

Coming From *Ajam* to *Rum*: Ajam Poets of the 16th Century Ottoman Empire

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1. Introduction

Classical literature prospered in the cultural and literary circles that have been shaped around powerful governments since its formation period. The circles and platforms founded by Umayyads in Damascus and Abbasid in Baghdad have been a center of attention for poets, scholars and artists of the time. Khorasan and Transoxiana began to gain importance especially for Sunni scholars and poets, when the Buwayhids took over the Abbasid caliphate under their control in the middle of the 10th century. Arabic continued to dominate as a language of science and poetry in this century, although Persian began to emerge as a language of poetry in the regions under Samanid rule. These circles which were concentrated in Bukhara, Samarkand and Belh, expanded from India to Anatolia with the emergence of the Ghaznavids and Seljuks. Cities such as Gazne, Herat, Rey, Isfahan, Shirvan, Shiraz, Konya, Sivas and Kayseri have become important literary centers for those who recite Persian poems. The Mongolian invasion of the East during the first quarter of the 13th century brought about great destruction and became the biggest driver of the cultural migration to the West. The focus of this study is the *Ajam* poets who came to Ottoman state in the 13th century as part of the last of ring of this migration wave. The paper identifies the poets who came to Anatolia from the wide geography stretching from Azerbaijan to Kashgar, and elaborates on their positions and roles in the Ottoman literary life.

The first section of the study briefly defines the concept/identity of *Ajam* and deals with the cultural migration from Persia and Anatolia from the time of Mongolian invasion until the conquest of Istanbul.

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This part also discusses the cultural activities under the Mehmet II, the Conqueror and Bayazid II, highlighting Istanbul's focal position in Islamic world. The second part dwells upon the main subject of the study, i.e. the poets who came from *Ajam* to Ottoman Empire between the last years of reign of Beyazid II and Mehmed III. Based on the biographical sources of the period, especially the poet biographies, the study provides information about the situation and position of the *Ajam* poets of the 16th century and discusses the social and political conditions under which *Ajam* poets came to the Ottoman territories in detail. The third section seeks to answer the questions of how Persian poets were received in the Ottoman cultural environment and how they influenced the literary life. In addition, this part explains Ottoman perception of *Ajam* identity and how it changed overtime. Final section highlights the opinions of the Ottoman poets towards the *Ajam* and the competition between these rival groups.

2. The longest migration of The East: Coming from *Ajam* to *Rum*

Ajam (*Acem* in Turkish) is the name given by the Arabs to someone who is not an Arab. In the first centuries of Islam, the term was used to describe communities belonging to Persian tribes. Over time, it became the general name of the people living in the regions from Iraq to the borders of Turkestan. The word *Ajam*, which is used to describe a community, has become so widespread that it also denoted a geography in the form of *Diyar-ı Ajam* (Lands of Ajam) or *Dār u'l-Ajam* (House of Ajam). In the Ottoman world, the *Ajam* used to describe people living in countries starting from the eastern borders of the Ottomans to Turkestan. The word mostly referred to a geographical region rather than people. The inhabitants of this wide region, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation such as Persian, Turkish, Arab, or else were all designated as *Ajam*.

After the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, Anatolia witnessed a great migration predominantly by Oghuz and Turkmen. The Crusades that started at the end of this century, have been the most important justification for the Turks coming from Khorasan, Turkestan, Dashti Kipchak and Transoxiana to make Anatolia their homeland. By the end of the 12th century, Anatolia -with the exception of some of the cities on the sea coast- has now become "Turkey". In this period, there is no designation of *Ajam* for those coming from the eastern lands. In fact, the inhabitants of the region are already immigrants

from the aforementioned regions. With the emergence of Mongolian invasion in the first quarter of 13th century, Anatolia witnessed one of the most intensive migration movements in its history. Large masses, predominantly composed of Turkish tribes, moved towards the Western regions to get rid of the Mongolian invasion. The farthest end of this journey extended to the Aegean shores. This migration movement had a great impact in the shifting the Anatolian demographics in favor of Muslims.

Towards the end of the 13th century, these migration movements had weakened. The conversion of Ilkhanid ruler Gazan Khan to Islam marked the beginning of bringing the cities of Iraq, Azerbaijan, Persian and Khorasan back to their former glorious days. Lands of Persia, Azerbaijan and Iraq had been the center of classical literature until Timur took control over these regions at the end of the 13th century. After a short turbulent period, the region regained its former stability and maintained its peaceful tranquility until Shahruh's death. In the middle of this century, a struggle for dominance broke out between the rulers of Karakoyunlu, Akkoyunlu and Timur. These dates coincided with the period when Mehmet the Conqueror ascended the Ottoman throne. This period when the Ottomans strengthened the central state by eliminating the Anatolian principalities is also the period when the relations with the "*Ajams*" were most intense.

The name of *Ajam* has started to be frequently used in Ottoman science, art and literature with the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. In this period, Ottoman-*Ajam* relations took place as follows: While the students of science from the Ottomans went to the *Ajam* countries for education, *Ajam* scholars and poets came to the Ottoman Empire in search of new patrons and prosperity. In the second half of 15th century, Mullah Djāmī in Herat and Jalāladdīn Devvānī in Shiraz were the most popular personalities of the period. These names, to which both Mehmed the Conqueror and Bayezid II sent precious gifts several times, were an important source of prestige for the Ottomans. Being a student of Mullah Djāmī or being in his circle was a distinguished credential for the period. Those who learned science in these regions for a certain period of time or were in the literary circles were in high demand in the Ottoman Empire. This situation continued until the end of the 15th century, when the Akkoyunlu and Timurids were gone.

Those who have lived in *Ajam* for a certain period were called *mutaajjim*, literally “the one who has become an *Ajam*.” The difference between the *ajam* and the *mutaajjim* was an important criterion in distinguishing the original from the upstarts. Another concept that should be considered in this context is *ajamzadah*. This concept, which is used to express the origin of a person, is used for people whose father, grandfather or ancestors came from *Ajam*.

2.1. The First *Ajam* Poets of Anatolia

By the middle of the 12th century, the Seljuks began to become a powerful state in Anatolia. Kilicarslan II, who ascended the throne in 1155, played a major role in the establishment of the state’s order and institutions. It is seen that cities such as Konya, Sivas, Kayseri, Erzurum, Tokat, Aksaray turned into important centers of cultural and scientific life. In parallel to these developments, the writing of Arabic and Persian works has gradually increased in Anatolia. Seljuk Anatolia was exposed to a strong migration wave in a short time with the start of the Mongol invasion in 1220. People from almost all strata of the society flood into Anatolia. Among them were also favorite scholars, poets and artists of the time. As a result of this migration movement, Anatolia became an important cultural center of the 13th century.

