

Holy Men at the Ottoman Court: A Dynasty in Search of Legitimation

Dr Caroline Finkel (Istanbul)

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Caroline Finkel, author of the recent history of the Ottoman Empire *Osman's Dream*, spoke of the 'Spirit of Holy War' animating the Ottoman Sultan and his followers at the siege of Constantinople in 1453. Groups of holy men included *ulama*, who were salaried preachers; dervishes; and mosque preachers close to the life of the people. These careers were often combined. The sultans were invariably affiliated to a dervish order. They were never all-powerful and needed legitimisation from holy men. In April 1512 for example, the *ulama* helped Selim I depose his father Bayezid II. They were necessary to legitimise the Ottoman Empire's wars with other Muslim powers, for example Iran. The holy men around Murad III in the late sixteenth century, including his dream interpreter, were antagonistic to the Grand Vizir Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, to Christians and to astronomical research. In the seventeenth century, opposition to 'all innovations' increased. Taverns were raided and closed. The sale of wine was banned by the Sultan. The preacher Vani Efendi obtained the destruction of eighteen of twenty-five churches and a ban on inter-faith prayers for Ottoman military success. However, defeat in 1683 led to the disgrace of Vani Efendi. He died away from the court. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Sheikhs, especially from the Mevlevi order supported the Sultans' reforms.