Nicknames and sobriquets in Ottoman vernacular expression

Güçlü Tülüveli

Abstract

Nicknaming is a social practice that presents an area for comparative historical research. From a communal perspective, nicknames can be evaluated as markers of status in social hierarchy. On a personal level, they play a crucial role in defining personal identities. This article evaluates some examples from Ottoman archival documents from these perspectives. It focuses not only on the impact of dynamic elements on local community, as in cases of migration and conversion, but also on the question of how social prestige in a local setting could be perceived through the prism of nicknames.

Keywords: *Ottoman, Early Modern, Social History, Trabzon, Nickname*

"Vive notre Petit Caporal" exclaimed the French soldiers when they were harangued by Napoleon himself. Emmanuel-Augustin-Dieudonné-Joseph, Comte de Las Cases, in his "Memorial de Sainte Helene" stated that there existed the following custom in the "The Army of Italy" (*Armée d'Italie*): after each battle, the veteran soldiers held a meeting and conferred a new rank on their young general, who upon making his appearance in the camp was received by the soldiers and saluted with this new title.[1] Napoleon was in his early twenties when he received this nickname, but it probably was that of a Brigadier General and not Corporal. What does this historical anecdote signify? From this military ritual emerged a nickname which would follow Napoleon until his demise. "Le Petit Caporal" continued to be used throughout the years

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1 W.E. Buckley, "Napoleon's Nickname, 'Le petit caporal'," *Notes and Queries* s7-VIII, no. 207 (1889).

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to such a degree that the writer of the "Memorial" indicated that it was perhaps this very nickname contributing to Napoleon's miraculous and successful return in 1815. In fact, the nickname "Petit Caporal" became part of Napoleon's identity.

Modern studies on the process of nicknaming have shown that this practice is closely related with identity formation. From one perspective, nicknames reflect the image that a person wishes to project. As suggested in some studies, an adult who chooses to be called by his or her nickname instead of his or her given name tries to emphasize certain character traits or perhaps prefers to remain silent on others. Qualities such as being cheerful for a television personality, or morality for a politician running for high office may serve as examples of this kind. For most people, their given names or the nicknames by which they have been called their entire life are an unquestionable part of their individual identities.[2] Nicknames may also mirror the image and status of an individual in a social setting. Modern studies on schoolteachers' nicknames suggest that they can serve as a unifying device for group membership. They are used as a medium to express feelings of affection, for teasing and ridicule. In this sense, they are a means of confirming identity, bestowing social recognition, and marking social status.[3] Therefore, nicknames are considered to be one of the critical features of urban and rural community life. Functioning as mechanisms of social control and integration, they offer clues about the level of social interaction within local communities.[4] Derogatory nicknames, for example, can be used as a linguistic technique to stigmatize people. In sixteenth-century Cologne, persons punished for vagrancy and petty crimes were often referred to not by their real names, but by various nicknames.[5] In short, nicknaming is a "creative discourse practice for constructing identities, marking social inclusion and managing hierarchical relationships,"[6] and the study of nicknames offers us various avenues for research.

This study analyses various nicknames observed in the Islamic court registers (*şeriyye sicilleri*) of Trabzon in the mid-seventeenth century.[7]

2 Albert Mehrabian and Marlena Piercy, "Differences in Positive and Negative Connotations of Nicknames and Given Names," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 133, no. 5 (1993): 738.

3 W. Ray Crozier, "Donkeys and Dragons: Recollections of Schoolteachers' Nicknames," *Educational Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 133.

4 Marco Jacquemet, "Namechasers," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (1992): 733.

5 Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 163.

6 Jacquemet, "Namechasers," 736.

7 Henceforth the term TSCR will indicate the relevant documents in the *şeriyye sicilleri* of the city of Trabzon. The number of the register, the page of the relevant document, and the date of the document are given in this order. The recto of a folio is called "a" and the verso "b."

