ACTA
VIENNENSIA
OTTOMANICA

Akten
des 13. CIEPO – Symposiums
(Comité International des Études Pré-Ottomanes et Ottomanes)
in Wien

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON

MARKUS KÖHBACK
GISELA PROCHÁZKA-EISL
CLAUDIA RÖMER

WIEN 1999
IM SELBSTVERLAG DES INSTITUTS FÜR ORIENTALISTIK
Nef'î’s Siham-i Kaza: A Satirical View of Seventeenth Century Ottoman Society

MEHMET KALPAKLI, (Ankara)*

Satire was one of the ways in which Ottoman social criticism expressed itself. In many respects, the place of the media today was held, in Ottoman times, by poetry. Poetry was on everybody's tongue; it was recited in social gatherings and was even passed from mouth to mouth among the common folk. This kind of poem, which was called "taşlama" (literally, "stoning") when it was done in the language and style of the common people, was called "hicviye" (satire) when it was done in the elite Divan tradition. Satires were done mostly in the form called kt'a. Yet, we will also encounter satires in the rhymed letters that poets used to send to one another, and in various verse forms in their divans. But if one considers all of Divan poetry, satirical poems are not all that frequently found.

One reason for this is Islam's dim view of satire. Islam has forbidden making fun of people or saying evil things about them. (In Kur'an, Nisa, Ayet 148: "God does not like evil words to be spoken openly with the exception of those who have suffered injustices and tyranny.") According to Islamic belief retribution belongs to God. Evil, like this world we live in, is transitory and evil will be surely punished either today or in the Coming Day. A God-fearing poet would consign an injustice he witnessed or those who do evil of any sort to the judgement of God. In addition, because satirical kt'as were made up of obscene and improper words, not much space was given to them when a divan was collected. Or, more accurately, outside of some mecmua's they were not put into writing and hence have not survived to the present day.

Nef'î (d. 1635) is famed among Ottoman poets as a writer of kasides (praise) and his kasides are considered to be the best of genre. But one aspect of his work that has not been studied enough is his satirical work. The content of Nef'î's work can be summarised as follows: praise, self-praise, and satire.

Nef'î praised the sultans and notables of his age in his kasides but he also did not shrink from criticising mistakes in their administration of affairs. Prior to Nef'î, critiques of societal characteristic were more guarded and tended to take the form of general criticisms of the system rather than criticisms of persons. Only Nef'î seems to have directly targeted the person in charge of running the system. What allowed him to dare this was the fact that the Sultan (Murad the Fourth) supported him and even encouraged him in this kind of satire.

Some people manifest "the good" and some manifest "evil". And so Nef'î recalls some of them with good -with praise- and some with evil -satire.

Versem ne aceb hükümünü ger medh ile hicvin
Ademdir olan mazhar-i hayr u şer-i ilem

Is it any wonder, if I give what is due of both praise and satire
A man is where both the good and evil of the word are manifested.

The Shafts of Doom is the name of the work in which Nef'î's satires are collected. There are a number of texts of this work in several manuscript libraries but, unfortunately no modern scientific edition has been produced to date. The language of The Shaft of Doom is rather common only in the

* Bilkent University, Dept. of History
satires that have the character of a "satire in kaside form" (anti-kaside), that is to say, in the satires that are written in the kaside form as opposed to those in the kit'a or other forms, is the language more serious even to the point of approaching the language of the kaside in his Divan. The simplicity of the language of The Shafts of Doom is what assured its popularity among the common people and its place in a number of mecmuas. The language of the kasıdes in Nef'i's Divan is rather ponderous, weighted with artistic and Persian vocabulary. The reason for writing satires in a simpler language is the class of people to whom it is addressed. In his satires with social content, Nef'i reflects the views of the society in which he lives. These poems were read in literary assemblies, but they were also followed with interest by the common people. Nef'i proves his skill as a poet by adapting his language to the situation and to the group he was addressing. The poets whom Nef'i satirized in his Shafts of Doom also wrote equally harsh satires of him. (Some copies of the Siham-i Kazâ even include these poems written about Nef'i).

The Shafts of Doom begins with a poem written about his father who had abandoned his family to take a patronage position with the Khan of the Crimea. Next come two satirical poems in kaside forms about Gürcü Mehmed Paşa. After this, there are satires of several paşa's (including Kemankeş Ali Paşa, Etmeçizade Ahmed Paşa) and various poets and ulumâ of the age. Among these are satires concerning Şeyhülislâm Yahya Efendi, Recep Paşa, Bâkı Paşa, Halil Paşa, Veyişi, Nevişâde Atâî, Kâzâzade Fâtîz, Farsâtî, Bahsci, Mantkî, Ganizâde Nadîrî, and the age's famous biographer of poets, Râyîzî and Azmizâde Hâletî.