Mawlana Jalaladdin-i Rūmī was the most well-known among those coming from *Ajam*. Mawlana’s ancestors were from Khwarazm, and he was born in Belh. He arrived in Konya with his family at the end of the long journey when he was a child. His father was Mawlana Burhaneddin, an important scholar of his time. Mawlana Jalaladdin, one of the lights of the Ottoman cultural hearth, was the founder of the Mawlavī order, whose influence would continue for centuries. Besides Mawlana Jalaladdin-i Rūmī, 13th century Anatolia has become homeland to many other poets such as Rāvendī, Evhaduddīn-i Kirmānī, Jelāleddīn Verkānī, Kānī-i Tūsī, Shemseddīn Muhammed Isfahanī, Ibn Bībī, Necmeddīn Dāye, Fahreddīn-i Irakī, Seyfeddīn Ferganī who came from *Ajam* lands to Anatolia and wrote their works in Seljukid cities.¹

¹ Ahmet Ateş, “Hicrī VI.-VIII. (XII.-XIV.) Asırlarda Anadolu’da Farsça Eserler,” [Persian Works in Anatolia in Hijri VI.-VIII Centuries] *Istanbul Üniversitesi Türkiyat Enstitüsü Türkiyat Mecmuası* 7-8, no.2 (1940-1942): 94-135.

After the collapse of the Seljuk State, the Period of Principalities began, during which Anatolia left behind its brightest days in terms of literature. Works in Persian continued to be copyrighted in Anatolia, under the rule of the Ilkhanate. However, arrivals from *Ajam* to Anatolia were cut off because the cities around Azerbaijan, Iraq, Persia and Khorasan increasingly became flourished with the adoption of Islam by Ilkhanate in the beginning of 14th century. The Ottoman Principality, which expanded its dominance from the middle of this century, entered the process of staterdom with its conquests in Rumelia. Yildirim Bayezid, who ascended the throne at the end of this century, was now the ruler of a great state.

There is no information about the poets who emerged during reign of the first three Ottoman sultans before Yildirim.² During the reign of Yildirim Bayezid, great progress was seen in the scientific and cultural life of the Ottoman Empire. With the domination of other Anatolian principalities, the poets living in these regions became the first inhabitants of the cultural gatherings in Bursa and Edirne. However, the rise of the Ottoman Empire was interrupted with the Battle of Ankara with Timur in 1402, which lasted until Murad II came to the throne. There is not a single poet who came to Anatolia from the *Ajam* country and became famous during this period.

2.2. Persian Poets of Ottomans in the 15th Century

Sultan Murad II has a big role in formation of Ottoman science, culture and literature life. It is possible to follow the literary life concentrated in cities such as Bursa, Edirne and Manisa through the literary works. It is certain that the translations made from Persian and Arabic in this period had an important effect on the development of classical Turkish literature. Mehmed the Conqueror topped off the legacy he inherited from his father with the conquest of Istanbul. While the young ruler continued his conquests, he was also busy with the construction of the cities that came under his rule. In order to complement these activities, he invited many scholars, artists and poets from the distant regions of the Ottoman Empire and abroad to these cities. The cities and wealth obtained through the conquests were transformed into a source of prosperity for both Ottoman subjects and those living outside the Ottoman rule.

² Gelibolulu Ālī, *Künhü'l-Ahbār'ın Tezkire Kısım*, [The Tazkira Part of Kunhul Ahbar]. Prepared by Mustafa İsen. (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 1994), 101.

Istanbul, which was declared the capital after its conquest, as well as the former capitals, Edirne and Bursa, were the most popular cities of the period. By appointing his princes to the *sanjaks*, Mehmed the Conqueror also allowed the Ottoman scientific and cultural life to spread to other cities.

Mehmed the Conqueror wanted to realize in Istanbul what Timur envisioned for Samarkand. Emir Timur had invited scholars, artists, and poets who lived in the lands he conquered to Samarkand. He wanted Samarkand to be the center of the world and made great efforts for its reconstruction. These activities, which were carried out as part of Timur's vision to be the world conqueror, was mostly coercive. On the other hand, Mehmed the Conqueror used the power, wealth and prestige he gained with his sword to attract the poets, scholars and artists of his time to his country. Historian Ibn Kemal expresses Mehmed the Conqueror's desire on this issue with the following lines:

“Her ne kişverde bir sâhib-i kemâl ehl-i hüner işitse fi'l-hâl haber gönderür da'vet iderdi sîm ü zerle kalbini şöyle celb eylerdi ki bi't-tab' hizmetine rağbet iderdi.”³

“Whenever he heard of a masterly skillful person in a country, he would send a message and invite him to his country along with gold and silver, requesting to benefit from his service.” Sehî Bey, on the other hand, confirms Ibn Kemal's words by saying, “Arabdan ve 'Acemden ehl-i marifet adına olan kimseleri buldurup getürdüh fevka'l-had ri'âyet itdürürdi.”⁴ translated as “He used to bring talented people from Arab and *Ajam* countries and show respect to them.” Mehmed the Conqueror not only invited the *Ajam* to his country, but also gave gifts to the respected names of the period living outside the Ottoman Empire. Latifi said that one thousand florints were sent every year to Haje Jihan from India and Mulla Jâmî from *Ajam* as part of these activities.⁵

³ Ibn Kemâl, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân: VII. Defter (Tenkidli Transkripsiyon) [Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân: .Notebook VII (Transcription with Critique)]*, prep. by Şerafettin Turan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1957), 546.

⁴ Sehî Beg, *Hesht Bihisht*, prep. by. Halük Ipekten et al. (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2017), 15.

⁵ Latîfi, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'arâ ve Tabsiratü'n-Nuzamâ (Inceleme-Metin) [Tezkiretu'sh-Shu'arâ and Tabsiratu'n-Nuzamâ (Analysis-Text)]*, prep. by Rıdvan Canım (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2000), 141.

Mustafa, the eldest son of Mehmed the Conqueror, and his other son Bāyezīd, who would later ascend to the throne, established a life of science and literature in Konya and Amasya, respectively. After the death of Prince Mustafa, Cem Sultan, who was given the Kastamonu *sanjak* a short time ago, was sent to Konya. These two princes, who will later fight for the throne, form their own councils in Konya and Amasya as a part of their rehearsal for the throne. Many poets who were in the entourage of Cem Sultan, himself a great poet, would be referred to as “Cem Poets” in biographies. There were also important poets in the entourage of Bayezid, who wrote poems under the pen name “Adlī”. The first stop of the poets, especially from *Ajam*, was the palace of Bayezid II in Amasya. Hamidi and Kabuli arrived in Amasya before reaching Istanbul, and moved on to the capital with the reference of the prince.

During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, Hasan-i Isfahanī, Hāmidī-i Isfahanī, Kabūlī, Gulshen-i Saruhanī (Shirvānī), Shukrullāh-ı Shirvānī, Mehdī-i Shirāzī, Meālī, Aynī-i Karamanī (Tirmizī), Halilī, Ma’nevī were the distinguished poets who came from *Ajam* to Ottoman land. While some of these poets wrote works for the sultan, others glorified the sultan’s reign with the *madhiyah* (praising poems) they wrote. During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, the number of poets who went to *Ajam* from the Ottoman Empire was also significant. Poets such as Melihī, Abdullah-ı İlāhī, Halimī, Nizāmī-i Karamani, Abdulvasi Chalabi, Shavkī from Edirne and Gamī are those who went to *Ajam* for the purpose of education and training. All of these poets later returned to their homeland. Dede Omar Rūshenī, on the other hand, went to Tabriz from his hometown Aydın, but he did not return to his country and died there.