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Court registers are essential sources for Ottoman local and social history and cover the cases and issues presented to Islamic judges in Ottoman cities. Although day-to-day events can be observed in these registers, there are some limitations and bias regarding this type of primary source. First of all, the contents of the registers show variations in different cities and time periods. Secondly, as certain fees have to be paid to the judges, the poorer segments of Ottoman society used the courts less than their wealthier counterparts.[8] And lastly, the non-Muslim population of the Ottoman society is less visible in these documents, because non-Muslims were not obliged to come to Islamic courts for the settlement of their disputes. Yet, court registers still remain the main source for Ottoman local and social history despite these limitations.

As to the historical background of the Trabzon region, the area was annexed to the Ottoman territories in 1461. The city of Trabzon was the center of the governorship (*eyalet*) of the same name in the mid-seventeenth century.[9] The borders of the Trabzon *eyalet* covered not only the present-day province of Trabzon, but also included towns from other provinces. The towns of Tirebolu and Görele from Giresun, and Kürtün and Torul from Gümüşhane were included within Trabzon's borders. The modern towns of Rize and Gümüşhane and the whole of Rize province were also part of Trabzon province. Therefore, the seventeenth-century province of Trabzon was much larger than today.[10]

Mid-seventeenth-century Trabzon was a small town by contemporary standards. While exact figures for that period are not available, information from the preceding and following centuries can give us a rough picture of the area. The survey register (*tahrir defteri*) of 1583 indicates that the city of Trabzon had 1,134 Muslim *hanes* (55.38%) and 981 Christian *hanes* (44.62%) in that year.[11] The term *hane*, literally meaning household, is a vague one. Scholarly debate about its historical composition is still continuing.[12] Ronald Jennings, in his study on sixteenth-century Ottoman cities, gives the figure of four for the city of Trabzon; I will also use this number to arrive at a minimum population

8 For a thorough analysis of cases in Ottoman Islamic courts, see Boğaç Ergene, *Local Court, Provincial Society and Justice in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

9 Melek Öksüz, *Onsekizinci Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Trabzon* (Trabzon: Serander Yayınları, 2006), 46.

10 Hanefi Bostan, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Trabzon Sancağında Sosyal ve İktisadi Hayat* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2002), 48.

11 Heath Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması ve Türkleşmesi 1461-1583* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1998), 111, 113.

12 The standard work on this subject is Nejat Göyünç, "Hane Deyimi Hakkında," İÜEF Tarih Dergisi, no. 32 (1979). A more recent study discusses the matter on a comparative basis: Alan Duben, "Turkish Families and Households in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Family History* 10, no. 5 (1985).

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figure.[13] This makes for a total rounded figure of 8,460 persons for the city of Trabzon in the sixteenth century. The figures for the nineteenth century differ according to the sources and vary between 15,000 and 20,000 persons.[14] In the light of the above-mentioned figures, we can surmise a population figure of between 10,000 and 13,000 people for the mid-seventeenth century.

Nicknames, in the Islamic usage, formed part of the full name of an individual. The full name of a person is usually made up of the following elements: *kunya*, *ism*, *nasab*, and *nisba*. The *kunya* is an onomastic element fashioned in this manner: the father's (*abu*) or mother's (*umm*) name plus a personal name.[15] *Ism* is the name properly speaking. *Nasab* is the pedigree or list of ancestors. The *nisba* was originally the name of the individual's tribe or clan. Later on, place of birth, origin, or residence were also included in it. Nicknames (*lakab*) or pejorative sobriquets (*nabaz*) come after the *nisba*, thus in a sense complementing the full name.[16] The *lakab* originally seems to have been a nickname or sobriquet of any tone, one which could express admiration, be purely descriptive and neutral, or insulting and derogatory. In the latter case, it was often termed *nabaz*.[17] In our documents, nicknames were often registered in formulas such as "someone known as..." (*dimekle maruf*), "...someone generally called..." (*eşşehr be*) or "someone famously called..." (*dimekle meşhur*). This article not only analyzes *lakab*s (nicknames) and *nabaz*s (pejorative sobriquets), but also *nisba*s, as they offer valuable information about the impact of intra-regional and inter-provincial migration on the local community of Trabzon. As *lakab* could also mean honorific title, I must note that this article only focuses on the nicknames proper.

