

Border Warfare and Patronage in Ta'likîzâde's Şehnâmes

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The position of şehnâmecî was a relatively short-lived one at the Ottoman court, and its purpose is still debated, but it is highly significant as the source of a number of key works of early modern Ottoman historiography. Meanwhile, as Baki Tezcan has pointed out, the şehnâmecîlik was less of an institution than a “personal enterprise.” In this paper, I situate şehnâmecî Ta'likîzâde Meḥmed el-Fenârî's şehnâmes dealing with the Ottoman campaigns of 1593-4 and 1596 in Hungary (Şehnâme-i Hümâyûn and Egri Fetḥi Târîḥi) in this context. By doing so, it is possible to gain a greater insight into the patronage dynamics that underlaid this “enterprise.” Indeed, the şehnâmes themselves are highly personal documents, containing both explicit and implicit autobiographical details. Notably, in the Şehnâme-i Hümâyûn, Ta'likîzâde describes Murâd III's rejection of the original version of his Şemâ'ilnâme as the initiating event of his service in the retinue of Koca Sinân Pasha on his 1594 campaign in Hungary. This paper argues that Talikîzade's personal participation in the border campaigns of 1594 and 1596 likely played a key role in his rise to be the unrivaled head şehnâmecî, displacing his predecessor, Lokman. By participating personally in the border campaigns, Talikîzade not only gained first-hand knowledge of events, but also situated himself close to key players upon whose favor he depended, most notably Mehmed III (Şehnâme-i Hümâyûn and Egri Fetḥi Târîḥi both devote considerable space to praising and currying the favor of the new sultan). Through the analysis of these texts, this paper aims to shed light on the role of service in the borderlands as a source of opportunities for career advancement.