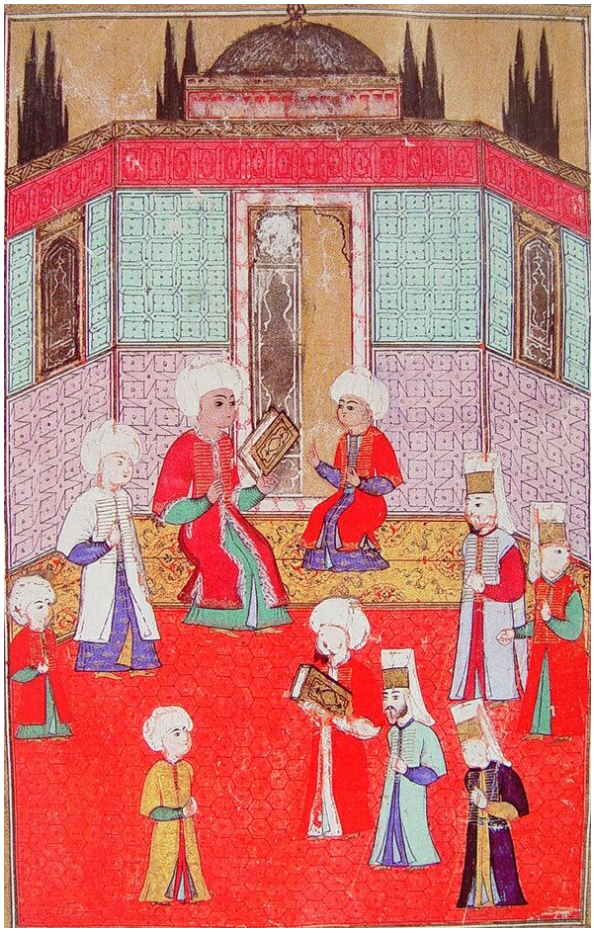

Figure III.1 – The miniature showing Cüce Zeyrek Ağa. He and the Chief Black Eunuch Mehmed Ağa are shown at the centre, sitting opposite to each other. The white man holding a book in the front is most probably the author İntizâmî. There is also a figure resembling a white dwarf on the leftmost side. Miniature by Nakkaş Osman, dated 1582-1588, from the *Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn*, reproduced in Atasoy, *1582 Surname-i Hümayun*, p. 13 (Image taken from SUIC, Ottoman Culture Images Digital Collection).

Zeyrek must truly have been a very favourite *musâhib* of Murad III if we can judge by his presence in these sources, though he is usually not mentioned among the most influential companions of Murad III. As for Nasuh, Ca'fer, and Cehûd Cüce, Selânikî's *History* seems to be the only narrative source. This absence itself is quite puzzling: if they were so influential and powerful as Selânikî presents them, their absence in other sources is a contradiction. As has been mentioned before, silence about women is not so curious when it is explained with a certain more, yet silence about dwarfs is not quite understandable. The situation inevitably brings to mind that Selânikî exaggerated their power probably due to his bias about the physical and moral imperfection of the disabled. He seems to represent the most extreme position of his time in discrimination of the physically different.

Apart from that, the absence of any major mute figures in Selânikî's account is also puzzling. When it comes to making general statements, Selânikî always mentions mutes together with dwarfs. Yet if we take his chronicle as a complete account, it seems that there were no mutes punished because of bribery at that period. A possible explanation may be that mutes' communication with the 'outsiders' (who did not know Ottoman sign language that was well-known by the court people) was partly hindered because of their disability, which in turn confined them to a lesser role compared to dwarfs. The same question could of course be asked about eunuchs as well; i.e. why Selânikî did not record any eunuch who was expelled because of bribery charges, which would only bring about more speculation in the absence of other sources with which to compare.

It is, however, clear that Selânikî expressed his dissatisfaction with the current circumstances of the state and society through dwarfs, who appear to be the scapegoats for the widespread corruption. He felt bitter and unfulfilled like many of his contemporaries because of those corrupt ways of promotion and other maladies in the state and society that they witnessed. For him, dwarfs (and also mutes, eunuchs, and women) with their physical 'anomaly' and 'lack' that implied their moral degeneracy were the winners of the contemporary age.

III.3. Dwarfs and Mutes in *Nasihatnâme*s

Selânikî's pathetic remarks about dwarfs and mutes seem to be a unique expression of hatred in the writings of Ottoman men of lettres, although he wished to present his view as a common one—indeed, it could have been shared by others as well. However, in the advice (*nasihatnâme*) literature, which proliferated in the period under consideration, dwarfs and mutes have a very limited appearance, which perhaps contradicts the impression that they rose to some eminence as a result of their position within the harem. Undoubtedly, Selânikî's attitude towards dwarfs, his hatred which is not fettered by any trace of pity towards the disabled at all, represents the extremity among Ottoman writers. Despite the similarities between Selânikî and the *nasihatnâme* writers in their outlook and diagnosis of the problems of the state, there are such discrepancies, which can be explained with regard to the authors' personal alliances and

personal concerns. In other words, some authors' silence about the disabled as well as Selânikî's expressiveness could possibly be understood in terms of how they were positioned vis-à-vis the cliques including dwarfs and mutes.

This section deals with the sporadic pieces that I was able to find in the advice literature of the period. Two main themes concerning dwarfs and mutes are identifiable in this literature: one is the general motif that the sultan's *musâhib*s should not interfere in state affairs, and the other is that they do not deserve to get *timar*s.

III.3.a. "*Musâhib*s should not interfere in state affairs"

Complaints about dwarfs and mutes undoubtedly fit into the general framework of complaints about the interference of the monarch's boon companions in state affairs, which can be conceived as a common problem of monarchical regimes. To give but one example from outside the context of the Ottoman sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Seljukid vizier Nizam Al-Mulk wrote in a chapter on boon companions and intimates in his *Siyâsetnâme* that kings should not consult with their boon companions those matters that relate to the government of the country but only those matters that relate to leisure activities.[276] In Selânikî, we have seen that this interference may take other forms where boon companions, independent of the sultan's will, can establish connections with other members of the ruling elite and exercise their power through ways other than discussing with the sultan himself.