3. Persian Poets of Ottomans in the 16th Century

After the death of Mehmed the Conqueror, Bayezid II ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1481. But for a long time, he had to continue his struggle for the sultanate against his brother Cem Sultan. Having given up hope to ascend to the Ottoman throne, Cem took refuge first in Egypt and then in Italy. However, the refugee prince became an important diplomatic issue for the Ottoman Empire until his death in 1495. Bayezid II, who became the sultan after a tiring struggle

for the sultanate, had to deal with the Mamluks in the Cukurova region while busy with the Rumelian conquests on the other hand. Compared to his father who was known as *Ebu'l Feth* (The father of the conquest), Bayezid II's term was rather unfruitful in terms of conquests but his role in the Ottoman scientific and cultural life was comparable to that of his father. Throughout his reign, the young sultan tried to extend the path his father paved.

3.1. *Bāyezīd II (1481-1512)*

Although Bayezid II was overshadowed by his father's charismatic personality, he succeeded in upholding and elating his father's understanding of protecting science and art. He made great efforts to protect important figures belonging to different classes. Containing the records between the years 909-917/1503-1511, the *In'āmāt Defteri* (*Notebook of Gifts*) bears the reflections of the care shown by Beyazid II. These grants, registered with names such as *in'ām* (gift), *tasadduk* (charity), and *idāne* (loan), indicate how vibrant the period was in terms of scientific and cultural life. During the reign of Bayezid II, some of the poets who came to the Ottoman lands from the *Ajam* countries, managed to fit in the palace circles and receive regular service pay (*ulufe*). The entry "He came from the *Ajam*", which is frequently seen in this notebook, indicates the landscape of the period.⁶ In order to understand the reasons for the increase in the number of poets who came to the Ottoman country from *Ajam* during the reign of Bayezid II, it would be useful to look at the political developments in the East.

In the middle of the reign of Bayezid II, that is, at the beginning of the 16th century, major political events took place in the *Ajam* lands. The Timurid sultans and their lords, who controlled Khorasan and Transoxiana, began to lose their lands as a result of the pressures of the Uzbeks from the north. After the death of Huseyn Baykara, no strong sultans remained in Khorasan and Transoxiana and the conflicts for sovereignty between the princes allowed Uzbeks to easily take over the region. Even though Babur, son of Omer Mirza,

⁶ See İlhan Gök, "Atatürk Kitaplığı M.C. O.71 Numaralı 909-933/1503-1527 Tarihli In'āmāt Defteri (Transkripsiyon-Değerlendirme)" ["The Book of Rewards at the Atatürk Library with Number M.C.O.71 and dated 909-933/1503-1527 (Transcription -Evaluation)"], (Ph,D Dissertation Marmara University, 2014), 400, 760.

one of the sultans of Transoxiana, had short-term successes in trying to protect the country of Timur by fighting against the Uzbeks, he had to renounce his ancestral homeland and retreat to Kabul and India. Similar events occurred in the Akkoyunlu country as well. After the death of Yakub Khan in 1494, the Akkoyunlu state started to disintegrate. The Akkoyunlu State first came under the rule of Rustem, then Mirza (Göde) Ahmed, Uzun Hasan's grandson, son of Ugurlu Mehmed. Yet Sultan Ahmed was not able to survive the sedition of the Akkoyunlu amirs and was killed in 1497.⁷ In the mean time, Safavids, who were getting stronger in the region, united around Shah Ismail and started to take Azerbaijan under control. In 1502, they took Tabriz and ended the reign of the Akkoyunlu dynasty in Azerbaijan.

Due to these political developments, migration towards the Ottoman country from Azerbaijan, Iraq, Iran and Khorasan regions, which was the scene of great turmoil and strife, became inevitable. The historical and deep enmity between Shah Ismail, who was the son of Uzun Hasan's daughter, and the Akkoyunlu amirs brought a great war to the region. In the cities they ruled, the Safavids followed and killed the members of Akkoyunlu dynasty.⁸ This situation forced especially the Akkoyunlu dynasty and their close/affiliated groups to leave their homeland in a haste. Meanwhile, "Turkman serdars" (Turcoman commanders), that is, members of the Akkoyunlu dynasty, flocked to the Ottoman country as historian Ibn Kemal stated in his book *Tevārīh-i Āl-i Osman*.⁹

The Safavids acted with sectarian fanaticism in the regions they dominated and therefore, forced scholars, poets and craftsmen to migrate. Some members of the intellectual group took refuge in the regions of Khorasan and Transoxiana, which were dominated by the Uzbeks. Most of them preferred to pass to Anatolian lands. The Safavids' taking control of Persia and Jibal regions and thus preventing the passage to the east was also a factor in this choice. The flight of Ibrahim Gulshenī, who was one of the followers of Dede Omer Rushenī and was close to the Akkoyunlu dynasty,

⁷ Ibn Kemāl, *Tevārīh-i Āl-i Osmān*: VII. Defter, 148-158.

⁸ Ibn Kemāl, *Tevārīh-i Āl-i Osmān*: VII. Defter, 276.

⁹ Ibn Kemāl, *Tevārīh-i Āl-i Osmān*: VII. Defter, 232.

from Tabriz to his hometown Diyarbakır, is noteworthy in terms of showing what happened in the region. Muhyī Gülshenī, in his book *Menākīb-ı İbrāhīm-i Gülshenī*, tells the story of this escape from *Ajam* in detail.¹⁰

During the reign of Bayezid II, the number of poets from *Ajam* increased considerably compared to the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. However, it is not possible to identify the names of all *Ajam* poets who had been in the Ottoman lands during this period. In *Hesht Behisht*, which was written in 1543 and is the first collection of Ottoman poets, very little space is given to *Ajam* poets of the period. While talking about Basīrī-i Acem, who was in the entourage of Uzun Hasan's son Uğurlu Mehmed Mirzā for a while, Sehī Bey states that he included only Anatolian poets in his biographies by saying that "this person was considered as a *Rumi* poet and thus was registered into the collection of biographies."¹¹ Sehī Bey, who lived during the reign of Bayezid II, was the most important source of information about the poets of this period, yet he included very few *Ajam* poets in his work due to his focus on the Rumi poets (literally, "Roman," a geographical designation for lands formerly part of Eastern Roman Empire.) Latifi, who lived in the first years of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, also gave partial information about *Ajam* poets in *Tazkiratu's-Shu'arā wa Tabsīratu'n-Nuzamā*, which he wrote in 1548. Therefore, the biography records are not sufficient for identification of the *Ajam* poets of the Bayezid II period.

The bookkeeping records of the Bayezid II era, which is known as the *In'āmāt Defteri*, provides very rich material about the poets of the period. However, some of the poets who received donations in this period were recorded in the class they belonged to rather than their profession, so it is sometimes not possible to identify them. In addition, the fact that the people who receive donations are sometimes recorded by pseudonyms and sometimes by their names makes it difficult to identify poets. Another important archival source about the poets of Bayezid II period is the *Defter-i Kutub* (*Notebook of Books*), which was prepared in 1503 and contains the list

¹⁰ Muhyī-i Gulshenī, *Menākīb-ı İbrāhīm-i Gülshenī (Inceleme-Metin)*. [*Menākīb-i İbrāhīm-i Gülshenī (Analysis -Text)*]. prep. by Mustafa Koç and Eyüp Tanrıverdi (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2014), 226-233.

¹¹ Sehī Beg, *Hasht Bihisht*, 152.

of books in the Ottoman Palace.¹² Through this notebook, some of the works presented to Bayezid II can be identified.