Nicknames as signs of identification

Most of the nicknames in the documents surveyed for this study were occupation-oriented. Here, nicknames, just like honorific titles, were used as signs of identification. As Ottoman citizens did not use surnames, nicknames, together with one's first name and his or her paternal name, were crucial indicators for distinguishing one individual from another. Nicknames such as knife-grinder (*bileci*),[18] muleteer (*harbende*),[19]

13 Ronald Jennings, "Urban Population in Anatolia in the Sixteenth Century: A Study of Kayseri, Karaman, Amasya, Trabzon and Erzurum," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 52-54.

14 Necmettin Aygün, *Onsekizinci Yüzyılda Trabzon'da Ticaret* (Trabzon: Serander Yayınları, 2005), 16-19.

15 "Kunya," in *EI 2*.

16 "Ism," in *EI 2*.

17 "Lakab," in *EI 2*.

18 TSCR, 1835, 6b, evasıt-ı şaban 1065.

19 "*Mehmed Çelebi bin harbende Mustafa*" TSCR, 1836, 20b, evail-i şaban 1067.

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cattle dealer (*celeb*),[20] raft-maker (*salcı*),[21] jailer (*seccan*),[22] or sword-maker (*seyyaf* or *seyfci*)[23] were applied to identify anyone bearing the same name. Some of them, such as mirror-maker (*aynacı*),[24] quilted-turban-maker (*kavukçu*),[25] gunpowder-maker (*barutçu*),[26] wandering coffee-house minstrel (*şair*),[27] or bookbinder (*mücellid*)[28] can be useful for assessing the level of specialization of crafts and arts in a given city.

For social historians, it is interesting to observe how certain professions were reflected in nicknames. Ali Çelebi, nicknamed timber-store (*ağac enbarı*), was in the wood-cutting or -selling business.[29] Ali Beşe bin Kurd, called Tokmak Çavuş in the city,[30] was probably the collector of the Mallet Tax (*tokmak akçesi*).[31] Individuals who were famous in the community for their special skills were also nicknamed accordingly. For example, a certain Mustafa Beşe bin Ali was called *şakaloz*,[32] a corrupted form of *çakaloz*, meaning a small swivelgun. Mustafa Beşe's competence in using his gun was perhaps recognized in the community by attaching an epithet to his formal name.

If occupational status was one of the basic ways to identify individuals, kinship and lineage connections could also provide necessary information. Here the examples show the importance given to the paternal line in defining lineage ties. At the most basic level, sons were nicknamed after their fathers' occupation. İbrahim Beşe bin Alaaddin was called the stove-maker's son (*sobacı oğlu*),[33] Mahmud Beşe was referred to as cobbler's son (*eskici oğlu*),[34] Ali Çelebi was called the tinker's son (*meremmetçi oğlu*),[35]

20 "*Mehmed Bey celeb*" TSCR, 1833, 40b, evail-i receb 1063.

21 TSCR, 1835, 57b, evail-i muharrem 1067.

22 "*...seccan dimekle maruf Mahmud Çelebi...*" TSCR, 1835, 52a, evail-i şevval 1066. The same individual was also recorded simply as "*Mahmud Çelebi seccan*" TSCR, 1836, 31b, evail-i zilhicce 1067. Another example is "*seccan İsmail Beşe*" TSCR, 1835, 53a, evahir-i şevval 1066 and TSCR, 1836, 25a, evahir-i ramazan 1067.

23 "*Rüstem Beşe seyyaf*" TSCR, 1835, 47b, evasıt-ı şaban 1066, and "*Osman seyfci*" TSCR, 1835, 57a, evahir-i zilhicce 1066.

24 "*Aynacı Mustafa*" TSCR, 1834, 4b, evahir-i muharrem 1064.

25 "*Mehmed Çelebi kavukçu*" TSCR, 1836, 21b, evasıt-ı şaban 1067. The Redhouse dictionary gives the meaning of the word: toady, sycophant, or flatterer.

26 TSCR, 1832, 18a-18b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1061.

27 "*Şair Abdülbaki Çelebi*" TSCR, 1833, 12b, evail-i şaban 1062, or "*Abdülbaki Çelebi şair*" TSCR, 1833, 16b, evail-i zilkaade 1062.