There is one instance in *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, an anonymous early seventeenth century treatise, where an anecdote about a dwarf *musâhib* is used in order to make the same point that boon companions should be kept away from state affairs.[277] Having mentioned the Circle of Equity, the author remarks that the perpetuation of this order depends on three principles that the sultan should abide by: first, justice; second, bestowal of offices and *dirlik*s according to merit and in accordance with the law

[276] Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk*, Hubert Darke (trans.), London: Curzon Press, 2002, 3rd ed., p. 90.

[277] Anonymous, "Kitâb-ı Müstetâb," *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtına Dair Kaynaklar*, Yaşar Yücel (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988, pp. 18-19. Yaşar Yücel notes certain clues within the text which suggest that it was written around 1620 and probably dedicated to Osman II: ibid., pp. XXII-XXIII.

("*ḳānûn-i kadim üzre mansıbı ve dirliği ehline virmek*"); and third, not to heed the words of boon companions and servants who do not belong to the state apparatus ("*umûr-i saltanata müte'allik müsâhib ve nedîm söziyle ve hükûmetde olmayan hademe söziyle kat'â umûr görülmemekdir*"). While the second of these principles also concerns dwarfs and mutes as will be explained below, in the third one the author puts his finger on the issue and proceeds to tell a story to illustrate the apparently examplary behaviour of a previous sultan. Accoding to the story, Selim I ("*Sultân Selîm Hân-ı atîk*") orders his grand vizier Pîrî Paşa[278] to commence preparations for campaign, but does not mention whether the campaign would be in Europe or in the east. Wondering against whom the campaign would be, Pîrî Paşa cannot dare to ask it to the sultan for he is afraid of arousing the latter's wrath. At this point, the author describes him as a vizier who knows how to manage things wisely and prudently ("*bir âkil müdebbir vezîr olub*"); therefore, instead of the sultan himself he asks the question to the sultan's dwarf companion. An interesting detail is that Pîrî Paşa asks it in a written correspondence. The wording is also interesting, for he does not 'ask' but 'requests humbly' ("*minnet ider*"). Addressing the dwarf "my son" ("*Benim oğlum*"), he sincerely relates the situation, that he is ashamed to ask the sultan lest he attribute it to the vizier's stupidity ("*hamâkatımıza haml olunmıya deyû*"). Then, he once more refers to the cordial relationship between them by saying "Now do me a favour as a son would do [to his father]" ("*İmdi lutf idüb oğulluk eyliyesin*"), and entreats him to inquire in a moment of merriment ("*bir şenlik arasında*") where the sultan would like to lead a campaign. The dwarf, proud for having received the letter and favour of the grand vizier, grasps an opportunity to ask the sultan about the campaign. Alerted by the dwarf's question, the sultan asks in return who told him about the matter. As he realizes the gravity in the sultan's manner, the extremely scared dwarf confesses to have been urged by Pîrî Paşa. At this, the sultan utters this sober warning:

> You being my boon companion, if I told you for mere fun that my campaign would be to Rumelia, or if although it were to Rumelia I said "to Anatolia," you would give the news to the grand vizier, who trusting in your word would act according to a lie. Now is it up to you and your sort to interfere in matters

[278] Not "Pîrî" but Pîr Mehmed Paşa, grand vizier from 1518 to 1523, under Selim I and Süleyman I: see İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 544-545.

pertaining to the state and sultanate?[279]

Then, in a shocking culmination, the sultan immediately gives order to behead the dwarf. The dwarf's head is put on a tray, wrapped in a bundle, sealed, and sent to Pîrî Paşa with a note saying:

> "O black Turk! I had a companion whom I've lost because of you. Now I send you his head. If you wonder about my campaign, it is against Persia. Take good care of the preparations or I shall do the same to your head too!"[280]

Like most of the material on jesters, this too is anecdotal rather than historical in character. This was perhaps a tale that circulated within the court and the elite in general, one of those tales that contain a piece of wisdom or a lesson in themselves. Still, the fact that the author belonged to the court and perhaps himself was a courtier[281] gives some credibility to certain details concerning the court life, namely the vizier's correspondence with the dwarf and his manner of addressing him—note that it might have been regular to address a dwarf as "my son" as Mustafa Âlî also addressed Zeyrek in this way.

The story suggests that it was an inevitable course of action for the sultan to command the dwarf's execution, for he violated an important principle. There is no doubt that the anecdote was supposed to contain a message for the present. This dwarf of the past is remarkably humble and vulnerable to the sultan's almost capricious wrath. The disproportion of the punishment to the crime is meant to inspire awe for the past sultans' observance of values that have now been forgotten. It is also significant that not the valuable vizier, whom the sultan accuses for his companion's loss, but the insignificant and useless dwarf was sacrificed.

The story, by the way, repeats the same pattern of a jester interceding on the grand vizier's behalf that we have seen in the story of Mashara Arab's redemption of the judges. It, however, unfolds in a different way, suggesting Sultan Selim's absolute

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[279] Ibid., p. 19: "Sen nedîm olduğun eclden ben seni mücerred masharalık içün seferim Rûm-ili'nedir disem ve yâhûd Rûm-ili'ne iken Anadolu'yadır disem ve sen dahî nedür haber aldım deyû vezîr-i a'zama haber gönderüb ve ol dahî senin sözünle hilâf üzre tedârük görürdü ve şimdi kaldı kaldı Devlet-i Aliyeyeye [sic] ve umûr-i saltanata müte'allik ahvâllerde senin gibiler mi karışıyor[?]"

[280] Ibid., p. 19: "Bire kara Türk, bir nedîmim var idi, bize çok gördün, imdi başını sana gönderdim, seferim su'âl idersen Acem seferidir, tedbîr ve tedârük üzre olasın, yohsa senin dahî başını böyle iderim."

[281] See ibid., p. XX: The author says that he was in the service of the Ottoman dynasty since his childhood (implying his *devşirme* origin), and had personal contact with the sultan.

control that becomes manifest in the act of execution for the sake of the state order. The relations among the sultan, the vizier, and the jester are of a completely different nature, in accordance with the different historical context and different political motive.