During the reign of Bayezid II, the most famous of the poets who came to the Ottoman country is Basīrī. It is recorded that the first person who brought the divan of Ali Shir Nevāyī to Anatolia was Basīrī.¹³ Other poets who came to Anatolia during this period are: Hāfiz-ı Ajam, Efsahī, Hakīmī, Kāsim b. Ahmed Konjaī, Sherīfī-i Mu‘ammāyī, Edāyī-i Shirāzī, Alā‘ī-i Kirmānī, Sayyid Ahmed Huseynī (Emīr Buhārī), Azīzī, Mā‘ilī, Sā‘ilī, Edībī, ‘Iyānī, Alā‘ī-tāibī, Aīzāibī, Aīzāmi-Mācī Ferruhi, Ahmed-i Balish, Hakimi, Habīb, Fahr-i Halhalī, Muzehhib-i Kirmani. In addition, one of the important bureaucrats of the Akkoyunlu State, Idris-i Bidlisī; one of the grandchildren of Seyyid Sherīf Jurjānī, Mu‘inüddīn Ashraf Mirza Mahdūm; Sheikh Abdullah-i Shebusterī (Niyāzī Sherīf Jurjānī); one of the grandchildren of Shebusterī who is the author of *Gulshen-i Rāz*; II. Bāyezīd’s palace doctor Mawlānā Sedīd-i Kazvīnī; Sheikh Fethullah (Fethī), son of Sheikh Muzafferuddin Ali, are among the elite of the poets who came from Persia.

3.2. Selīm I (1512-1520)

After the Safavids eliminated the Akkoyunlu State, they continued to expand their dominance in the direction of Khorasan and Anatolia. Although Shah Ismail tried to keep his diplomatic relations with the Ottomans at a good level, the fact that Shah Ismail occupied Diyarbakir and reached the borders of Maraş signaled a great danger was at the door. The Shahkulu Revolt that broke out in 1511, on the other hand, meant that the *Qizilbash* threat directly targeted the Ottomans. At the time of these events, Bayezid II’s decision to leave the throne to his eldest son Ahmed due to his old age intensified the struggle for the sultanate among the princes. Sultan Selim won the struggle against his father and brother Ahmed and ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1512.

Sultan Selim reinstated state authority in a short time and immediately started the preparations for the *Ajam* expedition. In the battle that took place in Chaldiran in 1514, Sultan Selim,

¹² See Atufī, *Defter-i Kütüb* (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Törük F 59)

¹³ Latīfī, *Tezkiretü’ş-Şu‘arā ve Tabsiratü’n-Nuzamā (Inceleme-Metin)*, 101.

who defeated Shah Ismail, entered Tabriz, the ancient capital of the Akkoyunlus and the new capital of the Safavids. The sultan remained in the city for a while and brought his favorite scholars, poets, artists and other professionals of the Persian region back to Ottoman lands on his return from the campaign.¹⁴ As reflected in the archival records of the period, many artists and craftsmen from music to illumination, from calligraphy to bookbinding were brought to the Ottoman territory.

Some of the poets who came to the Ottoman lands during the reign of Bayezid II found the respect they deserved during the reign of Selim I. Edāyī-i Shirāzī, 'Iyānī, Niyāzī, Mātemī, Sā'ilī, who came to Istanbul during Bayezid II's reign, presented their works to Sultan Selim. The poets who came to Anatolia during the reign of Sultan Selim or were brought at the request of the Sultan were Shah Kasim, Shukrī-i Bidlisī, Garībī, Hashimī, Shāhī-i Sharkī, Shemseddin Muhammed, Hakim Ebū Talib and Habībī.

3.3. *Suleiman the Lawgiver (1520-1566)*

After the short reign of Sultan Selim, Sultan Suleiman ascended the Ottoman throne in 1520. He continued the conquests that his father had started with great determination and took over the Iraqi lands under his rule. The tradition of patronizing literature and art continued in this period, when the central administration was gradually strengthened and new cities joined the territory of the country. Apart from the Ottoman palace, literary gatherings were formed in the mansions and palaces of important statesmen such as Piri Mehmed Pasha, Defterdār Iskender Chelebi and İbrāhim Pasha. Some of the *Ajam* poets who came during the reign of Bayezid II and Sultan Selim preserved their privilege in the palace environment in this period.

The first poets' biographies of the Ottoman circles began to be written during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. The biographies by Sehī Bey, Latifī, Āshik Chelebi and Ahdī provide the opportunity to closely follow the poets of the period. Especially Ahdī's biographies provide valuable information about the poets who came to the

¹⁴ For some of the names that Yavuz Sultan Selim Han brought from Tabriz see Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "H. 933-934 (M. 1527-1528) Malī Yılına Ait Bir Bütçe Örneği," ["An Example of Budget Belonging to Financial Year H. 933-934 (M. 1527-1528)"] *Istanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15, no. 1-4 (1953): 326-7.

Ottoman Empire from the *Ajam* region due to the fact that its author was from Baghdad. Kinalizāde's *Tazkiratus'-Shu'arā*, written in the Murad III period, is also important in that it complements the shortcomings of the previous biographies.

The movement of scholars and poets from *Ajam* to *Rum* in the Sultan Suleiman period is not as intense as it was in the time of his grandfather and father. However, because many biographers lived in this period, the names of many less and more famous poets were recorded. We can list the poets of the Sultan Suleiman period as follows: Sehābī, Eflātun (Esīrī), Zuhurī-i Chagatayī, Judāyī-i Buhārī, Bidārī, Hazānī, Mehmed Emīn, Iyshī, Molla Muhammed Ma'sūm, Molla Shamseddin (Dā'ī), Halilī-i Kazvīnī, Hāverī, Handān, Zīrekī, Sarfī, Molla Imād, Ferdī, Fedāyī, Mīr Kadrī-i Shirvānī, Lutfī, Mufredī, Mahfī-i Gīlānī, Murādī, Hemdemī. Abdulaziz-i Ajam, Necātī-i Ajam and Rizā-yī Ajam are those poets whose names are not included in the biographies but in the *in'āmāt* records of the period. There were also poets who came from *Ajam* and went directly to Baghdad, Damascus, Aleppo and Egypt, bypassing Anatolia.¹⁵

3.4. Selim II and After (1566-1600)

Ottoman Sultans of second half of 16th century are Selim II (1566-1574), Murad III (1574-1595) and Mehmed IV (1595-1603). This period is very rich in terms of classical Turkish literature, both in terms of *masnavi* (classical stories in verse) and collections of poetry. The problems that arose in the economic and social life during the reign of Murad III directly affected the literary circles. The patronage of literature has gradually weakened compared to previous periods. In the last quarter of this century, the tensions with the Safavids on the eastern border of the country brought along long-term wars. This situation also reduced the opportunities for *Ajams* to come to the Ottoman lands. During this period, *Ajam* became "enemy" in the Ottoman mental world. This perception directly affected the image of *Ajamzadah* poets in the country.

The most respected of the poets who came to the Ottoman country in the second half of the 16th century is Hazīnī-i Hisārī. Hazīnī was the Nakshi-Yesevi sheikh who came to the Ottoman lands

¹⁵ See Ahdī-i Baghdādī. *Ahdi ve Gülşen-i Şu'arasi (Inceleme-Metin) [Ahdi and his Gulshen-i Shuara (Analysis-Text)]*, prep. by Süleyman Solmaz (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2005), 468.

from Hisar, which is currently within the borders of Tajikistan. He attained Murad III's compliments and blessings. In the second half of the 16th century, the position of *Ajam* poets in the Ottoman literary circles weakened. Yet, the duty of palace *shahname* writing (literary records of historical events) was still entrusted to *Ajam* poets in this period. Between 1569 and 1595, the duty of *shahname* authorship was under the responsibility of Sayyid Lokman Chalabi, who was originally from Urmia. Fethullah Arif Chalabi and Eflatun-ı Shirvani, successors of Chalabi, were also of *Ajam* origin.