28 "*Eyüb Çelebi bin mücellit Musli*" TSCR, 1832, 63b, evasıt-ı zilhicce 1061.

29 TSCR, 1834, 10a, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1064.

30 "*Ali Beşe bin Kurd eşşehr be Tokmak Çavuş*" TSCR, 1834, 36a, evahir-i zilhicce 1064.

31 Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul, Fluidity and Leverage* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 202.

32 TSCR, 1833, 16b, evail-i zilkaade 1062.

33 TSCR, 1835, 11a, evail-i zilkaade 1065.

34 TSCR, 1832, 45a, evahir-i zilkaade 1061.

35 TSCR, 1832, 46a, evail-i zilhicce 1061.

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and İbrahim Beşe bin Murad was referred to as the son of the *sayacı*.[36] Not only sons, but also daughters were often nicknamed based on the occupation of the paternal head of their family. For example, Rabia bint Mustafa Beşe was referred to as the donkey driver's daughter (*merkebci kızı*),[37] and Emine bint Mehmed was called the cauldron-maker's daughter (*kazgancı kızı*). The extent of the paternal lineage also included wives. Thus, Kamile was called the water seller's wife (*sucu avreti*),[38] and Saliha was the wife of Safer Subaşı (*Safer Subaşı avreti*).[39]

These examples show us that paternity held a pivotal place in defining the close family circle. They can also give clues about the notion of adulthood. When an individual passes from teenage years into adulthood depends on the life-cycle patterns in a given society. Acceptance of an individual as an adult is based on cultural and legal norms. Before that threshold, the individuality of a person is not confirmed in the community; this was noted for Mahmud Çelebi who was called in the community the "son of Derviş Beşe" (*Derviş Beşe oğlu dimekle maruf Mahmud Çelebi*).[40]

Migration and local community

Newcomers or temporary residents of the city formed one of the dynamic segments of local society. Various reasons, such as trade ventures, could be the underlying cause for urging individuals to travel and perhaps to settle, temporarily or permanently, in new places within the limits of the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of their familial or professional connections with some of the inhabitants of the city of Trabzon and the dynamism that they introduced, these individuals were sometimes regarded as outsiders by the local community. As the examples from the primary sources show, a part of the community's response to these newcomers was nicknaming. Nicknames pointing to the individuals' former places of origin show the extent of interaction of the city of Trabzon with the surrounding regions. Moreover, they are also indications of the extent of regional and inter-provincial human mobility in the Ottoman Empire in general.

The first category of nicknames relates to the close vicinity of Trabzon. As would be expected, people from Trabzon's immediate hinter-

36 The term refers to a person who cuts and sews the leather uppers for shoes. TSCR, 1832, 84b, selh-i safer 1062 (February 10, 1652).

37 TSCR, 1835, 8a, evail-i ramazan 1065.

38 TSCR, 1835, 6a, evasıt-ı şaban 1065.

39 TSCR, 1833, 11a, evail-i cemaziyülahir 1062.

40 TSCR, 1832, 85b, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1062.

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land stayed in the city. Visitors from nearby villages such as Yoros (a small settlement 10 kilometers west of Trabzon), Mayer (now Fındıklı), Kalcıya (now Toklu), Haçavera (now Yeşilyurt in the Maçuka region), Zefanos (now Bulak), Kokona (now Uçarsu in the Akçaabat region), Samaruksa (now İkisu), and Kisarna (now Bengisu) stayed in the city. Likewise, people from neighboring small towns such as Akçaabat, Sürmene, Maçka, Bayburd, İspir, Giresun, and Gümüşhane occasionally came to the provincial capital.[41] Some of the persons involved in the first ring of contact were presumably in the city for temporary business activities.

