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Essays on the Ottoman World and Beyond in Honor of Cemal Kafadar

Edited by RACHEL GOSHGARIAN, ILHAM KHURI-MAKDISI, and ALİ YAYCIOĞLU

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In the Balsam Orchard with Salih Çelebi Celalzade (d. 1565): First-Person Narrative and Knowledge in Ottoman Egypt

Aleksandar Shopov[1]

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
—19th-century African American spiritual

A bottle filled with *belesan*, or balsam oil (*bir şişe içinde belesan*), is among the items recorded in the 1530 inventory of the inner treasury of the Topkapı Palace.[2] At some point thereafter, the entry was crossed out by a scribe in the palace administration, meaning that the oil was taken from the treasury and put to use—either given as a valuable gift, sold on the market, or used in the production of medicine for the palace. In 1453, just a few months after the conquest of Istanbul, glass bottles of *belesan* oil, along with a congratulatory letter, had been sent as a gift from the Mamluk Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 1438–1453) to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–46 and 1451–81).[3] Even before

1 I want to thank Marisa Mandabach for her editorial help and Himmet Taşkömür, Sara Nur Yıldız and Hannah Erlwein for their comments on an earlier draft.

2 TSMA, D. 1023 (fol. 2b, IV/3). I want to thank Hedda Reindl-Kiel for sharing this document with me.

3 Elias I. Muhanna, "The Sultan's New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the Fifteenth Century," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 27 (2010), 194.

the conquest, bottles of this oil moved between Cairo and Ottoman Edirne: in 1440, balsam oil had been among the gifts sent by Jaqmaq to Sultan Murad II (r. 1421–44 and 1446–51), along with elephants, saddles, and silk.[4]

If balsam oil was treasured in Christian Europe for its uses in preparing the holy Chrism, or anointing oil, in the early modern Islamic world, it was valued primarily as medicine. The medicinal benefits of the oil extracted from the tree today known as *commiphora gileadensis* had been praised already in Pliny's *Natural History* (77 AD), which goes into significant detail on the history of *balsamum* and the laborious techniques of its cultivation.[5] *Belisan* is one of the ingredients in a preventative clyster described by the Muslim philosopher and physician Al-Kindi (d. 870) in his *Aqrabadhin* as useful for warming the kidneys, restoring color to the face, maintaining the balance of the humors, and arousing potency.[6] For the latter concern, Ibn Baytar (d. 1248) prescribes rubbing the penis with balsam oil to eliminate erectile dysfunction.[7]

Ancient sources attest to balsam's cultivation in the Jordan valley, where it had been brought from the Arabian Peninsula—according to Biblical legend, by King Solomon.[8] However, by at least the tenth century, production in Palestine seems to have ceased and moved to an agricultural site in the countryside north of Cairo, near the ruins of Ayn al-Shams.[9] This balsam plantation, located in the village of Matariya, was the subject of a legend, originating in the early Coptic tradition, that the trees had sprouted from the broken staff of Joseph during the Holy Family's flight into Egypt.[10]

This chapter looks at a first-person account by an Ottoman scholar and official, Salih Çelebi (d. 1565), of his visit to the balsam orchard in Matariya. The passage is found in Salih's *Tarih-i Mısr-ı Cedid* or New History of Egypt, completed in 1547 and dedicated to Sultan Süleyman II (r. 1521–1566), whose name linked him with King Solomon and therefore balsam's ancient cultivation.[11]

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4 Muhanna, "The Sultan's New Clothes," 193.

5 Eleni Manolaraki, "Hebraei Liquores: The Balsam of Judaea in Pliny's Natural History," *The American Journal of Philology* 136, no. 4 (Dec. 2015): 633–667.

6 Kindi, *The Medical Formulary, or Aqrābādhīn*, ed. and trans. Martin Levey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 158.

7 Ibn al-Baytar, *al-Jāmi' li-Mufradāt al-Adwiya wa'l-Aghdhiya* (Beyrut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1992), 214.

8 Marcus Milwright, "The Balsam of Matariyya: An Exploration of a Medieval Panacea," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 66, no. 2 (2003): 197.

9 This is attested to by Ibn Baytar (d. 1248), the Andalusian physician who traveled in North Africa, Anatolia, and Syria. See Ibn al-Baytar, *al-Jami' al-Mufradat*, 213.

10 Milwright, "The Balsam of Matariyya," 204–5.

11 An edition of this work has recently been published; see Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye: Tarih-i Mısr-ı Cedîd*, ed. Tuncay Bülbül (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2011) On this work see

Figure 1. A miniature depicting balsam oil extraction from a 12th-century Arabic translation of Discorides' De Materia Medica, Asitan-e Quds-e Razawi no. 5079, f.25a.

In the passage, Salih describes the balsam orchard, the techniques required to cultivate and maintain its delicate trees, and the process of extracting their precious oil—a product that was, by this time, an important global commodity. The passage is remarkable for its vividness and its emphasis on the author's sensory experience. Accordingly, my focus will be on the role and function of observation in this passage and in the broader context of Salih Çelebi's work and the epistemology of the period. For Salih Çelebi, "to observe" (*temaşa eylemek*) is to mediate between past authorities and present reality: by presenting the orchard to his readers as he encountered it through his senses, he demonstrates that a previous account of the orchard, by the Mamluk scholar Muhammad Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqrizi (b.1364–d.1442), needed to be updated—thereby also implying the superiority of Ottoman scholarship to that of the Mamluk state. Moreover, Salih Çelebi was writing at a time when the balsam production in Matariya was under threat, as the Spanish empire increasingly imported oil it called balsam from another tree in Hispaniola.[12] His account of the balsam

Giancarlo Casale, "An Ottoman Humanist on the Long Road to Egypt: Salih Celalzade's *Tārīḫ-i Mışır Al-Cedid*," *DYNTRAN Working Paper*, no. 29, online edition, October 2017, available at: http://dyntran.hypotheses.org/2052.

12 Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 15–23.

orchard in Matariya, and his emphasis on the current state of affairs there, was therefore likely intended to encourage and facilitate the revival of balsam production within the Ottoman state.