3.5. Born in the Ottoman Empire and Remembered as *Ajam*: *Ajamzadah* Poets of the 16th Century

By the end of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, there was a great decrease in the number of poets coming from *Ajam* to Ottoman cities. In this period, it is seen that rather than *Ajam* poets, the number of poets known as *Ajamzādah* increased. The designation of poets as *Ajamzādah* pointing to their fathers or grandfathers is sometimes a sign of the poet's highly regarded ancestry, and at other times a derogatory implication that he is not of Ottoman origin. *Ajamzādah* poets of the Ottomans usually wrote poetry in Turkish, but were mostly the sons of fathers who recite poetry in Persian. There were many *Ajamzādah* poets in the 16th century Ottoman literary life. Some of them were descendants of the famous *Ajams* of the past. Niyāzī, son of Molla Hafiz *Ajam*; author of *Shahnāme* Fethullah Ārif (Ārifī), one of the grandchildren of Ibrahim-i Gulshenī; Emir (Mīrek Hekīm) son of Sayyid Islam; Jalīlī, son of Hamidī; Ebulfazl Chalabi, son of Idris-i Bidlīsī; Hasan Beyoglu *Ajamī* Kāsım Pasha; Atāyī of Skopje; Mehmed (Gayretī), one of the children of Ulama Pasha; Ahmed (Hayālī), the son of Ibrahim-i Gulshenī; Rumuzi Chalabi and Muhyī-i Gulshenī were the leading names of this group. Other *Ajamzādah* poets, many of whom we are aware of through the *Gulshen-i Shu'arā* of Ahdī, were Jevrī (from Edirne), Mirī (from Bursa), Sabūhī, 'Iyani, Germī Beg (Bağdādī), Hamdī-i Bursevī, Hālī, Khalife (Amidī), Shuhūdi. (Kara Amid), Alāyī, Kurbī, Latifī-i Hanende, Nutkī, Yārī, Firākī (from Kütahya), and Vālihi (from Tokat).

4. *Ajam* Poets in Ottoman Literary Circles

Since the reign of Mehmed, the Conqueror, the Ottoman Empire claimed to be the center of the Islamic world. Mehmed the Conqueror,

who expanded his field of dominance with his conquests, made a great effort to make his country a center of science, art and literature. The young sultan, who first invited those in the provinces of his own country to Istanbul, later extended this invitation to territories outside his dominance. Since his reign, the Ottoman Empire made it a state policy to gather scholars, artists and poets living in different parts of the Islamic world. As a result of this policy, which was pursued with care and diligence, many people from different classes and clans came to the Ottoman country from the Ajam region since the second half of the 15th century.

The policy followed by the Ottoman rulers was an integral part of the claim to sultanate. Being a world conquerer did not only mean to conquer territories and fill the state treasury, but to bring together all the elements that signify power and greatness around one's sultanate. The patronage of scholars, poets, artists and other professionals constituted an important element of this endeavour. For this reason, many rulers made an effort to assemble prominent figures of their period in their country. The activities of Emir Timur and Sultan Shahrūh on this subject are well known. While talking about Mawlana Valihi, Ali Shir Nevayi also mentions that Jihanshah's son Pir Budak transferred the poets of the Khorasan region to Shiraz.¹⁶ Similarly, Akkoyunlu ruler Yakub Han brought together the poets from the surrounding regions in his palace in Tabriz.

4.1. Elites of the Ottoman Country: Ajam Poets Around the Palace

The *Ajam*, who came to the Ottoman country since the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, were highly respected by the rulers and were given positions suitable for their merits. In this period when the conquests continued rapidly, there were more than enough opportunities for outsiders. This situation made the Ottoman country a great center of attraction for the *Ajams*. In addition, the Ottomans generally regarded the presence of *Ajam* artists in their own country as a source of pride. In his *Mashā'irü'sh-Shu'arā*, Āshik Chalabi records that he heard Hāfiz-i Ajam who came to Istanbul

¹⁶ Ali Shir Nevāyī, *Mecālisü'n-Nefāyis (Giriş ve Metin)*, [*Mejālisü'n-Nefāyis (Introduction and Text)*], prep. by Kemal Eraslan (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2001), 52.

during the reign of Bayezid II, saying “When we came to Rum, our splendor shocked the people,” which confirms the above opinion.¹⁷

Various stories and information are conveyed in the biographies about the popularity of *Ajam* poets in the Ottoman country. Regarding this issue, what is told about Le‘ālī of Tokat, who came to Istanbul after staying in *Ajam* for a while, is remarkable. Latīfī relates the following story for the aforementioned poet in his collection of biography:

“Mehmed Han devrinden kisvet-i kalenderī birle büm-ı Rüm’a gelüp müteaccim iken Acem geçinüp ekābir ü a’yāna Hazret-i Mevlānā Cāmī selāmın ve ‘Acem erenleri peyāmın getürdi. (...) Acem olmayup müte‘accim olduğu tuyuldukda iltifāt-ı şāhīden dūr ve bisāt-ı kurb-i pādīşāhīden mehcūr oldu. Meger ol zamānda tāyife-i ‘Acem’e gāyetde ragbet ü hürmet ü ri‘āyet var imiş ve anı işidüp fuzalā-yı ‘Acemden vilāyet-i Rma çok kāmīl-vücūd kimse gelür imiş.”¹⁸

(“During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, Le‘ālī came to Rum by pretending to be a Kalenderi dervish, and although he was *mutaajjim*, he claimed to be *Ajam* and supposedly brought the messages of the Mawlana Jam‘i and other *Ajam* saints. When it was understood that he was not *Ajam*, but in fact *mutaajjim*, he was denied the high regard and removed from the sultan’s close proximity. Indeed, being *Ajam* was popular and highly respected at that time, and hearing this, many talented people came to *Rum* from among the skillful *Ajams*”)

Le‘ālī, who introduced himself as an *Ajam* in Istanbul, lost the reputation he had gained when it was learned that he was originally from Tokat. Although the authenticity of this story is debatable, it illustrates the prevailing perceptions about the *Ajam* poets in the period.

It is possible to confirm from the archival records that the *Ajams* enjoyed great acceptance and dignity in the Ottoman lands. There were also *Ajam* poets among the poets who received regular service pays in the *In‘āmāt Notebook* of the Bayezid II period. Persian poets

¹⁷ Āshik Chalabi, *Meşā‘irü’ş-Şu‘arā*, prep. by Filiz Kılıç (Istanbul: Istanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Yayınları, 2010), volume II- 663.

¹⁸ Latīfī, *Tezkiretü’ş-Şu‘arā ve Tabsiratü’n-Nuzamā*, 473-4. See also Sehī Beg, *Heşt Bihışt*, 93.