Trabzon's sphere of contact, however, was far beyond its immediate vicinity. The city welcomed visitors and residents from all over the empire, as the nicknames in the registers indicate. Temporary or permanent residents from places in Eastern Anatolia—such as Nakhchivan, Van, Tercan, and Darende[42]—visited the city. In Central and Western Asia Minor, people from cities such as Karahisar (-ı Şarki?), Amasya, Ankara, and Bursa came to Trabzon.[43] People from Damascus or Egypt and from the islands of Crete and Mitylene also visited the city of Trabzon.[44] The Black Sea formed a nexus of communication among individuals, as

41 "*Recep Beşe Yoroslu*" TSCR, 1836, 28b, evahir-i şevval 1067, "*Mehmed Ağa Mayerli*" TSCR, 1835, 39a, evasıt-ı cemaziyülahir 1066, "*Ali bin Hasan an karye-i Kalcıya*" TSCR, 1836, 3a, evail-i rebiyyülevvel 1067, "*Ahmed Beşe Haçavere*" TSCR, 1836, 7b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1067, "*Osman Ağa Zefineli*" TSCR, 1832, 45a, evahir-i zilkaade 1061, or "*Hasan Ağa Zefineli*" TSCR, 1834, 38b, evail-i safer 1065, "*Bostan Beşe Kokonalı*" TSCR, 1834, 33b, evahir-i zilkaade 1064, "*Kara Mustafa Samaruksalı*" TSCR, 1836, 30b, evasıt-ı zilkaade 1067, "*Yori der sakin-i Kisarna*" TSCR, 1834, 18b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülahir 1064, and "*Ahmed bin Ali an karye-i Kisarna*" TSCR, 1835, 18b, muharrem 1066, "*Ali Ağa Polathaneden*" TSCR, 1833, 21b, gurre-i muharrem 1063 (December 2, 1652), "*Beşir Beşe Sürmeneli*" TSCR, 1832, 24a, evahir-i cemaziyülevvel 1061, "*Maçukalı Mehmed Beşe*" TSCR, 1835, 33b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülevvel 1066, "*Molla Ali elbayburdi*" TSCR, 1832, 37a, evail-i şevval 1061, "*İspirli Gazzaz*" (silk mercer from İspir) TSCR, 1832, 29a, evasıt-ı cemaziyülahir 1061, "*Mehmed Efendi elasl Giresun*" TSCR, 1832, 23b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülevvel 1061, "*Yani Gümüşhaneli*" TSCR, 1832, 18a-18b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1061, and "*Hasan Beşe Gümüşhaneli*" TSCR, 1836, 10b, evahir-i cemaziyülevvel 1067.

42 "*Mehmed Çelebi Nahşuvani*" TSCR, 1832, 5b, evasıt-ı safer 1061, "*Süleyman Çelebi Nahşuvani*" TSCR, 1832, 94b, evail-i rebiyyülahir 1062, and "*Mahmud Çelebi Nahşuvani*" TSCR, 1836, 2b, evasıt-ı safer 1067, "*Hüseyin Ağa Vani*" TSCR, 1834, 4a, evasıt-ı muharrem 1064, or "*Hüseyin Ağa Vanlı*" TSCR, 1835, 55a, gurre-i zilhicce 1066 (September 20, 1656), "*Tercanlı Mahmud*" TSCR, 1835, 14a, 7 zilhicce 1065 (October 8, 1655), "*Darendeli Mahmud*" TSCR, 1833, 12b, şaban 1062.

43 "*Osman bin Abdullah elkarahisari*" TSCR, 1832, 64a, evahir-i zilhicce 1061, "*Hasan Bey Amasyadan*" TSCR, 1832, 36b, evail-i şevval 1061, and "*Amasri Mehmed Ağa*" TSCR, 1832, 41a, evail-i zilkaade 1061, or "*Elhac Mehmed Ağa Amasi*" TSCR, 1832, 52a, evahir-i zilhicce 1061, "*Engürülü dimekle maruf Ali Beşe*" TSCR, 1833, 8b, evahir-i cemaziyülahir 1062, "*Ali Beşe Ankaralı*" TSCR, 1833, 27b, safer 1063 or "*Ali Beşe Ankaravi*" TSCR, 1832, 23b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülevvel 1061, "*Brusalı Elhac Mehmed Beşe bin Elhac Ali*" TSCR, 1836,33b, evahir-i muharrem 1068.