In his article on the rise of first-person narrative in Ottoman literature, Cemal Kafadar argues that this mode of writing reveal "the shifting boundaries between self and society in Ottoman culture" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[13] This chapter offers a complement to Kafadar's thesis, by examining a related current, which emerged in the early sixteenth century: the new importance of firsthand experience and observation in Ottoman epistemology. As officials like Salih Çelebi competed for positions in a growing Ottoman administration, they increasingly used first-person narrative in order to authenticate their knowledge and show its usefulness in problem-solving for the Ottoman state. Ottoman officials touted their privileged experience of places and phenomena. Another, later example is the 1598 cosmography of Aşık Mehmed, *Menazırü'l-ʿAvalim* (Views of the Worlds), which recounts the author's thirty years of travels throughout the Ottoman state.[14] Aşık Mehmed frequently invokes his own firsthand experience, indicating the dates of his visits to various regions and reporting conversations with locals whose social status was well beneath his own.[15] Another example is Evliya Çelebi (b.1611), whose ten-volume *Seyahatname* offers knowledge about regions across the Ottoman realm framed within the author's first-person narratives of his travels. In such works, the production of knowledge is intertwined with the practices and concerns of the Ottoman official. As we will see, Salih Çelebi's description of his visit to the *belesan* orchard in Matariya likewise draws upon the testimony of local sources, in this case the gardener.

A Scholar's Journey

What we know about Salih Çelebi comes from his biographers and the references to his life scattered in his rich literary output. Born in *Vučitrn*, a town in

13 Cemal Kafadar, "Self and Other: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and the First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature," *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 150. See also: idem, "Müteredddit bir Mutassavıf: Üsküplü Asiye Hatun'un Rüya Defteri 1641–43," *Topkapı Sarayı Yıllığı* 5 (1992): 168–222.

14 Âşık Mehmed, *Menâzırü'l-Avâlim*, ed. Mahmut Ak, 3 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2007).

15 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu, Dizini*, 10 vols., ed. O.Ş. Gökyay et al., (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006).

present-day northeastern Kosovo, Salih studied with one of the most prominent scholars of the sixteenth century, Şemseddin Ahmed Kemalpaşazade (d. 1536). He was the son of one of the first Ottoman judges appointed after the conquest of the region in 1455.[16] He thus hailed from a family that had participated in the establishment of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. His brother was the head of the Ottoman imperial chancery in Istanbul (*re'isülküttab*) and a historian, who had already visited Cairo in 1525 with the grand vizier Ibrahim Paşa (d. 1536) on a mission to organize the administration of the recently conquered province.[17] To some extent, then, Salih was following in his older brother's footsteps when, in 1544, he traveled from Edirne to Cairo. As Salih also notes in the introduction, he too arrived in Cairo with a bureaucratic purpose: to inspect the city's Islamic charitable endowments.[18] Though he does not mention this in the introduction, Salih had also recently resided in Aleppo, where he was appointed a judge in 1544.[19] While Salih was in Aleppo, the Ottoman imperial state council (*Divan-i Hümayun*) dispatched him in 1544 to Cairo to inspect the financial documents related to the expenditures made by the Ottoman governors in Egypt, a task for which he was paid by the provincial treasury in Cairo.[20] In 1542, he was appointed as a professor of the college (*madrasa*) of Sultan Bayezid II, from where he departed for the new assignments in Aleppo and Cairo. The journey took three months, according to his introduction to the *Tarih-i Mısr-ı Cedid*. In Edirne, whose soil Salih describes as having the scent of ambergris, he left behind a professorship in the *madrasa*, where he had been immersed in the study of the sciences.[21] Salih complains about the hardships of this journey to Cairo, as if to express regret at having left behind his scholarly life in Edirne. On the road—which he says passed through the regions of Rum and Karaman as well as the cities of Aleppo, Tarsus, and Damascus—Salih says that he "lived through thousands of difficulties and endless troubles."[22]

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16 n.a., "Celalzade Salih Çelebi," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 41 vols., Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013, 7:262–264, accessed Novermber 27, 2021, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/celalzade-salih-celebi.

17 Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 53–59.

18 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 68.

19 This seems to contradict somewhat Salih's own claim that he traveled directly from Edirne to Cairo, though he does mention stopping at Aleppo. It is possible that he totaled the three months that it took him to travel first from Edirne to Aleppo, and then from Aleppo to Cairo.

20 Halil Sahilioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951–952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2002), 12 and 84.

21 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 67.

22 Ibid.

Yet the journey was also a time of learning. Pondering over the once-prosperous ancient ruins he encountered along the way, Salih weaves into his narrative poetry from the Persian poet Hafez (b.1315-d.1390) and says that the appearance of these abandoned structures left him in a state of bewilderment, "diving in a sea of thoughts."[23] Unlike other scholars who were interested only in such buildings' outer appearances, he says, his thoughts went to "the people who had built and commissioned them."[24] In other words, Salih focuses on the actors who, like himself, were shaping history in their own times. As we will see, this mode of historical thinking dominates his entire work, including the passage that will be the focus here, on the balsam orchard in Matariya. Salih writes that he continued to "see and observe" (*seyr ü temaşa*) ruins upon reaching Egypt, including the pyramids, after which, he says, he could not return to a normal state of being for some time.[25]

Translation and Knowledge

Salih was also grappling with a more recent, scholarly past. In the introduction, he acknowledges an important source for his work: the *al-Mawaʿiz wa-al-iʿtibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa-al-athar* by the historian Muhammad Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), whose own introduction describes it as "a summary of the history of the monuments of Egypt from the earliest times, and of the surviving structures of Fustat and the palaces, buildings, and quarters of al-Qahira, with short biographies of their patrons and sponsors."[26] Salih's History of Egypt is closely modelled on Maqrizi's work, which Salih says he had found, among all the available books on the history of Egypt, to be the most "beautiful, marvelous, and detailed."[27] Salih's work largely follows Maqrizi in its structure as well as its content, much of which is simply a translation of the *Khitat*. Indeed, in a colophon, Salih explicitly calls himself a translator: "this copy was finished by this poor translator Salih b. Celal in the year 1546–47 (953) in the month of Zilkaʿde, when he arrived from Egypt in Istanbul."[28]

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 68.
26 On Maqrizi's History, see Nasser Rabbat, "Was al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ* Khaldunian History?," *ISLAM* 89, no. 2 (2012): 131.
27 Salih also mentions in the introduction that he used Suyuti's (d. 1505) *Kawakib al-Rawda* and *Husn al-Muhadara fi Mahasin al-Sham* and Ismaʿil Yaʿref's *Kitab al-mukhtasar fi Akhbar al-Besher*.
28 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 437.