After this meaningful anecdote, the author goes on comment that only the grand vizier should have knowledge of state affairs, and no one else should be more intimate to the sultan. He continues to criticize that in the present time grand viziers rely on people that are most inappropriate to consult with simply because the latters are closer to the sultan, and they learn from them what happens inside and outside the palace. This is a practice that he finds completely at odds with the honour and dignity of the grand vizirate and with the "law" or the customs of the Ottoman court. While everybody used to fear from the grand viziers of the past, now grand viziers themselves fear from those confidants of the sultan, with whom they hope to be in good terms. Grand viziers of today are not loyal or trustworthy, and because of this conduct of theirs state affairs are not properly dealt with.[282]

This picture is in accordance with the account of Selânikî, who contended that everyone was seeking to attach themselves to a dwarf, mute, or eunuch. Although the same theme and the same complaint could be found in other works, in what follows I shall stick to Koçi Bey's treatise in particular for it specifically refers to dwarfs and mutes.

In this treatise written in 1630 for Murad IV, the very first chapter after the introduction relates to boon companions and intimates ("*nüdema ve mukarrebân*"). There, Koçi Bey explicitly dates a change in the behaviour of *musâhib*s to Murad III's

[282] Ibid.: "Öyle olsa saltanata müte'allik umûru vezîr-i a'zamdan gayri kimesne vâkıf olmamak gerekdir ve vezîr olanlar mu'temedün aleyh olmayınca niçün vezîr-i a'zam olur, zîrâ vezîr-i a'zam olanlar pâdişâhın sırdâşı ve hazînedârı ve kethudâsı ve mu'temedün aleyhi ve hayr-hâhı ki hiç bundan mukarreb ve sevgili bir kulu dahî olmamak gerekdir ve bu maḳūle sıfatlar ile muttasıf olan kulunu vezîr-i a'zam itmek gerekdir, yohsa fî zamâninâ sadr-ı a'zam olanlar hezâr sıfat ile zuhûra gelüb kendülerinde ise kemâ hüve hakkihi sadâkatlari olmamağla içerü sarâyda ve eğer taşrada nedir filân ve filân pâdişâhın mukarrebi ve mu'temedün aleyhidir deyû olur olmazların hevâlarına tâbi' oldukları eclden vezîr-i a'zamın ırzı ve ḳānûn-i Âl-i Osmân gözetilmek kande kaldı? Cemî'-i âlem vezîr-i a'zamdan havf ider iken şimdi vezîr-i a'zam olanlar olur olmazlardan havf ider olmuşdur ve el-iyâzü bi'llâh bu bid'at-ı seyyi'e ihdâs olalı fî zamâninâ vezîr-i a'zam olanlar dahî hemân sadra geldiklerinde "bu günü hoş görelim, irtenin ıssı vardır" deyû olur olmazlara müdârâ ve murâdları üzre hareket ider. Zîrâ fî'l-vâki' fî zamâninâ sadr-ı a'zamda sadâkat bulunmayıb ve hem mu'temedün aleyh olunmadıkları eclden bi'z-zarûrî olur olmazlara mürâca'at ve müdârâ ve murâdları üzre hareket itmek lâzım gelir. İmdi sadr-ı a'zamlık bu şekle varmağla umûr-ı saltanat ahvâli kemâ hüve hakkihi görülmekden ber-taraf olmuşdur."

accession to the throne. He states that "until the beginning of Sultan Murad's reign, the boon companions and other confidants were experienced, skillful, well-intentioned, and wise people," who would be satisfied with the gifts of the sultan; and nobody from inside the palace or from outside would in no way interfere in state affairs. The implication that contemporary *musâhib*s interfered in the promotions of grand viziers is also present, as it is mentioned that boon companions did not have the licence, when they were in the presence of the sultan, to comment about viziers and the members of the religious establishment.[283] He once more draws a clear line between the period before and the period after the succession of Murad III, in the chapter about viziers. According to Koçi Bey, before 1574, no one could interfere in the relationship between the sultan and the grand vizier. But after this date, the boon companions began to have an exalted status; in other words, the nature of their relationship with the sultan changed considerably, and they began to intervene in state affairs: "They began to propose many unacceptable things to those who became grand vizier. When the latters did not permit, they would join in one tongue and one mind, and use every opportunity to slander them in the sultan's presence. By provoking the sultan's wrath, they used to cause their assasination or exile, or the confiscation of their property, and defamation."[284]

III.3.b. The issue of timar-holding dwarfs and mutes

Immediately after that, Koçi Bey gives a number of examples from among the people who fell from favour due to the companions' calumny. He then goes on to claim

[283] Koçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risâlesi*, Yılmaz Kurt (ed.), Ankara: Ecdad Yayınları, 1994 [hereafter: Koçi Bey], pp. 16-17: "Ve nüdemâ ve mukarrebân evâ'il-i saltanat-ı Murâd Hâni'ye gelince umûr-dîde ve kârdân, sâhib-re'y ve hayr-endîş bir alay ukalâ kimesneler idi. Şemsi Paşa ve Celâl Bey ve Ferhâd Ağa gibi atâyâ-yı vâfire-i sultâniyye ile kanâ'at edüb gerek hudemâ ve mukarrebân, gerek iç ve taşra halkından ve gayriden kâ'inen men kâne umûr-ı devlet-i aliyeye kat'an müdâhale etmezlerdi.… Ve nüdemâ ve müsâhibâne [sic] huzûr-ı hümâyûnda ahvâl-i vüzerâ ve ulemâdan bahsetmeğe ruhsat-ı hümâyûnları olmazdı."