Mā'ili, Sāilī, and Basīrī are among the notables of the group that regularly receives *ulūfe*.¹⁹ Other *Ajam* poets who received financial aid in this period are Iyani, Edibi, Kesbī, and Ahmed-i Tash(?). Idris-i Bidlisī, one of the favorite *Ajams* of the Bayezid II period, was among those who received high financial aid due to his works.²⁰ Since the identities of some of the poets in the *Ināmāt Defteri* could not be identified, it is possible that there were other *Ajam* poets who received financial aid during this period.

It is recorded that Sheikh Abdullah-i Sebusterī, with the pseudonym Niyāzī, who came to Istanbul during the reign of Bayezid II, received 30 *akce* daily from the palace during the reign of Sultan Selim, and also received 5 thousand *akce* every 3 months.²¹ Mevlānā Shamsuddin Berde'ī (Hamdī), who was a member of a large *ulama* family and came to Istanbul from Khorasan in 917/1511-512, was also very popular during the reign of Sultan Selim. The poet, who studied the famous ode written by Mawlana Sharaf on behalf of Sultan Selim; was rewarded with 300 Ashrafi gold coins, a sable fur and 70 *akces* per day.²² Again, after the Battle of Chaldiran, Sultan Selim gave forty *akces* to Shah Kasim, whom he brought from Tabriz to Istanbul. Later, in response to his authorship, he first increased his service pay to seventy *akce*, and during his Egyptian expeditions it was increased to one hundred *akces*.²³

It is seen that *Ajam* poets received financial aid several times in the first years of the reign of Suleiman the Lawgiver. Emīnī was rewarded with three thousand *akces* in return for his ode that he wrote upon the conquest of Rhodes.²⁴ Also in the notebook, which contains the records of the years 933-942 (1527-1536) *Ajam* poets were documented as receiver of financial aid. Among these poets, Iyānī, Edībī and Basīrī were the poets who had received gifts since the Bayezid II. Among these names, there is a poet with the pseudonym

¹⁹ Ismail Erünsal, *Edebiyat Tarihi Yazıları*, [Papers on History of Literature] (Istanbul: Dergāh Yayınları, 2016), 224-5, 239.

²⁰ Erünsal, *Edebiyat Tarihi Yazıları*, 218-9.

²¹ Ali Shīr Nevāyī, "Kismet-i Duvvom: Tercüme-i Hakīmşāh Muhammed-i Kazvīnī" in *Tezkire-i Mecalisü'n-Nefāis*, prep. by Ali Asgar Hikmet (Tahran: Kitabfurūş-i Menuçehrī, 1363), 366-7.

²² Ali Shīr Nevāyī, "Kismet-i Duvvom: Tercüme-i Hakīmşāh Muhammed-i Kazvīnī", 370.

²³ Āshik Chalabi, *Meşā'irü'ş-Şu'arā*, III/1415.

²⁴ Ali Shīr Nevāyī, "Kismet-i Duvvom: Tercüme-i Hakīmşāh Muhammed-i Kazvīnī", 407.

Necātī-i Ajam, whose identity is unknown.²⁵ In 955/1548, it is stated that the *Ajam* poets Abdulaziz, Sehābī and Rizā received regular service pay.²⁶

As suggested by the biography authors (*tezkirah*) and some poets, the popularity of the *Ajam* in the Ottoman country did not extend to the whole group as it was once thought. There were also others who could not find what they expected once they came to Istanbul. Mawlana Habib, a good calligrapher and a poet, was one of them. Kazvīnī states that despite all of Habīb's virtues, he had trouble making a living due to the decrease in interest in poetry in Istanbul and seeing that he could not achieve anything with poetry, he had to return to his main profession, tile making.²⁷

In some collection of biographies, it is stated that *Ajam* poets were given high financial aid, although they did not deserve it. Gelibolulu Ālī says that Shukrī-i Bidlisī received 80 thousand *akces* worth of land from Suleiman the Lawgiver through Ibrahim Pasha in exchange for the *Selīmname* he wrote.²⁸ He adds that the poet belittled this reward and did not show gratitude. However, in the archival records, it is seen that on February 20, 1530, Shukri received 15 thousand *akces* for the book he presented to the palace.²⁹ Gelibolulu Ālī must have narrated this story in order to say that even mediocre poets were given great gifts in the past. Hakīmşāh Kazvīnī also narrates an interesting story about Mā'ilī, one of the favorite palace poets of the Bayezid II period. Mā'ilī presented an ode by one of the old poets to Bayezid II who noticed it. Since the sultan was a gracious and generous person, he sent the collection of poems by the original poet along with 5 thousand *akces* to Mā'ilī, and instructed him not to resort to such schemes. Most of the information about the financial aid given to the poets in the collection of biographies is unreliable.³⁰ To convey the troubles of his time by glorifying the bright periods

²⁵ Erünsal, *Edebiyat Tarihi Yazıları*, 231.

²⁶ Erünsal, *Edebiyat Tarihi Yazıları*, 209, 239-240.

²⁷ Ali Şir Nevāyī, "Kismet-i Duvvom: Tercüme-i Hakīmşāh Muhammed-i Kazvīnī", 381.

²⁸ Ali Şir Nevāyī, "Kismet-i Duvvom: Tercüme-i Hakīmşāh Muhammed-i Kazvīnī", 234.

²⁹ Erünsal, *Edebiyat Tarihi Yazıları*, 244.

³⁰ This is not exclusive to Ottoman biography authors. Ali Shir Nevayī also reports that Mir Kemāleddīn Huseyin, who came from Khorasan to Iraq, received financial aid (suyurgal) of 100 dinars annually from the Akkoyunlu ruler Yakūb Khan. See. Ali Şir Nevāyī, *Mecālisü'n-Nefāyis*, 142. In fact, the amount mentioned is too high to be given to a poet as a gift. As a comparison, let us state that the annual income of the Ottoman beylerbeys (governors) was well below this figure.

of the past had become a common practice in almost all biography authors.

Undoubtedly, apart from the names we have mentioned above, there are some other *Ajam* poets who were accepted around the palace. Yet, this honor is not extended to all *Ajam* poets. Although many poets came to the Ottoman country from *Ajam*, only some of them were complimented because of their fame in the region they came from and their influential friends in Istanbul. The patronage of literature which was stronger in the reigns of Bayezid II and Selim Han gradually weakened since the middle of the reign of Suleiman the Lawgiver. Especially after the death of Defterdar Iskender Chalabi (d. 1535) and Ibrahim Pasha (d. 1536), not only the number of poets who received regular service pay decreased, but also there was a serious depreciation in the amount of pays.

4.2. Rumi-Ajam Rivalry in the Ottoman Empire

Since the start of the 15th century, it has been very popular to read the *divans* of *Ajam* masters and to recite poems in their style among the Ottoman poets. The poets of this period often compared themselves to *Ajam* poets. Moreover, many Ottoman poets regarded themselves as followers of poets such as Enverī-i Ebīverdī, Hakanī-i Shirvānī, Zahiruddīn-i Faryābī, Nizāmī-i Ganjavī, Kemāleddīn Ismāīl-i Isfahanī, Sa‘dī-i Shirāzī, Husrev-i Dihlevī, Hacū-yim, Sāvejī, Kemāl-i Hojendī, and Hāfız-ı Shirāzī and they often referred to these poets to show their own worth and superiority. In fact, some Ottoman poets expressed that they were uncomfortable with being compared to their Anatolian predecessors and stated that if there was a similarity, they should be likened to *Ajam* poets.