A detailed comparison of the two works is beyond the scope of this article. However, the relationship between them does deserve some comment. Nasser Rabat has recently interpreted Maqrizi's *Khitat* as an expression of the idea, put forth in Ibn Khaldun's *Mukaddima*, of a cyclical movement of history, "in which periods of prosperity and urban expansion are followed by decay and urban contraction of the city under its successive dynasties."[29] Writing in the fifteenth century, Maqrizi saw Cairo as a city in crisis and decline. Salih, writing a hundred years later, had a very different perspective: to him, Cairo's previous decline was a necessary precondition for its revitalization under Ottoman rule, a process in which he himself was participating. Noting that he was working with Maqrizi's own personal copy of the text,[30] Salih claims, in a section on the history of Egypt during the Mamluk period, that he had decided to translate the Arabic works on the History of Egypt so that his contemporaries might learn and take warning from past events, as his Mamluk predecessors—such is the implication—had not.[31]

Salih's *New History* therefore triangulates between the ancient past (gleaned through ruins), knowledge of both the ancient and Mamluk pasts of Egypt as transmitted by earlier Muslim scholars, and the knowledge that he himself gains and *creates* in his own present by seeing and observing. It is this last facet of the work that is of interest here, and relevant, I will argue, to Salih's description of the balsam orchard.

In the first section, Salih recounts the earliest history of Egypt, including the history of pharaonic and ancient Egypt and the entire Islamic history of the region; this section also contains a brief description of the first three decades of Ottoman rule. Salih then turns his attention to the material world, with chapters on Egypt's ancient buildings and natural wonders, including several chapters on the river Nile (including one on irrigation), the pyramids, the Sphinx, the mountains of Egypt, and cities (both existing and those destroyed or turned into villages). It is in this section, on the cities of Egypt, that he places his description of the balsam orchard in Matariya, in a passage on the ancient city ʿAyn al-Shams. Maqrizi's description of the same orchard is found in a similar spot in the *Khitat*. Yet a comparison of the two texts reveals an important difference: unlike Maqrizi, Salih appeals directly to his readers' senses, transporting them into the orchard and into a vivid present tense.

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29 Rabbat, "Was al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ*": 134–35.
30 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 89.
31 Ibid., 239.

Salih initially offers his readers a straightforward translation of Maqrizi's account of the orchard.[32] This begins simply: "In ʿAyn al-Shams there is a plant that is planted in rows. The plant is called balsam, from which the oil balsam is extracted. It is not known on any other place on earth except this place."[33] Maqrizi then describes the use and significance of balsam oil in Christian baptismal rites, and informs his readers that the harvesting and transporting of this product was tightly controlled by the Sultan:

> People were squeezing the balsam in the season of its harvest by the order of the Sultan, who was overseeing this process. And [the Sultan] was keeping the balsam and it was carried to his *khizana* [inner treasury]. And then it was carried to the fortresses and hospitals in Sham [Syria] to heal the sick people there. No one can take from [this supply] without the permission of the Sultan himself.[34]

Maqrizi describes the taste and the properties of the plant according to the humoralism of the Galenic-Avicennan medicine: "The soft, moist inner part of the plant is eaten, and it has a taste and it has heat and it is delicious."[35] Like everything else in the passage, none of this information relies on claims to Maqrizi's firsthand knowledge or experience; rather, Maqrizi is conveying what he has learned from other sources or what is generally known.

Salih then suddenly does something different: he narrativizes knowledge, bringing to life the balsam orchard and the production of balsam oil through a first-person account that unfolds in concrete time and space. Salih appears aware of this approach, emphasizing it to his readers. After concluding his translation of Maqrizi, he suddenly writes:

> [This is] what we found in the descriptions of ʿAyn-i Shams and the antiquities there and the conditions of the balsam trees in the Arabic histories. But in the year 953 [1546–7], this poor man was in Cairo. On these matters, what I found in the old books did not satisfy me—hearing it is not like seeing it—and by looking attentively [*mülahaza*] at this place and the tree from

32 Ibid., 356–57.

33 *Ahmad ibn Ali al-Maqrizi, al-Maqrizi wa-kitabuhu al-Mawaʿiz wa-al-iʿtibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa-al-athar*, ed. Aiman Fuad Saiyid (London: Muʿassasat al-Furqan, 2002), 1:624.

34 *Ibid.*, 624.

35 *Ibid.*

> which they extract balsam oil, I observed with my own eyes [*kendi gözümle temaşa eyledim*]. What I saw [*gördüğüm*] in this place, I recounted so that those after us can benefit from us. . . The situation we saw should not be taken for granted because what we found in the books, we did not see. I am not saying that what was in the books was false. What they saw and heard, they wrote. However, as time passes, things change.[36]

To Salih, knowledge originates in the senses, and thus needs to be perpetually updated. He performs this task by transporting his readers directly to a storied agricultural site. The passage is worth citing at length:

> In that village we saw an orchard [*bağçe*]. In its well, there was plenty of water. There are two water wheels, each pulled by two oxen. The water from that well is drawn by these waterwheels. With them, they continuously irrigate that orchard. We drank from this water and saw that this is exceedingly soft. In the mouth, it feels as if oily. Although it does not compare in taste to the water in the river Nile, it is also a sweet water. And nearby, they had built a cistern, near which there is a portico built of stone. In the wall of this portico, there is a small hole in the shape of a door. Inside, it is paved with white marble and at its entrance they hung a candle.[37]

Salih explains that people at the site told him of the wall's Christian history and symbolism, as a marker of the site where the Virgin Mary supposedly hid her son as he was being pursued. He then launches into a closer description of the orchard itself:

> After that we started examining the orchard. We saw that in a suitable place, the ground was arranged into planting beds like cressets. Inside, here and there, they planted balsam trees. They propagate and protect them in one thousand ways. There is a gardener. Like a moth he hovers around the trees. The gardening job was passed to [such gardeners] as inheritance from their ancestors. There was a special guild. . . . In the land of Egypt,

36 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 358.
37 Ibid., 359.

> according to the people's beliefs, they are the only ones who know how to take care of the balsam trees. They taught each other. Others were not initiated into this knowledge. That is why this orchard stayed for a long time in their hands. They say that even if you tell them that you will cut off their head or offer them an immense fortune, they will still not teach you. We examined in its entirety this orchard of balsam trees. I saw that some of them are only one *zira'*[38] high and have very fragile and tiny branches. From that perspective, you might be tempted to say that they are not trees but rather a grass. Most likely, this is why people make the mistake of saying that balsam is a grass. In fact, it is not a grass but a type of tree, whose branches are however very small and sparse. On every planting bed, only one root was planted. Some have sprouted with great difficulty, and are weak and without vigor. The person who takes care of them does not allow people to approach them.[39]

Salih characterizes his visit to the orchard as a matter of privileged access, providing him insight into agricultural knowledge of the highest importance and secrecy. Moreover, he describes in detail the trees' appearances, while also taking care to temper these observations with taxonomical accuracy—acknowledging that what ones sees can also be deceiving in the grand scheme of natural knowledge. His use of the first-person plural makes clear his subject position as the inspector of the province; he would have arrived at the orchard with a retinue of other Ottoman officials and soldiers.[40] From there, the scene comes even more vividly to life, as Salih recounts a conversation with the gardener himself:

> I asked: "[The trees] have been in this soil for a long time. Why are they weak and without strength?" This person answered by giving many reasons, and while answering he struck upon two eloquent parables. He said: "First of all, essentially the balsam

38 Around 1520 one Ottoman builder's cubit was 72.1 cm. See Alpay Özdural, "Sinan's Arşin: A Survey of Ottoman Architectural Metrology," *Muqarnas* 15 (1998): 101–115.