The Shafts of Doom and its poems are said to have been the cause of the poet Nef'i's tragic end. As we are told by the historian Nâmî, in the year 1039 (1639 CE) Sultan Murâd the Fourth was in the palace at Beşiktaş reading The Shafts of Doom when out of a previously clear sky, thunder began to roll, lightning crackled and a bolt struck near the throne where the Sultan sat. The Sultan, then and there, tore up the copy of The Shafts of Doom he held in his hands, repented of ever reading such frivolous material, and fired Nef'i from his position and made him promise to desist from writing satires. One of the poets of the day produced the following couplet referring to this event:

Gökten nazâre indi Sihâm-i Kazâsına
Nef'i dîlye uğradı Hâkîn belâsına

A parallel came down from the sky to his Shafts of Doom
Nef'i by his own tongue brought the wrath of God down upon himself

And Nef'i himself said the following, on the subject of his repenting of writing satires, in a kaside to Murad the Fourth:

Bu günden ahâdim olsun kimseyi hicv etmeyem illâ
Vireydin ger icâzet hicv iderdim baht-i nâ-sâzi

Beni dâr ettı zîrâ dergeh-i devlet-pendâhindan
Nice hicv etmeyin bir böyle gaddâr u çpendâzi

From this day on I promise never to satirize anyone, except
With your permission, I would satirize discordant fate.

For it has distanced me from the court of my fortune's refuge
How shall I not satirize such a cruel and treacherous one?

Nef'i was exiled for a time to Edirne and later was forgiven and allowed to return to Istanbul. But he could not keep his promise and continued to write satires. There are a number of stories about the satire that finally proved to be his undoing. Although it is said that he was killed for satirizing
Bayram Paşa, it appears unlikely that the Sultan would have ordered the execution of this poet whom he loved for anything less than satirizing the Sultan himself. Whatever the case, Nef'i was executed on 8 Şaban, 1044/November 27, 1635 because of his satires. Two of the chronograms written on his death point to this cause:

Geçdi Sihâm-i Kazâ

The Shafts of Doom have struck

And

Katline oldu sebep hicvi hele Nef'i'nin

His satires were the reason for Nef'i's execution.

Above I referred to a Quranic Verse to support the contention that Islam does not look favorably on satire. However, the sense of the Verse can also be interpreted to be that satire was a right reserved for those whose rights had been violated. As for Nef'i, he experienced injustice at the hands of the very person to whom he had submitted three kasides of praise and was, at his orders, dismissed from his job. In Nef'i's Divan there are three kasides praising Gürçü Mehmed Paşa and at the same time there are two hicvi's about him, and one kor'a on his death in The Shafts of Doom. Gürçü (the Georgian) Mehmed Paşa, who died in 1626 CE, held several important positions in the Ottoman State rising to the position of Grand Vizier. As Prof. Karahan relates, about that time at a banquet given by the then Second Vizier Gürçü Mehmed Paşa for the Safavid emissary, Yâdigâr-i Ali Sultan, the Paşa said something that upset the poet and when the latter responded with dismissive and hurtful words, the Paşa grew angry and dismissed the poet from his position. At this point, Nef'i penned an hicvîyye about the Paşa on whom he had earlier poured fulsome praise. In one hicvîyye about Mehmed Paşa, who fired the poet not just once but three times, Nef'i is quite clear about the situation:

Üçüncü def'adır bu Hak belâsın vere mela'nun
Ki yok yere bent azl etti olmuşken senâ-hâni

It's the third time this accursed one, may God punish him
Has fired me for no reason from my job while I was his panegyrist

Nef'i expresses regret that he had ever written kasides to such an evil person and finds it difficult to forgive himself:

Bana bu güç gelir ammâ hakikaade adâletdir
Niçin haritg edip medh eyledim bir böyle nûdânî

Ki ne idrâki var ne rüşdî var ne hüsîn-i ahlâki
Hiç insân medh eder mi böyle har-i çengelîstânî

Cezâsi bu gînâhun kendimi hicv etmedir zîrâ
Çırá kâri kâned åkîl ki bâz-âred peşîmânî

This is difficult for me to say but in truth it's just
Why did I act like an ass and praise such a fool?

He has neither wit, nor maturity, nor good morals
How could a person praise such an uncultured jungle-dweller

The punishment for this sin is that I satirize myself, because
How can an intelligent person do what he will later regret.

But at least he did repent and took his vengeance by writing satires:

*Ben hele tâ'ib oiledm hıcv ile intikâm aldım*

At least I repented and took my vengeance with satire

After this *hıcvîyye*, Gürcü Mehmed Paşa, tried to punish Nef'i by having him condemned to death, but he was unsuccessful in this. In response to these attempts, Nef'i wrote another *hıcvîyye* with the redif "ah köpek" (oh you dog). Nef'i expresses suprise that Mehmed Paşa, whom the poet has destroyed with the "scimitar of his tongue," is still administering the government. As for the Paşa's evil treatment of Nef'i, it continues, increasing the while:

*Çak çak etmiş iken tığ-i zebân ile seni
Kande buldun o kadar yâreye merhem a köpek*

*Ki ferâmus edip ol mertebe zahhin acısun
Kudurup yine isvadin beni muhkem a köpek*

As I cut you to pieces with the sword of my tongue
Where did you find balm for so many wounds, oh you dog.

Forgetting the agony of such a degree of wounds
You became rabid and bit me sorely, oh you dog.

Nef'i used his poetic power as much to satirize as to praise and proved that poetry could be a very powerful tool for both social and personal critiques. Throwing open the floodgates to poets who followed him, his satire had a strong influence on Turkish writers from Vehbi to Haşmet and Eşref, from Neyzen Tevfik to Aziz Nesin.