[284] Koçi Bey, pp. 34-35: "Târih-i mezbûreden beri [i.e., from 1574/982 onwards] nüdemâ ve sâ'ir mukarrebân huzûr-ı hümâyûn-ı pâdişâhîde hayyiz ve rütbeler bulub umûr-ı saltanata müdâhale eder oldular. Vezîr-i a'zam olanlara nice nâ-mâkûl teklifât eder oldular. Anlar dahi murâdlarına müsâ'ade etmezler ise cümlesi yek-dil ve yek-cihet olub huzûr-ı hümâyûnda fırsat buldukca haklarında nice iftirâlar edüb tahrîk-i silsile-i gazâb-ı pâdişâhî etmekle bî-günâh kimini katl ve kimin nefy ve kiminin mâl ü menâlin aldırub küllî hakâretler etdirirler."

that, as the frightened viziers started to try to maintain good relations with them, the companions began to take *timar*s and *ze'âmet*s, which were in fact the due of warriors, as *arpalık* and *paşmaklık* or as private property. They thus undermined the state's basis by corrupting its land-holding system and consequently weakening its military. Still not satisfied by these usurpations, they began to interfere in the promotions to governors' posts, in which bribery became the norm.[285]

In these passages—where his remarks instantly bring to mind Zeyrek, Ca'fer, Cehûd Cüce, and others' influence on promotions, and Nasuh's *ze'âmet*—Koçi Bey writes about *musâhib*s without specifying them as dwarfs and mutes. However, several times in the treatise, Koçi Bey mentions dwarfs and mutes specifically as he complains about allocation of *timar* lands to them. In the first chapter for example, he states that mutes, dwarfs and all other boon companions would be payed in cash for they were forbidden to have *ze'âmet* and *timar*.[286] In a chapter devoted to the issues relating to *ze'âmet* and *timar* distribution, Koçi Bey describes and censures another practice. According to this, not only dwarfs, mutes, and other companions, but also many people at high posts would receive the revenue of *timar*s that they had registered upon their servants and slaves, and would indulge in entertainment at the time of war.[287]

Elsewhere, alluding to the fact that they do not go to campaigns and are unable to use sword, he repeats his request that dwarfs and mutes should be payed salary, and *ze'âmet* and *timar* should be given to those who deserve.[288] The uselessness of dwarfs and mutes is also repeated being accompanied by a remark about their disproportionately great income in the reform treatise attributed alternatively to Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Paşa and Koçi Bey, where it is stated that those attached to the

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[285] Koçi Bey, pp. 35-38.

[286] Koçi Bey, p. 21: "Ve dilsizler ve cüceler ve sâ'ir nüdemâ-i pâdişâhî kimler olur ise ulûfeli olub ze'âmet ve timâr anlara memnû' idi."

[287] Koçi Bey, p. 48: "Beylerbeyilerde ve sancak beylerinde ve vüzerâ ağalarında ve müteferrika ve çavuş ve küttâb zümrelerinde ve dilsiz ve cüce tâ'ifesinde ve nüdemâ-i pâdişâhîde ve bölük halkının ekâbirinde nice timâr ve ze'âmetler olub kimi hıdmetkârları üzerine ve kimi âzâdsız kulları üzerine berât etdirmişlerdir. Nâm-ı âdemlerinin, mahsûlün kendülerin yeyüb içlerinde âdem vardır ki yirmi otuz belki kırk elli mikdârı ze'âmet ve timârı bu tarîk ile alub mahsûlün kendüler ekl edüb…" Also see ibid., p. 70.

[288] Koçi Bey, p. 80: "Ve sefere eşmeyen ve kılıca kâdir olmayan cüce ve dilsiz tâ'ifelerine kânûn-ı kadîm üzere ulûfeler ta'yîn olunub ze'âmet ve timârı erbâbına verile."

Chamber of the Expeditionary Force, most of whom were musicians (*sâzende*), bath attendants (*tellâk*), mutes, and dwarfs, were of no service yet received too much income.[289]

But Koçi Bey saves his strongest remark to the conclusion, where, reminding that the sharia does not permit to give to undeserving people the fiefs, which are the pillar of the state and the prerequisite of the existence of *gâzi*s and *mücâhid*s, he asks (the sultan) whether it is right to give them away as *arpalık* and *paşmaklık* to mutes, dwarfs, adherents of the grandees, and other "deficient, useless, weak, and helpless people" ("*nâkıs ve ebter, âciz ve fürûmândelere*") who do not understand of warfare. Having said this, he immediately adds that all these will be inquired from the sultan on the day of Last Judgement.[290]

Koçi Bey reasserted this notion of their weakness and helplessness in his second treatise, which was written for Sultan İbrahim. Partially intended as a guide for courtly life, this pamphlet—perhaps due to a change in the author's immediate concerns—does not include the complaint about *timar*s, which is so repetitive in the first one. On the other hand, in a section where he explains the organisation of the inner palace, Koçi Bey advises the sultan to bestow one golden coin to each dwarf and mute in the Privy Chamber, and five golden coins to each of the *musâhib*s among them. These alms established by custom are justified by the deplorable condition of the receivers, who would rejoice at the gift: "They are essentially poor and helpless. You would make them happy."[291] The author, thus, in the guise of pity for the disabled, establishes what their due should in fact be: a mere golden coin as opposed to the immense *ze'âmet*s.

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[289] Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Paşa, "Sadrâzam Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Paşa Lâyihası," Faik Reşit Unat (ed.), *Tarih Vesikaları*, vol. I, 6. Ankara: Maarif Vekâleti, 1941-1942, p. 472: "Seferlinin hizmeti yoktur ve gelürü dahi çoktur." For the identification of the manuscript as the second treatise of Koçi Bey (written for Sultan İbrahim) see Ömer Faruk Akün, "Koçi Bey," *TDVİA*, 26, p. 148.

[290] Koçi Bey, p. 104: "Husûsan ze'âmet ve timar ki Devlet-i Aliyyenin rükn-i a'zamı ve erbâb-ı timâr, guzât ve mücâhidînin mukaddimi iken dirlikleri nâ-ehle verilüb izâ'at-i beytü'l-mal olunmak şer'an câ'iz değil iken dilsiz ve cüce ve ekâbir tevâbi'ine ve sâ'ir sefer uçar bilmez, varsa da elinden iş gelmez nâkıs ve ebter, âciz ve fürûmândelere verilmek ve arpalık ve paşmaklık olmak Allâh'tan revâ mıdır? Rûz-ı cezâda cümlesi sa'âdetlü pâdişâhımdan su'âl olunur."