39 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 359.

40 In the entry on Salih Çelebi in a biographical dictionary of Ottoman judges in Cairo, it is noted that Salih, while in Cairo, was accompanied by a certain al-Shaykh Asil al-Din al-Tawil; see Muhammad al-Damiri, *Qudat Misr fil Qarn al- 'Ashir wal Rub' al-Awal min al-Qarn al-Hadi Ashir*, ed. Abdul Raziq Isa and Yusuf al-Mahmudi (Cairo: Al-Arabi Publisher, 2000), 153–155.

> tree is like a sickly little boy: exceedingly fragile and graceful in shape. In order to bring it to this shape, I spent so much effort. The most trifling change has an immediate impact on the state of its health, and alas, it reverts to its previous condition. This tree is a wild tree, like the Arabs. Actually, it grows only in the wilderness and in valleys. Here, the trees are sustained with difficulty—just like the Arabs who descend into the city and stay there with difficulty. That is why, in the clime (*iklim*) of the city, their nature is not the same as in the wilderness. Here, it is done by irrigating them with this water. Otherwise, this tree could most likely not grow in the city or in low-lying places. Only with the properties of this water is it possible: with another water, they could not grow. These are newly planted trees. A few years ago, the trees dried out. From our fathers, we heard that beyond the city of Medina, there is a stream called Vadi-i ʿAli along which the balsam trees grow. We went there and brought them here."
>
> I asked: "How did you get the oil from these [trees]?" "Only once a year," he said, "the branches are cut, and bottles are placed beneath so that oil drips into them. The oil comes out itself and drips into the bottles. Only 30 to 40 *dirhem*s [about 130 grams] are produced from the entire garden every year." With that, he broke off a small branch. I touched it with my finger and tried it. I saw that it was like oily water. It had a stringent taste and smelled like naphtha (*neft*). "We are not able to keep a drop of this for ourselves. The Sultan takes it all. Every year, for a few of these trees, there are 1000 gold coins of expenses." The saying "health is for the ruler" came to my mind. I said, my God, do not afflict your servants with the necessity to use this [balsam oil] as a medicine.[41]

Salih's account of his visit to the *belesan* orchard might prompt us consider the ways in which he understood the work of a translator. To a sixteenth-century Ottoman scholar, a translation was not simply a carrying over of an original text, but rather a deeply discursive undertaking, a kind of transhistorical collaboration. The interweaving of translation with references to his own firsthand experience

41 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 360.

is also found Salih Çelebi's translation of a work by Muhammad Aufi Bukhari (d. 1242), *Jawami al-Hikayat wa Lawami' al-Riwayat* (Collections of Stories and Illustrations of Histories), in which he describes the conflicts he had in Cairo with other Ottoman officials that prompted him to resign in 1550 and to settle in Eyüb, near Istanbul.[42] (According to Salih's biographer Al-Damiri, Salih's dispute was with the *defterdar* or financial director of the province, whom the biographer calls a "tyrant.")[43] In the introduction to another translation, an Ottoman-Turkish rendering completed in 1554–55 of the Persian epic *Layla ve Mecnun* based on the version by the poet Hatefi (d. 1520), Salih writes that he had lost the ability to read books at night, and that in Istanbul, where most were in pursuit of material things and rank, there were still some people like him preoccupied with science and learning.[44] In both of these translations, Salih indicates that that he added verses not found in the original. In *Layla ve Mecnun*, he incorporates Turkish proverbs, changes the descriptions of the various foods and drinks in order to adjust them to the dietary repertoire of his contemporaries, reworks conversations between protagonists, offers his own interpretations of the story, and departs from the original text in numerous other ways, creating an original work.[45] In *Jawami al-Hikayat*, he even criticizes the author of the original text.[46]

Salih's emphasis on his firsthand experience of the balsam orchard, and departure from his source here, had an important context: by the time Salih was writing, balsam production at Matariya had long been precarious. An earlier attempt to revive this production in Matariya had already been recorded by the Mamluk historian Ibn Iyas (d. 1524), who writes:

> [The production of balsam] had ceased from the first of the year. Egypt had been unique among all lands for its *belesan* production. European kings had purchased it at high prices, even paying its weight in gold. To them, baptism was invalid unless they poured some oil of balsam in the font water before an initiate's immersion. This essence was customarily extracted

42 Tuncay Bülbül, *Celâl-zâde Sâlih Çelebi Cevâmi'ü'l-Hikâyât ve Levâmi'ü'r-Rivâyât Tercümesi İnceleme—Metin* (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi, 2017), 139.

43 Al-Damiri, *Qudat Misr*, 153–55.

44 Zehra Toska, *Sâlih Çelebi and Hıs Mesnevi, Mecnûn u Leylâ, (Kıssa-i Pür-Gussa): Textual Analysis, Critical Edition and Facsimile = Sâlih Çelebi ve Mecnûn u Leylâ Mesnevisi (Kıssa-i Pür-Gussa)* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, 2007), 138.

