

THE PROBLEM OF SOURCES IN THE STUDY OF TEKKE HISTORY (A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ERKAN ÖVÜÇ'S ARTICLE)

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Abstract.

This article examines the methodological problems of source criticism in the study of the history of the Üsküdar Uzbek tekke. Central to this discussion is the scholarly article published in 2018 by Erkan Övüç under the title "How is Tekke history written?" The four-category source typology proposed by Övüç tekke records, tombstones and inscriptions, archival documents, and oral history is critically analysed in terms of its strengths and limitations. On the basis of this critical assessment, the article demonstrates that Övüç's typology contains three significant lacunae: the Istanbul periodical press of the early twentieth century, the consular reports of the Russian Empire, and memoir literature. The article proposes an expanded seven-category typology that incorporates these three additional source types and evaluates the prospects for their application in tekke scholarship.

Keywords: Üsküdar Uzbek tekke, source typology, methodology, Erkan Övüç, periodical press, consular reports, historiography, tekke history.

I. Introduction

The quality of any historical inquiry is fundamentally conditioned by the completeness and diversity of its source base. The Üsküdar Uzbek tekke a religious and cultural institution that operated from the mid-eighteenth century until 1925 and served as a vital cultural bridge between Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire has attracted growing scholarly attention in Turkish historiography in recent decades [1]. Research

that had its modest beginnings in the 1940s gained remarkable momentum in the second decade of the twenty-first century [2].

A pivotal contribution to this expanding field was made by Erkan Övüç, whose 2018 article "How is Tekke history written? An Essay on the Classification of Sources" offered the first systematic typology of the sources available for the study of tekke history [2]. Övüç's framework was rapidly adopted as a methodological foundation by subsequent researchers.

Yet, like any scholarly classification, Övüç's typology is not without its limitations. The present article undertakes a critical reassessment of that typology with a view to proposing a concrete expansion. The methodological contribution intended here extends beyond tekke scholarship proper: it speaks to the broader challenge of studying the social institutions of the Ottoman period. The central question guiding the inquiry may be formulated as follows: Is the source typology proposed by Erkan Övüç sufficient for a comprehensive account of the history of the Üsküdar tekke, and what categories of sources has it left unaccounted for?

The study proceeds in two methodological stages. In the first stage, Övüç's typology is subjected to internal analysis: each of its four categories is examined individually in order to determine its scope and inherent constraints. In the second stage, a comparative analysis is conducted by placing Övüç's typology alongside the source types employed by scholars working on Russian and European imperial archives notably Robert Crews [3] and Eileen Kane [4].

The primary materials consulted include Övüç's own article [2], the studies of Serpil Özcan [5] and Lale Can [6], the works of Cengiz Bektaş [7] and Muharrem Varol [8], and Musahibzade Celal's memoir "Life in Old Istanbul" [9].

II. Discussion and Results

Övüç distinguishes four categories of sources for the study of tekke history [2]: tekke records (registers of visitors, financial ledgers); tombstones and architectural inscriptions (epitaphs, votive inscriptions on buildings); archival documents (the Ottoman state archives); and oral history (testimonies of the descendants of tekke shaykhs). The scholarly contribution of this typology deserves recognition on several counts.

First, it constitutes the first systematic attempt to classify tekke sources a task that had not previously been undertaken. Second, the emphasis Övüç places on the primacy of archival documents reflects a sound methodological position: the existence of more than two hundred documents relating to the Bukharan emirate's hajj affairs in the Ottoman state archives [10] demonstrates that primary archival sources provide the most reliable foundation for the study of tekke history. Third, the treatment of architectural monuments tombstones and inscriptions as sources in their own right represents a genuinely innovative approach, one that has been pursued with considerable productivity by Işlı Esin Demirel [11].