[291] Koçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risâlesi*, Zuhuri Danışman (ed.), Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1972, p. 96: [rendered in modern Turkish] "Esasen fukaradırlar. Sevindiresiniz."

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that dwarfs and mutes are at the very heart of Koçi Bey's complaints and diagnosis for the maladies of the state. According to him, a significant part of the responsibility for the decline of the Ottoman Empire belonged to mutes and dwarfs, who usurped the *timar* lands in spite of their physical incapacity and indifference for warfare. Indeed, the rise of this group marked by their physical incapacity is directly related to the decline in the military capacity of the state. Thus, the non-martial character of the political body parallels the non-martial bodies of dwarfs and mutes.

III.4. Perfect Companions for an Ideal Monarch: A Different Image in Mustafa Sâfî's *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh*

Having presented the sources which, in one way or another, criticize the enhanced status of dwarfs and mutes in the post-Süleymanic age, we can now move on to a narrative source that offers an alternative representation. Writing in a different genre, Mustafa Sâfî, the early seventeenth century author of *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh* ("The Essence of History"),[292] had a completely different motive for composing his work and for mentioning dwarfs in it. In this work, which is devoted to the personality and reign of Ahmed I until 1614, he adopted a defensive, justifying, and legitimizing attitude rather than critical. A major aim of Sâfî in composing it is to display his patron's possession of the virtues of an ideal king, rather than to point out the inherent problems of the polity or to complain about what he thought was going wrong. Therefore, the image of dwarfs that he presents in this work should be seen from within the requirements of this genre, as the representations of dwarfs in *nasihatnâme*s and in Selânikî's *History* should be seen within the framework of the discourse of decline. Clearly, Sâfî does not allude in his writings to any relation between the ascendancy of the physically different and the anthropomorphic image of the decaying polity—both elements are absent in his work. He also does not give any clue that he saw himself as a loser in the face of changing circumstances. Therefore, it is only natural that his

[292] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," in *Mustafa Sâfî'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârîh'i*, Dr. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003, 2 volumes.

representation of dwarfs is informed by a different mindset and agenda from those that have been analyzed above.

Sâfî composed the book between 1609 and 1614, when he was the imam of Ahmed. Being an insider to the palace, he had first-hand knowledge of the court life; thus, he wrote about many events of which he himself was an eye-witness, and for various others he resorted to the memory of a number of informants from the palace milieu. Among these were four dwarfs, namely Habîb, Yusuf, Hüseyn and Ebû Bekr,[293] with whom the author had contact at the court. In other words, Sâfî did not aim to write about dwarfs; they were not his primary subject but his helpers in his endeavour, who facilitated his work by contributing some material that he could use.

Sâfî divided his work in two volumes. The second volume is meant to provide an account of the major events of Ahmed I's reign, and will be out of the scope of this section for it does not contain anything about dwarfs. The first volume, on the other hand, focuses "on the meaning, significance and interpretation of seemingly commonplace 'minor' events connected with the daily routine of the sultan and his entourage."[294] What Sâfî tries to do in this volume is to gather and interpret anecdotes (*menkıbe*s or *menâkıb*) that exemplify the existence of the ideal sultan's qualities in Ahmed.[295]

It is in this part of the work where 'minor' events are discussed that dwarfs come in. In accordance with his eulogizing attitude towards the sultan, Sâfî portrays the dwarfs at Ahmed I's court as decent, honourable, and reliable gentlemen. Thanks to the author's personal—and apparently cordial—contact with the dwarfs, who often acted as messengers between him and the sultan and shared their memoirs pertaining to their joyful gatherings, *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh* appears to be the single narrative source where we have anecdotes put into the mouths of dwarfs themselves—of course, in a form polished by Mustafa Sâfî's elaborate style. Therefore, this book should be taken not as a contradictory evidence that may challenge the validity of what Selânikî and others were

[293] Also is mentioned another dwarf by the name of Mûsâ.

[294] Rhoads Murphey, "Mustafa Safi's Version of the Kingly Virtues as Presented in His Zübdet'ül Tevârih, or Annals of Sultan Ahmed, 1012-1023 A.H./1603-1614 A.D.," Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province, and the West, Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (eds.), New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005, vol. 1, p. 5.

[295] Ibid., p. 5. For an assessment of Sâfî's presentation of kingly virtues see the entire article: pp. 5-24.

complaining about but as a relatively uncritical account by an insider to the seventeenth century Ottoman courtly life.

Mustafa Sâfî is remarkably careful in identifying his informant in each anecdote, shedding light on his own personal relationship with him. Thanks to the vividness of his account, this book is a remarkable source on the seventeenth century Ottoman courtly life. In this section, three anecdotes will be quoted from it, each of which is narrated in the first person singular by a certain dwarf. This is, indeed, the closest that we can get to the world of Ottoman dwarfs.

The first anecdote is not about any ideal quality in Ahmed I but about an event which, however insignificant it may seem in present, is supposed to strike the reader with its supernatural quality. In 1609, as he set out to write his book, Mustafa Sâfî tried to find out the sultan's age in order to record it accurately. One of his informants was a certain Habîb, who was a dwarf of the former sultan Mehmed III retained by his son Ahmed I. Sâfî relates that Habîb used to follow the young sultan inside and outside the palace, as he went hunting or for an excursion, and make him laugh with his jokes.[296] One day, Sâfî inquired the dwarf about the sultan's true age, to which Habîb replied that he was in his twenty second year. However, he immediately met with the ardent opposition of a third person, a servant from the harem, who, as Sâfî implied, had such a temperament that apparently led him to object for no logical reason. Instead of arguing with him, Habîb preferred to remain silent, yet he seems to have been offended, for the next day he found Sâfî again to tell him a dream that he had:

> Today, as I was at a gathering, a book was being read aloud, and those who were present listening to it. Since my ears do not hear sounds or voices and my hearing ability is cancelled, my heart was unaware of what was being told. I had let my head loose and was thinking about our conversation yesterday. Suddenly, drowsiness overcome my eyes, and the wine of the little death made me drunk. So, in that state of drunkenness, as a curtain concealed the physical world, the divine hand captured my hand, and from that state of unconscious disappearance in the union of beings it took me to a distant world, where the bird of my soul flied and my inner eye contemplated that rose garden. Suddenly, I saw with the eye of my knowing heart one of the *ağa*s of the honourable harem coming to me and saying, "The Queen Mother salutes you, and says, ‹‹Habîb the Dwarf is faithful to the truth and right in his estimation of the age of the light of my eye, my beloved son, the sultan of seven climes; and he is upright and truthful in his cause, since my eye's light completed his twenty-first year in the month of

[296] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," vol. 1, in Dr. İbrahim Hakkı Çuhadar (ed.), *Mustafa Sâfî'nin Zübdetü't-Tevârîh'i*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003, vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

Cumâdiyü'l-âhire of this year and is currently in his twenty second.››"[297]

Here we have a rare insight into the 'inner world' of an early seventeenth century Ottoman court dwarf thanks to this dream account, albeit apparently embellished by Sâfî's elaborate rhetoric bearing mystical overtones. What is truly striking is the petty details, the dwarf's trivial concern in 'proving' his knowledge, which took Sâfî a folio to tell. In the end, the author expresses his conviction in the correctness of Habîb's testimony and in the truth of this 'divine' method of informing. The dwarf's service to Ahmed's father and his spiritual connection with Ahmed's mother Handan Sultan, who was dead at that time, underscoring the dwarf's intimacy with the family justifies Sâfî's respect in him. Habîb as represented here is not simply a jester but someone almost from the family.

What is puzzling is the mention of his deafness—possibly, he was just a dwarf who was deaf but not mute. This question can indeed be posed for Sâfî's entire work, and for other sources as well: whether the words like "said" or "heard" should be taken literally or not. Habîb's verbal skills and wit are evident in the jokes he "told" to the young sultan ("*ba'zı letâif söyler*"), but were these told by speech or by sign language? On the other hand, when Sâfî writes, for example, that he "heard" from Dwarf Yusuf Ağa ("*Cüce Yûsuf Ağadan mesmû'dur ki*") about the sultan's intolerance to those who drank wine and those who engage in prostitution, and that the dwarf "heard" such things from the sultan several times ("*mükerreren semi'mize vâsıl olmuşdur ki*"),[298] it seems plausible to assume that the ear and tongue were involved in this communication. It seems plausible because, when a dwarf relates something to him by any other means, Sâfî is careful to mention this detail: e.g. "it has been related to me by Dwarf Yûsuf Ağa through written correspondence" ("*Cüce Yûsuf Ağa'dan bi tarîki'l-mükâtebe mazbûtumdur ki*").[299]

Another anecdote told by a dwarf by the name of Hüseyn conveys a sense of Ahmed I's gatherings with his companions. One day, Hüseyn told Sâfî what happened when he was mentioned and praised in the presence of the sultan for his quality as an imam and for the beauty of his recitation of the Qur'an. Intending to learn the sultan's real opinion about Sâfî, the dwarf brought in a petty flaw of the author:

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[297] Ibid., p. 24.

[298] Ibid., p. 33. Also see p. 61.

[299] Ibid., p. 139.

> I said, "My sultan, the imam's recitation is nice, and his manner is pleasant. However, he prolongs the prayer, and completes a short one in such a long while that he bores those who follow him and makes them out of spirits." Upon hearing my words, he scolded me, "You despicable fool, who stay in my presence for a long while, for four or five hours you behave with complete joy, [and while you do that] never once you show the faintest sign of torpor or weariness, and you lose nothing of your gaiety. Then, why do you get bored and dispirited when you remain for half an hour before the Absolute Creator?"[300]

To be sure, the author's aim in telling this was to demonstrate the sultan's piety, but he does this by conveying an atmosphere of intimacy that would lend credibility to his informant and therefore to his tale. Thanks to this strategy, the first volume of *Zübdetü't-Tevârîh* is a remarkable collection of minor events that came to pass in the daily life at the court.

Note how the following anecdote narrated by the same Dwarf Hüseyn Ağa depicts a usual hour of entertainment as it conveys the sultan's appreciation of humility and dislike of conceit:

> One day during a meeting with him, while we, as a few of his slaves[301] who are his servile companions, were standing before him, conversing with each other, having fun, and exchanging witty remarks, one of the newly arrived dwarfs approached me and attempted to make me a hand joke, upon which I made him palm joke and he received a hit from my hand. At that moment, I glanced at the auspicious sultan and saw that his sublime complexion changed colour and sorrow appeared in his holy heart, [from which I deduced that] he was utterly grieved because of my act. However, since the mild and noble side of his nature came to suppress the furious and wrathful side, he did not do what his feelings required him to do, and kept silent. As this poor fellow [i.e., I] noticed this, I said to myself "[in Arabic] I take shelter in God from the wrath of God and that of His caliph," so I went pale and was totally stunned. Meanwhile, the aforementioned companion seized the opportunity to slap me in return. I immediately looked at the munificent sultan, who smiled like a rose and blossomed like a bud. He made the favour of addressing this slave of his, saying, "Hüseyn, if this time your rival had not given you your due by slapping you, you would be ever-guilty in my eyes, because his jocular slap on you was only to please me. However, you slapped him because you, who are higher than him in rank, were so conceited as to judge his behaviour as insolent."[302]

Sâfî adds that "in spite of his imperial title and so many reasons for arrogance and pride, the sublime sultan was rid of conceit and disinclined to inability or hauteur, he did not like arrogance and pride in a person who is deprived of a reason for

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[300] Ibid., p. 38.

[301] This does not need to be taken literally but as an expression of loyalty. Nevertheless, see below for Hüseyn's possible slavery.

[302] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," p. 86.

arrogance and vanity and whose body is full of inability and deprivation."[303] Here, once more, the 'pitiful' body of the dwarf is mentioned, but this time to be contrasted with the idealized sultan's perfection. This anecdote is aimed for exalting the sultan by contrasting his moral (and physical) perfection with the dwarf's flawful nature. This strategy, however, produces a side effect: for, as it presents the sultan as an ideal king, it represents the dwarf as an ordinary human being—which can be considered as an elevation to a higher status, given the material presented earlier in this chapter.