45 Salih Çelebi, *Mensur bir Hikâye*, 33, 98–100.

46 Bülbül, *Celâl-zâde Sâlih Çelebi Cevâmi'ü'l-Hikâyât*, 21, 22.

> during the spring, in the Coptic month of Barmahat (April). When the sultan learned of this lapse in *belesan* cultivation, he made an inquiry as to where else it might be found. He pursued the matter until some seeds from wild bushes were brought from the Hijaz. They were planted in the same plots where the crop had previously been sown. Their revival was successful after watering from a nearby well. This was one of al-Ghawri's finer acts.[47]

At a time when the economy of the Mamluk state was being hurt by the Portuguese conquests in the Indian Ocean that disrupted trade, balsam production, which had been a source of revenues and international trade, emerged as an agricultural problem. In the 1520s, soon after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Spanish Empire began commercializing the trade of "balsam" produced from trees in the Americas, which the Catholic church officially accepted in the sixteenth century as a replacement, in the making of anointing oil, for the original balsam from Egypt.[48] By the end of the sixteenth century, the production of balsam in Matariya seems to have steeply declined. Hans von Lichtenstein wrote that when he visited Egypt in 1587, only two balsam trees in Matariya remained; by 1610, according to another traveler, John Sandys, there was only one.[49] By the late seventeenth century, the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi would remark, in the tenth volume of his *Seyahat-name*, which recounts his stay in Egypt in the 1670s, that he did not see *belesan* trees in Matariya.[50] When he asked locals what had happened to the trees, Evliya Çelebi was told that they had dried out with the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, a remark that may have been meant as a criticism towards the Ottoman administration there. His remarks that he had, however, seen, on the road to the Kaʿba, many

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47 Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?: The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 119. For the original passage, see Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, vol. 4, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafa (al-Qāhirah: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyah al-'Ammah lil-Kitab, 1982), 149.

48 Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, 15–23. In his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (Natural and Moral History of the Indies) (Seville, 1590), the Spanish Jesuit missionary and naturalist José de Acosta writes at length about the new balsam from the Indies, noting that it is not the "true" balsam brought from Alexandria and Cairo. By his time, the new balsam from South America had been accepted by the Apostolic See for preparation of the sacramental chrism (anointing oil). see José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Jane E. Mangan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 220–221.

49 Milwright, "The Balsam of Matariyya": 206n101.

50 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme (IX ve X.CİLT)*, ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2013), f. 242b.

belisan trees, from which local people extracted oil they sold to Muslim pilgrims in wooden cups.[51] By the eighteenth century, all *belesan* oil would come, as Ebulfeyz Mustafa Efendi (d. 1744) notes in the entry on *belesan* oil in his medical dictionary, from trees in *yeni dünya*, the "new world."[52]

Salih's visit to a balsam orchard in Matariya therefore offers a glimpse into a production site that was on its way to disappearing into the history books. A certain awareness or anxiety about this imminent decline can be discerned in Salih's text. This becomes especially clear in comparison to Salih's closest source, Maqrizi. From the beginning of the lengthy passage on the orchard, Salih attunes his readers to the world of the senses: "hearing is not like seeing it," he writes. Salih assumes that his readers would recognize this phrase, which was attributed to the prophet Muhammad and reported in a *hadith* by his nephew Ibn Abbas (d. 687), in which the prophet describes the angry reaction of *Musa* (Moses) upon after seeing, with his own eyes, his people venerating the bull—something that had been reported to him by God. Salih therefore justifies eyewitness observation with a reference to early Islamic history. On the other hand, his anthropomorphizing of the balsam tree as a "sickly boy" can be seen as a reference to his own family, one that contemporary Ottoman readers might have recognized. His Ottoman biographer Aşık Çelebi claims that Salih wrote the epic *Leyla and Mecnun* in a state of mourning for the death of his young son, Ishak.[53] Salih aestheticizes his son's sickness, inscribing himself into the fatherly figure of the gardener, who is described as hovering like a moth over the sickly tree.[54]

Salih distinguishes between different ways of seeing. His use of the word *mülahaza*, with which he clearly labels his direct experience in the orchard, is striking. According to the mid-sixteenth-century Arabic-Ottoman dictionary complied by Ahteri Mustafa bin Şemseddin (d. 1578), *mülahaza* is to view things with the corner of the eye and to think (*tefekkür*).[55] Tefekkür or

51 Katip Çelebi (also known as Hajji Khalifa), however, writes in his medical dictionary that *belesan* trees grows in ʿAyn Al-Shams near Cairo; see Ekrem Demir, "Hezârfen Hüseyin b. Cafer Istânköyî'nin *'Lisânü'l-Etibbâ'* Adlı Tıp Lügatı Üzerinde Dil İncelemesi (İnceleme-metin-sozlük)" (PhD. diss., İstanbul University, 2011), 130.

52 Şaban Doğan, *Risâle-i Feyziyye fî Lügâti'l -Müfredâti't-Tıbbiyye* (İstanbul: Değişim, 2011), 38–39.

53 Aşık Çelebi notes that Salih before reaching sixty and marrying a woman who had been his concubine or slave spent his life as a single. Âşık Çelebi, *Meşâ'irüʾş-Şu'arâ: Inceleme—Metin*, vol. 3, ed. Filiz Kılıç (İstanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2010), 1273.

54 Aşık Çelebi compares the literary ability of Salih Çelebi to that of a gardener (*bağban*); see ibid., 3:1274–75.

55 "al-mülahaza: göz uç ile nazar itmek ve tefekkür ma'nasına da gelur" Ahteri Muṣṭafa bin Şemseddin, *Ahteri-i Kebir* (Istanbul: Matba'a-i Ali Beg, 1875), 273. Also Ahteri Mustafa

tafakkur in Arabic is defined by the philosopher, theologian and jurist Ghazali (d. 1111) as the syllogistic thinking or bringing together two pieces of knowledge in order to draw a conclusion from them and arrive to a third piece of knowledge.[56] Two Ottoman Turkish translations of *Ihyaʾ ʿUlum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), in which Ghazali discusses *tafakkur*, attest to the revival of Ghazali's thought and methodology in the sixteenth century.[57]

Salih juxtaposes the previous state of knowledge about balsam trees to the observations he made during his own site visit, reporting the latter in order to arrive to a conclusion. Rather than simply rendering the older texts on *belesan*, Salih shifts the focus to the immediate state of affairs in Matariya —the origins, appearance, and condition of the trees, and the means by which they are tended in order to extract the oil. He transports his reader to a specific space in which the balsam trees are the product of elite technical knowledge and labor necessary to recreate the ecology of the area in Hijaz from which the trees originated. In fact, Salih's explicit contrast here with Maqrizi heightens an approach found throughout the text, which is to emphasize to his readers the necessity to update everything found in the previous writings on Egypt through firsthand observation.[58]

Knowledge Put to Use

Salih Çelebi's passage on the balsam orchard at Matariya would take on a life of its own. In 1573–74, the Ottoman palace requested an unspecified quantity of balsam oil from Egypt's governor and *defterdar* (financial director of the

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Efendi, *Ahteri-i Kebir*, ed. Ahmet Kırkkılıç and Yusuf Sancak (Ankara: Turk Dil Kurumu Yayınlari, 2009), 692.