44 "*Şami dimekle maruf Elhac Ali Beşe*" TSCR, 1832, 48b, evasıt-ı zilhicce 1061, "*Mısırlı Mehmed Çelebi*" TSCR, 1836, 22a, evasıt-ı şaban 1067, and "*Ömer Beşe Mısırlı*" TSCR, 1836, 26a, evail-i şevval 1067, "*Mehmed Bey Giridli*" TSCR, 1836, 11b, evail-i cemaziyülahir 1067, "*Mehmed Çelebi Midilli*" TSCR, 1836, 36a, gurre-i rebiyyülevvel 1068 (December 7, 1657).

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persons from coastal cities such as Caffa, Batum, Varna, and Constanza can be observed in the Trabzon registers.[45]

The geographical background of an individual displayed as epithet could also take other forms. In several examples, individuals were registered in the court entries as being Albanian (*Arnavud*), Abyssinian (*Habeşi*), Circassian (*Çerkes*), Georgian (*Gürcü*), Bosnian (*Boşnak*), Uzbek (*Özbek*), Indian (*Hindi*), Persian (*Acem*), and Serbian (*Laz*).[46] These epithets, at first glance, can be evaluated as model examples of ethnic consciousness. Haim Gerber, in his study of the *fetvas* of a seventeenth-century Palestinian *mufti*, witnessed comparable terms, such as Palestine (*Filastin*) or Egyptian (*Mısri*). Gerber coined these terms as cases of "embryonic territorial awareness."[47] In the documents under study, there is the case of "Yannis the Albanian" (*Arnavud Yani*), in which the name of the individual suggests a Greek-Orthodox identity.[48] This runs parallel to Gerber's views that these examples could imply a territorial rather than an ethnic perspective. On this issue, a different view comes from Goitein, who noted that "when a man is called Ben Turkiyya, the mother was not a Turk, but was by-named thus because of her beauty, in particular her fair complexion."[49] This is not only a good reminder of the importance of local lore in nicknaming, but also a caution to the modern researcher about how misleading literal translations may be.

As to the question of whether the mentioned individuals were temporary visitors, such as travelers passing through, or whether they should be regarded as resident members of Trabzon, some comments are in order. First, there is a good chance that most of these individuals were

45 "*Mahmud Çelebi Kefeli*" TSCR, 1834, 37b, evasıt-ı muharrem 1065, "*Ali Çelebi eşşehr Batumluzade*" TSCR, 1832, 90b, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1062, "*Mustafa Beşe Varnalı*" TSCR, 1836, 17a, evasıt-ı receb 1067, "*Köstenceli*" TSCR, 1832, 94a, gurre-i rebiyyülahir 1062 (March 12, 1652).

46 "*Şatır Ali Ağa Arnavud*" TSCR, 1836, 25a, evahir-i ramazan 1067, "*Bali Çelebi Habeşi*" TSCR, 1832, 26b, evail-i cemaziyülahir 1061, "*Mustafa Çelebi Çerkes oğlu*" TSCR, 1835, 41b, evahir-i cemaziyülahir 1066, "*...Gürcü oğlu dimekle maruf Ahmed Beşe bin Abdullah nam racil...*" TSCR, 1836, 27a, evasıt-ı şevval 1067, "*elhac Boşnak dimekle maruf elhac Mehmed*" TSCR, 1834, 44b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1065, "*Ayasofya imamı iken fevt olan elhac Mehmed elözbeki...*" TSCR, 1835, 19b, evail-i muharrem 1066 and "*elhac Ahmed bin Abdülbaki elözbeki*" TSCR, 1835, 55a, evail-i zilhicce 1066, "*pir Mehmed elhindi*" TSCR, 1835, 25a, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1066, "*Derviş Hasan bin Abdullah elhindi*" TSCR, 1834, 3a, evail-i muharrem 1064, and "*Derviş İbrahim bin Abdürrahim elhindi*" TSCR, 1836, 9a, evail-i cemaziyülahir 1067, "*Acem taifesinden Kızar veled-i Emircan nam zımmi*," or "*Acem taifesinden Musa veled-i Evamonos nam zımmi*" TSCR, 1835, 14b, evasıt-ı zilhicce 1065, "*Laz Ali Beşe*" TSCR, 1832, 89b, evail-i rebiyyülevvel 1062 or "*... hala beşlü ağası olan Laz Mehmed Ağa dimekle meşhur nam kimesne...*" TSCR, 1834, 1a, evail-i cemaziyülahir 1065.