At the same time, however human they may be, Ahmed I's dwarfs are also the honourable companions of an ideal ruler. The titles and descriptive phrases employed for the dwarfs attest to this. Dwarf Yûsuf Ağa is called "the sultan's companion and pure-hearted servant" ("*Nedîm-i hâss ve hâdim-i pür-ihlâs Cüce Yûsuf Ağa*"),[304] and "the honest companion" ("*Nedîm-i müstekîm Yûsuf Ağa*"),[305] which define him as both a loyal servant and a trustworthy informant.

Hüseyn is described in a similar way: "*Nüdemâ-yı hâss ve 'ibâd-ı bâ-ihtisâsdan olub, 'ubûdiyyet ü ihlâs makâmında olan Hüseyn Cüce*;"[306] "*Nedîm-i hâss ve bende-i bâ-ihtisâs olan Hüseyn Cüce*;"[307] and "*Yine nedîm-i hâss ve 'abd-i kes îrü'l-ihtisâs* [sic] *olan Cüce Hüseyn Ağa*."[308] However, one difference is worth noting, which is the repetition of words referring to slavery. It is possible that Hüseyn was a slave, and Sâfî wished to indicate this.

These descriptive phrases may often contain other interesting information on the dwarfs. Yûsuf, for instance, appears to have been a member of a brotherhood (*tarîkât*).[309] Dwarf Ebû Bekr, who is compared to Dwarf Zeyrek and the jester Mîrek, would study books together with Sâfî and discuss them with him.[310]

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[303] Ibid.: "Çün pâdişâh-ı 'âlî-câh rütbe-i saltanat ve bu kadar esbâb-ı kibriyâ vü nahvet ile tekebbürden berî ve sıfat-ı 'acz ü tecebbürden müteberrîdür. Mâye-i kibr ü 'ucübden hâlî ve sunduka-i vücûdı metâ'-ı 'acz ü ihtiyâc ile mâlî olan kimseden kibr ü gurûru pesend itmeyüb, müşârün ileyhüñ ol vaz'ını kabûl buyurmamışlardur."

[304] Ibid., p. 33.

[305] Ibid., p. 69.

[306] Ibid., p. 38.

[307] Ibid., p. 82.

[308] Ibid., p. 90.

[309] Ibid., p. 61: "*Harem-i hâss-ı hümâyûn ve derûn-ı serâperde-i hürmet-makrûnda nedîm-i 'irfân-şemîm ve hâdim-i hâss-ı müstekîm ve 'ilm ü ma'rifet ve sülûk-i dervîşî ve tarîkâtdan sâhib-i hazz-ı 'azîm olub, "ve'l-leyli izâ 'as'ase ve's-subhi izâ*

To conclude, unlike their counterparts in the sources discussed above, the dwarfs in Sâfî's work are not mentioned for the harms they did to the state. The aim of this work to praise Sultan Ahmed I and to display his possession of the qualities of an ideal ruler, necessitated, in the first place, reliable informants who thanks to their access to the sultan, could witness the sultan's behaviour in intimate moments. On the other hand, the relationship between the sultan and his dwarf jesters as represented in Sâfî's account always exalts the sultan. When necessary, the sultan defeats his jester by a silencing reply, as he does to Hüseyn. This sultan is not one who would be under the influence of inferior ones such as dwarfs or women.[311] These jesters are in fact not 'jesters' (in the sense of entertainer-critic), but they are not despicable buffoons either. They have many flaws, but these are the flaws of an ordinary human being. What makes this source so distinctive is its humanisation of dwarfs. In fact, along with Selânikî's chronicle, this work enables us to think of dwarfs as social beings and regular members of the court beyond the limits of the taxonomy of jesters.

This chapter has, thus, brought forward a particularly mundane dimension of the role of dwarfs and mutes within the court, which, being complementary to their symbolic meanings, deepens our understanding of their roles and functions within the Ottoman court. The limited evidence presented here suggests that, although they were not officially part of the state apparatus, mutes and dwarfs could have been very much involved in court cliques, promotion mechanisms, and economic infrastructure thanks to their being entrenched within the whole web of alliances that extended in and out of the court. Their power seems to have been proportionate to their privileged access to the female and male domains—which depends on their being eunuchs or not—and to their

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teneffes" hıdmet-i 'aliyye-i hâkâniyyeden bir nefes dûr olmayan Cüce Yûsuf Ağa…" Ibid., p. 139: "*Nedîm-i hâss ve bende-i bâ-ihlâs-ı beyyinü'l-ihtisâs olub, 'ilm ü ma'rifetden behre-i tâmm ve sülûk-i ehl-i tarîkatdan hıssa-i temâme nâil olan Cüce Yûsuf Ağa…*"

[310] Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," p. 56: "*rikâb-ı devlet-iyâbları mülâzimlerinden sâhib-i fehm ü idrâk ve karîn-i 'akl-i derrâk olub, ḫôş fehmi ve nâdire-gûylikde merhûm-ı cennet-mekân Sultân Murâd Hân nedîmi olan Cüce Zeyrek'den ve nedîmi ve şûḫlıḳda merhûm-ı firdevs-âşiyân Sultân Selîm Hân musâhibi olan Mîrek'den etemm ü akdem olub, bu fakîr ile müzâkere ve ba'zı kütübden müdâreseye me'zûn ve her vechile inâyet-i bî-gâyet-i pâdişâhîye makrûn olan Ebû Bekr Cüce…*"

[311] In one of the anecdotes related by Yûsuf, upon a stupid remark of a woman, the sultan recites a couplet on women's half-wit ("*Meseldür tâ ezelden naks üzredür zenüñ 'aklı / Sözi bî-ma'nâdur uyma ki yokdur uyanuñ 'aklı*") (Mustafa Sâfî, "Zübdetü't-Tevârîh," p. 62).