56 Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazali and the rationalization of sufism," in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazali: Papers Collected on his 900th Anniversary*, ed. Georges Tamer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 44. *Tafakkur* as defined by Ghazali could be applied to both problems related to religion and those without connection to it, and is characterized by Ghazali as the "foundation of all good things, because its fruit is knowledge." al-Damiri emphasizes *Salih Çelebi*' expertise in logic; Al-Damiri, *Qudat al-Miṣr*, 153–155.

57 Ihyaʾ was a book described by the seventeenth-century Ottoman polymath Katip Çelebi as the book that would be sufficient if all Islamic books disappear. See M. Sait Özervarlı, "Ottoman Perceptions of al-Ghazālī's Works and Discussions on His Historical Role in Its Late Period," in Tamer, *Islam and Rationality*, 2:254.

58 The distinction between first- and secondhand observation has been identified as one of the features of the early modern conceptualization of experience that came with the rediscovery of the empiric/sceptic notion of observation in the sixteenth century. See Gianna Pomata, "A Word of the Empirics: The Ancient Concept of Observation and its Recovery in Early Modern Medicine," *Annals of Science* 68, no. 1 (2011): 23–24.

province).[59] Two years later, in 1575–76, thirty years after the *New History of Egypt* was completed, the Ottoman Imperial Council (*Divan-i Hümayun*) ordered the governor of Egypt to acquire tree saplings from the very place Salih reported to have been the location of wildly growing balsam trees, the valley Vadi-i ʿAli, near Medina.[60] In this, the council was almost certainly following Salih, and his firsthand reporting.[61] Two members of the council, the chief judges of Rumeli and Anatolia, had followed the same judicial and scholarly career path (*ʿilmiye*) Salih Çelebi had taken, and would likely have been familiar with his work.

When he wrote the *New History of Egypt*, Salih Çelebi was on the career path that would eventually lead him to join his brother in the imperial council. His appointments as a judge in Aleppo and in Cairo, which were incorporated in the *ʿilmiye* hierarchy in the 1530s, would have supported his case for advancement towards the highest position, that of the chief judge of Rumeli or Anatolia.[62] Salih's literary output and particularly his *New History of Egypt*—which, again, was dedicated to the Ottoman sultan—should be seen as attempts at self-fashioning and self-advancement, as he worked his way into the highest circles of power in Istanbul. The importance of Salih's remarks on *belesan* was indeed recognized by at least one anonymous Ottoman reader; in one of the sixteen extant copies of the manuscript, the passage has been marked with a marginal note: "important/desired balsam oil" (*matlab, dühn-i belesan*).[63]

Why was the balsam production north of Cairo a matter of discussion for the imperial state council? Did Salih Çelebi anticipate that his account of the *belesan* orchard would be read by the council and used in the near future to revive the production there?

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59 BOA, A. DVNSMHM, d. 23, 377.

60 Ibid., d. 27, 28. "vusul buldukda Medine-i Münevvere'de ve Vadi-i ʿAli'de gayri mahallerde zamanında fidanın getürdüp kadimden belesan hasıl olduğu mahalde gars etdirüp sabık üzre vafır belesan yağı tahsil eyleyesin ve barutu aynı ile vaktinde irsal edüp . . ."

61 Indeed, an apparent attempt to revive the production of balsam in Matariya is reported by Jean Palerne (d. 1592), the son of a physician and secretary to the Duke of Anjou, whose chronicle of his travels in the Ottoman Empire was published posthumously in 1609, visited Egypt in 1575–76. During this time, he claims, the Ottoman governor of Egypt ordered for balsam trees to be brought from Mecca in order to be planted in Matariya. See Milwright, "The Balsam of Matariyya," 206n101.

62 Abdurrahman Atçıl, "The Route to the Top of the Ottoman Ilmiye Hierarchy of the Sixteenth Century," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 3 (2009): 489–512.

63 Süleymaniye Library, Şehid Ali Paşa, no.1898, f. 215.

Balsam and Power

The cultivation of *belesan* in Matariya had been described in the earliest work with an account of the history of the Ottoman dynasty, the *Iskendername* (Book of Alexander) written by the Anatolian scholar and poet Ahmedi (b. 1334–d.1413) and dedicated to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed I (r. 1412–1422). Ahmedi includes a section on the discovery of balsam and its healing qualities by Alexander the Great, a crucial archetype for many Ottoman sultans, who decided to build the city of Alexandria in the vicinity of Matariya.[64] Prefiguring Salih, he adds a couplet on the importance of the location of the orchard and the water from its well: "That water does not support its growth in another place / That place does not support its growth with another water."[65] Ahmedi had received his medical education in Egypt, where he studied with a number of Rumi scholars from Anatolia under the Hanafi scholar al-Baberti.[66] His description of balsam cultivation in the *Iskendername* was connected to a commercial demand for this item to which Ahmedi himself contributed; he included *belesan* oil among the ingredients for medicines described in his *Tervihü'l-Ervah* (Calming of the Souls), the earliest known medical treatise written in Ottoman Turkish verse.[67] In the fifteenth century, balsam oil was a regular item in the Ottoman medical writings, and, as I have showed, an object of diplomatic gift exchanges between the Mamluks and the Ottoman sultans.[68] Following the conquest of

64 The section's title, written in Persian, is "the description of the Egyptian oil which is called belesan" (Sıfat-ı Rugan-ı Mısri ki an-ra Belesan Guyend). I want to thank Sara Nur Yıldız for sharing with me references on balsam in the Ottoman medical literature. On the importance of Alexander the Great in Ottoman conceptions of rule, see Gülru Necipoglu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 1–83.

65 "*ol şu ayruh yerde bitürmez anı / ol yer ayruh şuyla yitürmez anı*"; Ahmedi, *İskendernâme*, ed. Yaşar Akdoğan and Nalan Kutsal (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019), 608.

66 Sara Nur Yıldız, "From Cairo to Ayasuluk," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 25, no. 3 (2014), 268.

67 Ahmedi treating the lack of blood and pain in the liver see Osman Özer, "Ahmedî, *Terviḥü'l-Ervaḥ*: Giriş-Inceleme-Metin" (PhD diss., Fırat Üniversitesi 1995), 389, 398. For the dates when *Tervihü'l-Ervah* was composed, see Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, *Şâir ve hekim Ahmedî (hayatı ve eserleri)* (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1954).