During this period, many Ottoman poets were accused of plagiarizing ideas and phrases from *Ajam* poets. The accusation of reciting poetry from the *divans* of the masters of Persian poetry through reinterpretation, translation or even direct copying was attributed to many poets in the period. Āshik Chalabi states that Zātī, who frequently accused other people of reciting poems translated from Persian, defended himself by saying “You know that I don’t know Persian” when the same accusation is made against him.³¹ Considering that even great poets such as Ahmed

³¹ Āshik Chalabi, *Meşā’irü’ş-Şu‘arā*, III/1374.

Pasha were exposed to such an accusation, one can realize the extent of contention.

By the end of the 15th century, the *Ajam* poets of the preceding generation kept their popularity, although contemporary *Ajams* began to fall out of favor. The situation was a little more complicated in the period when *Ajam* poets flocked to the Ottoman country. The veneration shown to the old greats of *Ajam* poetry gave way to competition against the contemporary followers of the same tradition. *Ajam* poets are no longer seen as people to be taken as an example, but as people to be competed with and even fought against to protect one's position. The area where this rivalry was most intensely felt was distribution of financial aid and rank.

In the first years of the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror and Bayezid II, the popularity of *Ajam* increased the expectations of those coming from that region. The fact that those who previously came from *Ajam* obtained high positions led those who came later to have such a hope. Increasing *Ajam* immigration since the beginning of the 16th century created a competitive environment in the Ottoman country, especially for poets. Poets, who had been waiting to rise in their own ranks for years, experienced resentment because the positions they desired were given to outsiders. The famous poem by Le'ālī of Tokat, who is said to have lost his former reputation with the accusation of being a *mutaajjim*, is the best expression of this sentiment in the period:

Olmak istersen i'tibāra mahall
Ya 'Arabdan yāhud 'Acemden gel
'Acemün her biri ki Ruma gelür
Ya vezāret ya sancak uma gelür³²

(If you want to be respected, come from Ajam or from Arabia.
Each *Ajam* come to Rum expecting to become a vizier or a governor.)

Āshik Chalabi narrates the following verse of Mesihī, who lived at the same time as Le'ālī, with the introduction:

Mesihī gökden insen sana yir yok
Yüri gel yā 'Acemden yā 'Arabdan³³

³² Latīfī, *Tezkiretü's-Şu'arā ve Tabsiratü'n-Nuzamā*, 474.

³³ Āshik Chalabi, *Meşā'irü's-Şu'arā*, II/810. See also Mesihī, *Mesihī Dīvānı*, prep by. Mine Mengi (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 1995), 231.

(Oh Mesīhī, there is no place for you even if you descend from the sky /You better come walking from Ajam or Arab)

In the introduction of a Persian poem which was possibly written for Bayezid II, Mesīhī says:

Merā zi-zümre-i ebnā-yı Rūmiyān me-şumār
Egerçi Rūmī-yem emmā guzeşteem zi-‘Acem³⁴

(Don’t consider me belonging to the class of Rumi sons.
Although I am from Rum, my ancestors came from Ajam)

Mesīhī, like his contemporary Le’ālī, states that in order to find prestige in the Ottoman country, it is necessary to come from the Arab or *Ajam* lands, and that no other virtue can open the doors of popularity. Mesīhī’s belief in the association between gaining prestige and coming from abroad must have been very deep. So much so that the poet claims the reputation he longed for by saying that he was also of *Ajam* descent. The complaint, voiced by both Le’ālī and Mesīhī, reflects the general opinions of the poets of the period. As a matter of fact, Uzun Firdevsi complains profusely that the land given to him for his authorship of *Süleymān-nāme* was taken back by Yavuz Sultan Selim upon his return from the *Ajam* expedition and given to Shamsī Chalabi.³⁵ Whenever they found the opportunity, Ottoman poets expressed their discomfort about diversion of the financial aid they would receive to poets coming from abroad: Similar complaints were also present at the end of the 16th century. In his poem he wrote on the occasion of Mehmed III’s coming to Istanbul from Manisa to ascend the throne, Gelibolulu Ālī, who constantly wrote works in order to gain a rank, states that the *Ajams* have received enough rank referring to the office of palace *Shahnāme* authorship and that from now on the skillful should be given their due share:

Yiter menāsıbı kullandı nā-kesān-ı ‘Acem
Ma’ārif ehli murād alacak zemān geldi³⁶

³⁴ Mesīhī, *Mesīhī Dīvānı*, 80.

³⁵ Sezer Özyaşamış Şakar, “Firdevsī-i Rūmī’nin Süleymannāme Yazmasınının (81. cilt, 28 yk) Bilimsel Yayını ve Üzerinde Dil İncelemeleri” [“A Scientific Publication of and Language Studies on Firdevsī-i Rūmī’s *Süleymannāme* Manuscript (Volume 81, 28 leaves)] (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Mimar Sinan University, 2003), 20.

³⁶ Gelibolulu Mustafa Ālī, *Dīvān I: İnceleme, Tenkitli Metin*, [Dīvān I: Analysis, Text with Critique], prep. by I. Hakkı Aksoyak (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2006), 241.

(The greedy people of the *Ajam* have had enough positions.
/The time has come for the skillful people to take their share.)

In fact, the rivalry between *Ajam* and *Rumi* poets in the Ottoman country was desired by the sultans, whose expectations were that the *Rumi* would impose their superiority over the *Ajam*. As a matter of fact, Yavuz Sultan Selim tells Hayālī Chalabi during a conversation:

We brought every art and profession experts from the Ajam country. My aim was for the talented people of Rum to prevail over the Ajam. But I hear that the people are still in demand for Ajam masters. Even in a simple game like chess, the Ajams were superior to the Rumi. Is there no one among the Rumi who can beat them like I checkmated their king?

Upon these words, Hayālī Chalabi comforts the sultan by saying "In your time, Istanbul has become a city like Tabriz, and there are many talented people here who will prevail over the *Ajams*."³⁷ This conversation clearly reveals the expectation of the Ottoman sultans from the Persian-Anatolian rivalry. As a reflection of the expectation that Sultan Selim expressed in the above speech, the compliment he showed to one of the Rumi poets, Muammāyī is remarkable. Muammāyī, who wrote poems in the *muamma* style (verses that cryptically refer to names of people) against the *Ajam* masters, won the appreciation of the sultan due to this effort and was deemed worthy of various benefactions in addition to 300 florins.³⁸

4.3. From Being *Ajam* to Being *Ajami* (Novice) or from Prestige to Defect

Ajam intellectuals who came to Anatolia in the 15th century were a great source of prestige for the Ottomans. It was a sign of the greatness of the sultanate to be able to attract *Ajam* intellectuals who were in the assembly of rulers such as Shahrūh, Ulug Bey, Uzun Hasan, Huseyin Baykara, and Sultan Yakub to Ottoman cities, especially Istanbul. This continued until the end of the Bayezid II's reign. However, over time, the increase in the number of *Ajam* scholars, artists and poets in the Ottoman country brought competition. Another issue that caused discomfort for Ottoman poets was that

³⁷ Āshik Chalebi, *Meṣā'irü'ş-Şu'arā*, III/1538-1539.