47 Haim Gerber, "Palestine and other Territorial Concepts in the 17th century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998).

48 TSCR, 1836, 14b, evahir-i cemaziyülahir 1067.

49 S.D. Goitein, "Nicknames as Family Names," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 4 (1970): 522.

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permanent residents of the city, since non-resident members of the local community were specifically recorded in the registers as "guests" (*misafir taifesi*, or simply *misafir*).[50] Secondly, although some of them could be evaluated as temporary residents, as their names were occasionally registered in the witnesses sections of the record entries, certain other examples suggest that some of those individuals did in fact live in Trabzon for long enough to establish families and to own urban and rural properties. For example, "Serbian" Hamza owned a house in the Elhac Kasım quarter of the city of Trabzon,[51] and "Egyptian" Mehmed Çelebi had a house in the Yeni Cuma quarter of the city.[52] "Özbek" Mehmed died in Trabzon when he was the preacher of the Ayasofya mosque of the same city.[53] Derviş Hasan, called the "Indian," married his first wife in Trabzon court in November 1653, taking his second wife three years later, in August 1656, again in the same court.[54] "Bosnian" Mehmed had a shop in the woolen-cloth-makers' section of the imperial market place,[55] and he owned a house in the Molla Siyah quarter in the lower city and another in the Kule quarter which he gave to his infant daughter.[56] Ali Beşe from Damascus died in Trabzon in 1651, leaving his estates in the Trabzon region to his wife and married daughter.[57] He had estates in the Gümüşhane region and a house in the Kindinar quarter in Trabzon, which he gifted to his daughter Cemile when he was going away to Mecca for pilgrimage.[58]

These examples show that at least some of the above-mentioned individuals lived in Trabzon for a certain time and owned local urban and rural properties, which presumably qualified them as resident members of the local community. I think that their former background still mattered, as suggested by their nicknames. In my view, these did not reflect neutral perspectives and were not used randomly. Certain nicknames were selected against others, and the choice made between different alternatives is the crux of the issue here. In the present stage of research, one cannot be certain whether these nicknames were self-accorded to underline individual identities, or whether they were given by others to

50 "*Misafir taifesinden Osman Beşe bin Himmet...*" TSCR, 1835, 16b, evail-i zilhicce 1065, or "*misafirden İstanbul elhac Mehmed bin Mustafa ve Erzurum Kenan Beşe bin Abdullah...*" TSCR, 1836, 14a, evahir-i cemaziyülahir 1067.

51 TSCR, 1835, 4b, selh-i receb 1065 (June 5, 1655).

52 TSCR, 1836, 22a, evasıt-ı şaban 1067.

53 TSCR, 1835, 19b, evail-i muharrem 1066.

54 TSCR, 1834, 3a, evail-i muharrem 1064 and TSCR, 1835, 52a, evasıt-ı şevval 1066.

55 TSCR, 1832, 106b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülevvel 1062.

56 TSCR, 1833, 40a, cemaziyülahir 1063 and TSCR, 1834, 44b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1065.

57 TSCR, 1832, 45a, evahir-i zilkaade 1061.

58 TSCR, 1832, 48b, evasıt-ı zilhicce 1061 and TSCR, 1832, 49b, evahir-i zilhicce 1061.

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demarcate strangers from the local community. If these nicknames were used to display strangers as "outsiders," so to speak, then it would indicate that urban property ownership did not automatically result in becoming a member of the local community. Membership to a local community certainly follows social protocols. Yet, as the examples suggest, property ownership does not qualify as an exclusive element in this context.