68 The use of belesan oil is found in the *Selections in Medicine* (Müntahab Fi't-Tıbb) written for sultan Mehmed I (r. 1412–21); see Meriç Güven, "Abdulvehhâb bin Yusuf'un Müntahab-ı Fi't-Tıbb'ı (Dil incelemesi-Metin-Dizin)" (PhD diss., Pamukale Üniversitesi, 2005), 231 and 260. It was also referred to as an ingredient for the *tiryak berşaisa* by the Ottoman surgeon Şerefeddin Sabuncuoğlu in his *Mücerrebname* (Book of Practice), a pharmacopeia in which the author discusses the ingredients and methods of making and the use of medicines by providing examples from his practice; for references to balsam oil as the ingredient for making the *tiryak berşaisa*, see İlter Uzel Şerafeddin and Kenan Süveren, *Mücerreb-nāme: ilk Türkçe*

Egypt in 1517, the Imperial treasury regularly ordered shipments of *belesan* oil, and various other medicines, from Egypt to Istanbul, where they were sent to the palace to be used for the needs of the imperial kitchen and pantry.[69] By the mid-sixteenth century, when Salih Çelebi arrived in Egypt on his bureaucratic mission, the new hospitals built during the past decades in Istanbul and Edirne had further increased the demand for this foreign import.

Salih's appointment as inspector in Egypt in 1544 had been arranged by the grand vizier Rüstem Paşa, who is credited for increasing the revenues for the central treasury. The appointment in 1544 was part of a larger effort by the Ottoman governor, provincial finance director, and judge to investigate embezzlements of state money by the previous Ottoman governors, an investigation that resulted in dismissals and confiscations.[70] Rüstem Paşa reorganized the collection of revenues for the central treasury, expanded tax farming and increased the state revenues in order to support the growing salaried bureaucracy.[71] Salih's account of the cultivation and extraction of balsam would have found a readership in Istanbul among the Ottoman officials in the treasury eager both to cut expenses for the purchase of medicine and to increase the production of a marketable commodity. Rüstem Paşa supported the activities of Muslim merchants and the manufacturing industries in the Ottoman empire, including the palace workshops and kitchens where balsam was used as an ingredient for making medicine.[72]

Salih's concrete, detailed description of his visit to the balsam orchard was thus connected to the purpose of his visit, to his position as a bureaucrat arriving to inspect the province of Egypt, and to the precarity of Egyptian balsam production at a time of increased demand. The passage can be seen as exemplary of the rise of what we might call a *problem-based* approach to the Ottoman study of places and plants.

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deneysel tıp eseri—1468 (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı, 1999), 147. Balsam oil was used for making the tiryak-ı mesrutitus or mesir macun; see Şaban Doğan, "Terceme-i Akrabâdîn'de Yer Alan Mesir Macunu Terkibi Üzerine," *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Turken* 4, no. 2 (2012): 193–201. The Jewish palace physician Musa b. Hamun (d.1554) included *belesan* oil as an ingredient in a medicine that dissipates cold in the earliest known work on dentistry written in Turkish; see Ahmed Zeki Izgöer, *16. Yüzyili Osmanli tabibi Musa bin Hamon ve dış tababetine katkısı* (Istanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2012), 94.

69 Stanford J. Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517–1798* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 276, 283.

70 Halil Sahilioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951–952*, 7–13, 16, 51–64, 79, 82- 89, 101–103.

71 Muhammet Zahit Atçıl, *State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vezierates of Rüstem Paşa (1544–1561)* (PhD diss., Chicago University, 2015).

72 Ibid., 280–288.

In this case, the problem at hand was the need to acclimatize trees brought from other climes (sing. *iklim*), a subject that would have interested Salih's readership. Giving his readers direct access to the firsthand knowledge of the Egyptian gardener, Salih departs from an earlier scholarly tradition by framing balsam primarily as an agricultural concern. The passage emphasizes that it is possible to cultivate balsam trees transported to Matariya from Hijaz—the former located in the third, and the latter in the second clime *(iklim)*.[73] It therefore shows that with human effort, climate can be adjusted or compensated artificially. Already the physician-jurist Ibn al-Nafis (d. 1288) had offered an alternative to the essentializing views on climate found in many earlier geographies by noting, in his commentary on Ibn Sina's *Canon* (1025), that the specific climate of his native Damascus did not fit with Ibn Sina's general theoretical principle that days in the Spring have air which is "closest to balance between moistness and dryness, and between cold and heat."[74] Salih, whose account of the balsam orchard is highly attuned to the specificities and subtleties of climates and their impact on agriculture, goes further by demonstrating how human labor—in this case, using a special water—can intervene and compensate where nature fails. The new mobility of plants is also attested in the *Hünername* (Book of Skills), written in 1584 by the court historian Seyyid Lokman, on the moral attributes of sultan Süleyman (r. 1521–1566). In the fifth chapter, Lokman recalls an event that took place in the Topkapı Palace garden during Süleyman's rule. Several pomegranate trees had been transported to the garden from the cities

73 According to Ibn Sina's general principles, plants brought to other countries are affected by the new climate and soon begin producing plants resembling the local varieties due to the their "inclination to the nature of that area". See Remke Kruk, "Ibn Sina on Animals: Between the First Teacher and The Physician," in *Avicenna and His Heritage—Acts of an international Symposium*, ed. Jules Jannsens and Daniel de Smet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002): 332–333. On the concept of clime (*iklim)* in medieval Arabic societies, see T. J. Olsson, "The World in Arab Eyes: A Reassessment of the Climes in Medieval Islamic Scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no. 3 (2014): 487–508. On the development of Ibn Sina's thought on plants, which departs from the Aristotelian one, see Akihiro Tawara, "Avicenna's Denial of Life in Plants," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 24 (2014): 127–138.

74 According to Ibn al-Nafis, the proximity of mountains which retain snow in the spring, and the wind that blows from the mountains, contributes to the season's cold days; Ibn al-Nafis thus concludes that the weather of a particular city is not only determined by the season. The implication is that physicians should pay attention to the city's geography to determine the weather, the diseases that will prevail, and the treatments they will require. Ibn al-Nafis's commentary on the *Canon* is discussed in Nahyan Fancy, "Verification and Utility in the Arabic Commentaries on the *Canon of Medicine*: Examples from the Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288)," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 75/4 (2020), 375–379.

of Aleppo and Diyarbekir.[75] Because of the exquisite taste of their fruits, "a few knowledgeable pages" were assigned especially to take care of them. However, the trees were eventually destroyed, not by extreme heat or cold—as Süleyman had initially assumed when he noticed their absence one day as he strolled through the garden—but by a palace page, who had mistaken them for weeds. The pomegranate trees were found uprooted by the shore of the Marmara Sea, to which the garden's gentle slopes descended.[76] Upon learning that the page hailed from the mountain pastures near Edirne, however, the sultan granted him mercy, noting that he could not have known the trees' real value: in that region, pomegranate trees did not grow.[77] The moral qualities of Süleyman are proven in his knowledge about the distribution of pomegranate trees across the Ottoman regions and the variation of climatic conditions even within regions belonging to a single clime.[78]