³⁸ Āshik Chalabi, *Meṣā'irü'ş-Şu'arā*, II/819. Kinalizādeh Hasan Chalabi, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şuarā*, prep. by Ibrahim Kutluk (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1978), II/914.

since they did not know about Ottoman poetry, *Ajams* thought that no one else was interested in literature. Therefore, this situation caused *Ajam* poets to underestimate the Rumi. Āshik Chalabi's description of Ahdī, who was originally from Baghdad reflects this sentiment: "He is merciful and does not reject Rum or Rumi like other *Ajams*."³⁹

Ottoman poets, on the other hand, disparaged *Ajam* because they only recited Persian poetry or wrote Turkish in the dialects of their own region, that is, because they did not know how to recite poetry in the Rumi style. In this period, the word "Rumi" meant being a city dweller in the Ottoman country. In the 16th century Ottoman collection of biographies, to be *Ajam* or *Ajamzadeh* started to be considered as a shortcoming. About a poet named Ahmed, Kinalizāde said "Since he was an *Ajamzadeh*, he was able to recite poems in Persian."⁴⁰ Gelibolulu Ali's statement for Sultan Selim's friend Hāshimī, "He recites poetry well for a Persian," is a clear expression that the term "Ajam" was now regarded as "Ajami," a novice.

After the Battle of Chaldiran, there emerged a serious shift in the meaning of the word *Ajam*. The word which was previously used for the people living in the regions under the rule of Chagatai and Turkmen states, turned into an expression of Safavid (*Qizilbash*) affiliation over time. From the times when the Ottoman-Safavid struggle intensified, *Ajam* identity almost came to denote the "enemy." The same opinion was also present in the relations between poets. Starting from the middle of the 16th century, the children or grandchildren of people who had come to the Ottoman lands from the *Ajam* countries and been honored were now sometimes subjected to humiliation by being called *Ajamzadeh*. One of the victims of this treatment was Emīrek, the son of *Ajam* Hekim Molla Uveys. Emīrek replied to those who implied that he was *Ajamzadeh* with the following couplet:

El-minnetü li'llāh ki neyem çun dihiyān gūl
Ferzend-i Sitanbūlem ü ferzend-i Sitanbūl⁴¹

³⁹ Āshik Chalabi, *Meşā'irü'ş-Şu'arā*, II/1131.

⁴⁰ Kinalizādeh Hasan Chalabi, *Tezkiretü'ş-Şuarā*, I/14.

⁴¹ Aşık Çelebi, *Meşā'irü'ş-Şu'arā*, I/374.

(Thank God I'm not stupid like the country folks.
I am a child of Istanbul)

In this couplet, Emîrek states that those who accuse him of being *Ajamzadeh* are the people from outside of Istanbul, and that he deserves the Istanbulite identity more than them. As can be understood from this couplet, it is seen that *Ajamzadeh* poets easily adopted the identity of Istanbulite (Ottoman). Sani, one of the poets of the reign of Suleiman the Lawgiver, accuses an *Ajamzadeh* man who insults him by calling him a Rumi, of being a Rafizî (a heterodox sect):

Bana Rumî diyü niçün o Acem-zâde söger
Hamdü li'llâh bu şehr şehr-i Kızılbaş degül

Gelmesün hâne-i Sānî'ye begüm agyārün
Zurefâ mecma'ıdır mecma'-ı evbâş degül⁴²

(Why does this Ajamzadeh insult me because I am a Rumi?
Fortunately, this is not the city of Qizilbash.

Foreigners should not come to Sani's house.
This is where polite people gather, not rabble)

By the end of the 16th century, the divides between the Ottomans and the Safavids were sharpened and the two turned into two separate worlds. In this period, it is seen that the *Ajam* identity lost all the prestige it had in the past and completely turned into an enemy. The statements about the *Ajams* in the work of Gelibolulu Ālî's *Mevâidu'n-Nefâ'is fi Kavaidi'l-Mejâlis* clearly point to this issue:

Rüm sad-bâr 'Acem'den yegdür
Bu söze münkir olan segdür

Ya'nî sâbıkda kibâr-ı e'cām
Fazl ile bulmuşdı şöhret ü nām

Şimdi anlarda o hâlet yokdur
Merd-i Rümî'deki 'izzet yokdur⁴³

⁴² Pervâne b. Abdullah, *Pervâne Bey Mecmuası*, [Pervâne Bey Periodical], prep. by Kâmil Ali Gıynaş (İstanbul: Akademik Kitaplar, 2014), 1/769.

⁴³ Gelibolulu Ālî, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali ve Mevâidü'n-Nefâ'is fi Kavaidi'l-Mecâlis*, prep by Mehmet Şeker. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997), 343.

(Rumi is a hundred times better than *Ajam*
Whoever denies it, is a dog.

In the past, the elite among *Ajam*,
found fame and status with virtue/

Now they do not have that state
Nor the honor found in noble Rumi.)

With the above couplets, Ālī summarized the story of the *Ajams* in the Ottoman country. The *Ajams* who once constituted a prestigious group, fell far behind the Ottomans in terms of dignity and virtue by the end of the 16th century. This prevailing view would continue to strengthen in the next centuries.

5. Conclusion

The tradition of patronage of art and literature is among the most important activities of great states. The power of a state depends on being the center of science, art and literature activities as much as the extent of its territories. Many great rulers protected these groups to represent the power of their reign. The patronage of art and literature in the Ottomans started during the reign of Yildirim Bayezid and became a major state policy during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. Ottoman sultans not only protected the poets in their own countries, but also those outside the borders of the country.

With the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, Istanbul became an important place for poets from the *Ajam* country. The poets who came or were brought to Istanbul as a result of the special efforts of the sultans, had great reputation and set good examples for those who would follow. In the middle of Bayezid II's reign, the arrival of *Ajam* poets gained momentum with the political developments in the East. Sultan Selim brought prominent figures from Tabriz to the Ottoman country after the Battle of Chaldiran, which constituted an important stage of this mobility. The first years of the reign of Suleiman the Lawgiver were also a very active period for the arrival of *Ajam* poets. Starting from the second half of the 16th century, this movement gradually slowed down. With the finalization of the borders between the Ottomans and the Safavids, the Ottoman Empire ceased to be a shelter for *Ajam* poets.

It was an important prestige for the Ottoman Empire that important figures of the Timurid and Akkoyunlu art and literature circles appeared in Istanbul from the middle of the 15th century. The same was true for poets who received great financial aid and high praise for their poems. At the end of this century, with the arrival of many *Ajam* poets to the Ottoman country, *Rumi-Ajam* rivalry emerged. The distribution of the prestige and wealth in their home countries to those who came from abroad caused resentment in the Ottoman poets, which many expressed through poetry. Throughout the 16th century, the *Rumi-Ajam* rivalry continued, albeit in diminishing terms. Another issue of contention between *Ajam* and *Rumi* poets is that both groups belittled those who did not recite poetry in their style. Ottoman poets disparaged the *Ajam* for not knowing the *Rumi* dialect and style, emphasizing their “*Ajami-ness*” (novicehood). At the end of the 16th century, *Ajam* poets lost their identification with “mastery” and turned into “novice”s.

The political conflicts between the Ottomans and the Safavids brought about a transformation in the *Ajam* identity. The word *Ajam* ceased to refer to a community of people living under the rule of Timurid and Turkmen states, and began to correspond to Safavid affiliation. This change was the starkest expression of the Ottoman perception of *Ajam* shifting from “master” to “other.” Some poets, who were disturbed by the presence of *Ajam* or *Ajamzadeh* people in Ottoman literary circles, did not hesitate to point out these identities as almost an indictment.

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