Nevertheless, Övüç's typology contains a notable gap with respect to the Istanbul periodical press of the early twentieth century. This omission is methodologically significant. In the years between 1908 and 1918, Istanbul saw the publication of 918 periodicals newspapers and journals of varying character [12]. Outlets such as Tanin, İkdam, and Servet-i Fünun carried regular reportage on the arrival of Central Asians in Istanbul, the activities of tekkes, and difficulties encountered during the hajj. The methodological advantage of periodical sources lies precisely in their contemporaneity: unlike memoir literature, they record events as they unfold, unmediated by the retrospective distortions that inevitably affect recollection. Muharrem Varol [8] has written on the relationship between the tekke and the printing trade, but he treats the

periodical press as an object of research rather than as a source a distinction that carries considerable methodological weight.

A second significant lacuna in Övüç's typology concerns the consular reports of the Russian Empire, and more broadly the diplomatic archives of foreign powers. Russia had, from the closing decades of the nineteenth century, established a dedicated consular apparatus for monitoring the movements of Central Asian Muslims in Istanbul [4]. The figure drawn from those very consular reports that between eight and ten thousand pilgrims were registered annually [13] illustrates the informational density of this source type. In his work *For Prophet and Tsar* [3], Robert Crews relies on Russian consular reports as a primary source for the study of Muslim life in Central Asia. This approach has found virtually no equivalent in Turkish historiography. Yet the Russian consul's dispatches contain detailed accounts of visits to tekkes, of the intellectual activities of Central Asian scholars in Istanbul, and of the progress of hajj caravans. These reports are preserved in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) in Saint Petersburg and remain largely unexamined by students of Ottoman institutional history.

A third lacuna concerns the treatment of written memoir literature. Övüç identifies oral history as a distinct category, but does not integrate written memoirs and recollections into his typology. The methodological distinction between these two source types is not trivial. Oral history is recorded at a remove from the events it describes and is always mediated by the act of transcription; written memoirs, by contrast, are set down by their authors in their own hand and typically composed in closer temporal proximity to the events recalled. Musahibzade Celal's memoir *Life in Old Istanbul* [9], for instance, describes the tekke as an esnaf a guild of craftsmen thereby furnishing a unique primary account of the tekke's economic function. Övüç deploys this work as secondary literature rather than as a source in its own right, a choice that forecloses an important avenue of inquiry.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, the present article proposes an expanded typology that supplements Övüç's four categories with three additional ones: the periodical press, foreign diplomatic archives, and written memoir literature. The practical utility of this expanded framework may be illustrated by three concrete examples. First, a combined reading of the periodical press and the tekke's financial ledgers could yield precise figures for the volume of textiles delivered by İbrohim Adham Efendi's weaving workshop to the court of Sultan Abdülaziz [14]. Second, a comparative analysis of Russian consular reports and the tekke's visitor registers could help resolve the question of the character of the 1918 migration surge — whether it consisted primarily of refugees or of students. Third, press reportage on the tekke during the years of the National Struggle would allow scholars to assess, on the basis of near-contemporary evidence, the degree to which the institution had become politicised.

It bears emphasising that the lacunae identified in Övüç's typology are not a reflection of individual scholarly shortcoming; they mirror a broader tendency within Turkish regional historiography. Turkish researchers have traditionally privileged internal sources the Ottoman state archives and institutional records while making comparatively little use of foreign archival materials. This constitutes a systemic limitation of the field, one that a methodologically expanded approach can help, at least in part, to overcome.

III. Conclusion

The present article yields the following conclusions. First, the four-category typology proposed by Erkan Övüç has made a substantial methodological contribution to the study of the history of the Üsküdar tekke and has provided an indispensable foundation for subsequent scholarship. Second, the typology fails to account for three bodies of source material that are of considerable relevance: the Istanbul periodical press of the early twentieth century, the consular reports of the Russian Empire, and written

memoir literature. The methodological implication is clear: a source typology is not a fixed and immutable schema it must be expanded and refined as new materials come to light in the course of research. It is precisely this dynamic, revisionary orientation that sustains the scholarly vitality of historical inquiry.

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