As they became more mobile, plants seem to have become more closely identified with regions and thus also more able to transcend space, troping distant places as well.[79] There is also an economic twist to these literary and visual representations: the growing number of royal gardens in and around Istanbul in the first decade of the sixteenth century became a source of income for the Ottoman palace administration and the inner treasury. Produce from the royal gardens was sold on the Istanbul's market.[80] From the second half of the sixteenth century, the administrative practice emerged, financed by the regional departments of royal treasuries, of shipping to Istanbul large quantities

75 Topkapı Saray Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, ms. H.1524, ff. 150a–150b. On the arrival of plants in the Topkapı Palace garden in the sixteenth century from locations such as Crimea and Syria, including the pomegranate trees from Haleb and Diyarbekir, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: the Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1991), 202.

76 This garden was located partially on the grounds of a Byzantine garden built by Constantin IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055) and surrounded the monastery of St. George of Mangana. See Henry Maguire, "Gardens and Parks in Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000): 259–262.

77 Topkapı Saray Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, ms. H.1524, ff. 150a–150b.

78 According to ʿAşık Mehmed, the cities of Rum (including Istanbul and Edirne) are in the fifth, while those of Syria and Iraq in the third *iklim*; Âşık Mehmed, *Menâzırü'l-Avâlim*, 2:142–143.

79 The construction of botanical knowledge through images, including prints, in the sixteenth century has been discussed fairly extensively in the European context; for a recent contribution with reference to previous literature, see Claudia Swan, "Illustrated Natural History," in *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Susan Dackerman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 186–199.

80 Aleksandar Shopov, "'Books on Agriculture (*al-filāḥa*) Pertaining to Medical Science' and Ottoman Agricultural Science and Practice around 1500," in *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, Muqarnas Supplements 14, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar and Cornell H. Fleischer (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 558.

of fruit sapling, roses, and bulbs from various of flower varieties from cities such as Edirne, Bursa, and northern Syria.[81] Archival documents contain concrete technical description of how such plants were to be transported; for example, the fruit saplings, purchased directly from orchards in Bursa, were wrapped in felt and stitched with cotton or hemp and sent to Istanbul.[82]

The event described in the *Hünername* must have taken place immediately after the 1533–36 campaign during which Iraq was conquered, when the sultan's army stopped in both Aleppo and Diyarbekir. Both cities, along with the rest of the cities passed through by Ottoman army during the campaign, are illustrated in a work completed around 1537 by the Ottoman scholar Matrakçı Nasuh (b.1480- d.1564). The illustrations depict colorful and tightly arranged cityscapes in which groups of schematized buildings are punctuated with topographical features such as rivers or mountains, identifiable buildings and monuments, and plants—in many cases identifiable ones distinctive to the region. Baghdad, for example, is depicted with palm trees laden with dates,[83] and Diyarbekir, indeed, with pomegranate trees.[84] Topographical and botanical knowledge—constructed both through illustrations, and through the importing of actual plants—were bound up with conquest and the construction of royal identity.

Salih eventually lost the power to visually observe the world around him when he came down with cataracts in his eyes. We learn about this, again, from the introduction to his *Divan*, a collection of poems he completed shortly before his death in 1565.[85] Salih's work can be understood as part of the development of an Ottoman epistemology in which older authorities were interrogated and first-person narrative became an important tool in updating knowledge about regions and goods that were newly important in the Ottoman economy. The new need, reflected in Salih's work, to *know* balsam, to encounter it with the author in the specific orchard where it was grown—to question the Egyptian gardener about the techniques through which these fragile, imported trees were cultivated and preserved, and their oil tapped—emerged from the economic and administrative challenges of a growing Ottoman state bureaucracy, which

81 Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Taşrasında Bir Maliye Kurumu: Bursa Hassa Harç Eminliği* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006), 217; Ahmed Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda Istanbul Hayatı (1593–1591)* (İstanbul: Devlet Basimevi, 1935), 6 and 12.

82 Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Taşrasında*, 167.

83 Naṣūḥü's-Silāḥī (Maṭrāḳçı), *Beyān-ı Menāzil-i Sefer-i 'Irākeyn-i Sulṭān Süleymān Hān*, ed. Hüseyin G. Yurdaydın (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1976), 47b.

84 Maṭrāḳçı, *Beyān-ı Menāzil*, f. 89b and f. 102a.

85 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Onaltıncı Asır Ortalarında Yaşamış Olan İki Büyük Şahsiyet: Tosyalı Celâl zade Mustafa ve Salih Çelebiler," *Belleten* 22, no. 87 (1958), 438–39.

now extended across a vast area from the Adriatic Sea to the Indian Ocean. Salih Çelebi's account of the balsam orchard can thus be seen as within the history of the emerging global economy, in which production sites—especially in the Americas with the widespread use of slave labor—began to compete with that in Matariya. The first reports of the American balsam by a Spanish scholar appeared just a decade prior to Salih Çelebi's New History of Egypt, showing how the commercial conflicts between the Spanish and Ottoman empires could be linked to epistemological shifts.[86] Salih Çelebi's New History of Egypt was translated into Spanish in 1678 under the title *Anales de Egipto.*[87] Its translator, Vincente Bratuti from Ragusa (Dubrovnik), a translator for the Spanish Emperor Charles II, paid special attention to Salih Çelebi's observation of balsam in Matariya, by adding to his translation a comparison of the balsam tree to a "tree known in Constantinople as Italian apple."[88] His description of the balsam orchard is just one point of departure for what could be a deeper exploration of the intertwining, in Ottoman literature, of the construction of self, the construction of knowledge, and the formation of a global economy.

86 On the connection between the commercialization of the trade with the balsam from the Americas by the Spanish Empire and the establishment of empirical procedures in its study in the sixteenth century, see Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature*, 15–23.

87 Salih Çelebi, *Anales de Egipto, en que se trata de las cosas más principales que han sucedido desde el principio del mundo hasta de cien años a esta parte. Compuestos por Salih Gelil, historiador turco, y aora traducidos de lengua turca en castellana por don Vicente Bratuti, Ragusés, traductor de lenguas de Carlos Segundo el Grande* (Madrid: Melchor lvarez, 1678).

88 "Pereciendose a un arbol que le llaman en Constantonopla Mançano Italiano." Ibid., 281–282. I want to thank Alberto Tiburcio for his help on the translation.