intimacy with the sultan and other powerful figures within the palace and in the ruling elite. In this sense, Sâfî's and Selânikî's accounts are useful in giving us an access into the lives of individual dwarfs, and enabling us to think them beyond any symbolic association as normal courtiers, who—just like any other courtier—were engaged in personal and patrimonial relationships with others. The two lines of representation identified in this chapter—roughly the favourable and unfavourable ones, represented respectfully by Mustafa Sâfî, and by Selânikî and *nasihatnâme* writers—are in fact, in a sense, a result of those relationship patterns that dwarfs and mutes had with their environment.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to locate mutes and dwarfs within the functioning of the Ottoman imperial household on both symbolic and practical levels. On the symbolic level, dwarfs and mutes resided in the imperial household as physically deformed courtiers that were a requirement and indication of royalty, ensured the majestic silence in the vicinity of the sovereign's semi-sacred physical being, and perhaps also implied by contrast the perfection of the royal body. On the practical level, they entertained the sultan, actively took part in the communication within the court and with outside, penetrated into state affairs in informal ways, and (in the case of mutes) acted as attendants and stranglers.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the court's layout and behavioural code were restructured to take their 'classical' shape, the custom of keeping disabled people at court also took its peculiar form in the Ottoman context. Though the custom—having its origins in the primordial belief that associated the physically deformed with the supernatural—was quite widespread to the extent of being a universal requirement of kingship, the Ottoman variant had a certain distinctiveness that lied for the most part in its employment of mutes for the triple function as attendants, strangles, and jesters. Ironically, mutes also provided the members of the imperial court with a common tongue (the sign language) which came to be a significant feature of the Ottoman courtly behaviour. Thus, they were present at various parts of a sultan's daily life: during his entertainments (as jesters and buffoons), during his confidential meetings and receptions (as attendants), as necessary instruments of government (as executioners), and as contributors to his sultanic grandeur (by their sign language). Furthermore, the division of the Ottoman court into female and male zones led to the emergence of a category of castrated mutes and dwarfs, who, thanks to their privileged access into all parts of the court and outside, could acquire power beyond their limited role as entertainers.

The discussion in this thesis on the behavioural limits and patterns of Ottoman court dwarfs and mutes as jesters has shown the difficulty in establishing with confidence that they conformed to the stereotypical jester figure as both an entertainer and a critic who is usually associated with the 'European' type of jesterdom. This difficulty arises perhaps due to a reticence on the part of the sources, which, because of inability to access or reluctance, do not provide any image of a sultan being ridiculed by a witty dwarf or mute. Though we do have some indications of the verbal skills and wittiness of dwarfs and mutes, and a remarkable example of an early 'perfect' jester in the person of (non-dwarf and non-mute) Mashara Arab, it is hard to prove that in the Ottoman world of the 'classical age,' the sultan could indeed have been made to laugh at himself by the intelligent and bold remarks of any jester, let alone a dwarf or mute one. In fact, the references to the etiquette that needs to be learned before entering the sultan's presence and the case of Cehûd Cüce, who was punished for his insolence, attest to the existence of a certain behavioural limit that should not have been breached. Nevertheless, rather than being assessed on the basis of an ontological distinction between the East and the West and used in order to support the view on the intolerance of the 'Oriental despot' to criticism and to any breach of decorum, this result needs to be taken—with caution—simply as a preliminary impression on the relationship between the jester and the sultan in the 'classical age.'

Dwarfs and mutes, however, seem to have exercised a certain influence on state affairs with the help of their contacts in and out of the court, and in and out of the state apparatus, if not by persuading the sultan himself in their private conversations, which are usually inaccessible for the historian. A major contribution of this study to the existing literature is its suggestion that there came to be an increase in the power and wealth of especially eunuch dwarfs and mutes during the period of the rise of the imperial harem—often associated with the 'sultanate of women'—particularly after Murad III's accession to the throne. Depending on their personal ability to establish contacts—which in the case of eunuchism would include the contacts within the imperial harem as well—dwarfs and mutes were able to create a niche within the web of patrimonial relationships that extended in and out of the imperial court. This is demonstrated by the chain of dismissals of associates following the expulsion of a certain dwarf whom they were attached to. Despite the possible exaggerations that the works of Selânikî and Koçi Bey may contain, these major sources on the dwarfs and mutes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries give very significant clues about the

power and wealth of the disabled members of the court in that period, which should not be overlooked.

There is, however, much room left for future research, which by resorting to archival material may clarify and substantiate certain points. For instance, Selânikî's account of Murad III's dwarfs, and Koçi Bey's contention that 'before' dwarfs and mutes would get cash and it was only recently that they had begun to have *timar*s need to be reassessed in the light of archival material. In fact, a drawback of this research is the scarcity of available evidence, which prevents any firm and precise conclusion as to the difference of this period from previous and subsequent periods in terms of the influence exercised by dwarfs and mutes. The very scrappy and sporadic nature of the evidence at hand does not really allow to write an uninterrupted history of Ottoman court dwarfs and mutes, where the impact of the increasing power of the imperial harem in this period could be better understood. The whole discursive framework in some of the writings of the period that is based on a contrast between 'before,' when everything was different and better, and 'now,' when it is getting worse and worse, may have a distorting effect on our view. Likewise, the discursive connection between the 'decaying' body politic and the increasing power of those with 'imperfect' bodies, which has been one of the suggestions of this study, may have affected as well as been affected by the pessimistic observations examined in the third chapter. Still, the very fact that dwarfs and mutes appear in the writings of this period as reasons for complaint testifies to their being well-entrenched into the patrimonial relations, alliances, factions, and rivalries within the court, for it is because of their involvement in these that they had their own enemies. Yet, the contrast between the strong tones of Selânikî and Koçi Bey on the one hand, and the silence of other sources on the other, requires a broader analysis and a more perceptive explanation. Finally, the position(s) of mutes and dwarfs within the court—we do not have to consider them as one single block—as well as the problems of silence and hatred, would be better understood if the cliques and hostilities in and around the court could be mapped out in greater detail.

With its concentration of 'imperfect bodies,' its male and female divisions, its black and white eunuchs, its patterns of sexual conduct and patterns of behaviour in general, the Ottoman court indeed constitutes a fruitful area of research for the history of the body that has not yet been thoroughly exploited. This study is in this sense a contribution to the understanding of the historical roles of certain physical conditions within the Ottoman context.

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