Reflections of physical qualities and personality traits

Undoubtedly, the physical appearance of individuals attracts outside attention which results in nicknaming. In the Ottoman context, facial and physical features which were commonly noted—such as having a slight mustache (*yarımbıyık*), a black mustache (*karabıyık*), black eyebrows (*karakaşlı*), and/or being of old age (*ihtiyar*)—were conferred in order to identify individuals bearing the same name.[59] Conspicuous anatomical characteristics, however, were an obvious source of various nicknames. Distinctive physical features such as unusual facial features—such as being one-eyed (*yek-çeşm*), blind (*kör*), freckled (*benli*), big-eared (*kabakulak*), earless (*kulaksız*), large-nosed (*burnaz*), or deaf (*sağır*)—could attract public attention.[60] Bodily features—such as being hunchbacked (*kambur*), crippled (*çolak*), lame (*topal*), or stunted (*yanuk*)[61]—could also find reflection in nicknames. Some nicknames referred to body proportions, such as tall (*tavil* and *uzun*), large-bodied (*yarma, dev*), or small (*küçük*),[62] while others were related to beauty and positive aspects;

59 "*Mehmed Çelebi yarımbıyık*" TSCR, 1835,34b, evasıt-ı cemaziyülevvel 1066, and TSCR, 1833, 30b, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1063 or "*yarımbıyık Ali Çelebi*" TSCR, 1832, 97b, evasıt-ı rebiyyülahir 1062, "*İbrahim Beşe karabıyık*" TSCR, 1835, 36b, gurre-i cemaziyülahir 1066 (27 March 1656), "*Ali Beşe karakaşlı*" TSCR, 1836, 4b evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1067 or "*karakaş Ali Beşe*" TSCR, 1832, 20b, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1061, "*İbrahim Çelebi ihtiyar*" TSCR, 1835, 54b, evasıt-ı zilkaade 1066.

60 "*Şeyhi Mustafa Efendi yek çeşm*" TSCR, 1832, 37a, evail-i şevval 1061, "*kör Abdurrahman Bey*" TSCR, 1833, 20b, evahir-i zilhicce 1062 or "*kör Süleyman Beşe*" TSCR, 1835, 13b, 4 zilhicce 1065 (October 5, 1655), "*Ahmed bin Abdullah benli*" TSCR, 1835, 21a, evahir-i muharrem 1066, and "*...benli Mehmed Beşe bin Mustafa nam racil...*" TSCR, 1835, 52b, evasıt-ı şevval 1066, or "*Mehmed Beşe benli*" TSCR, 1835, 52b, evasıt-ı şevval 1066, "*kaba kulak elhac Mehmed Efendi*" TSCR, 65b, gurre-i safer 1062 (January 13, 1652 Saturday). The dictionary *Lehce-i Osmani*, however, offers three other meanings for the word: mumps, pigeon, and the terminal phase of tuberculosis. "*kulaksız Hızır Bey bin Abdullah*" TSCR, 1835, 13a, evahir-i zilkaade 1065, and "*kulaksız Şahin*" TSCR, 1832, 80a-80b, evahir-i receb 1061, "*Mustafa Çelebi bin burnaz Mehmed Çelebi*" TSCR, 1834, 3b, evail-i muharrem 1064, or "*burnaz Ahmed Çelebi*" TSCR, 1834, 4a, evasıt-ı muharrem 1064, "*İbrahim bin sağır Ahmed*" TSCR, 1835, 38a, evasıt-ı cemaziyülahir 1066, or "*sağır Ömer*" TSCR, 1832, 46b, gurre-i zilhicce 1061 (November 15, 1651).

61 "*Hüseyin kambur*" TSCR, 1833, 15a, evail-i şevval 1062, or "*Ali Bey kambur*" TSCR, 1836, 25b, evail-i şevval 1067, "*çolak Hasan Ağa*" TSCR, 1832, 33b evail-i ramazan 1061, or "*Lefter veled-i çolak Konstantin*" TSCR, 1834, 40b, evahir-i safer 1065, "*topal Mustafa berber*" TSCR, 1835, 52b, evasıt-ı şevval 1066, or "*topal Ahmed Beşe Serdar*" TSCR, 1836, 30a, evail-i zilkaade 1067, "*yanuk Abdi Beşe*" TSCR, 1832, 4a, safer 1061, or "*Safer Beşe bin yanuk Sinan*" TSCR, 1832, 63a, evahir-i şevval 1061.

62 "*Mahmud Çelebi bin tavil Mehmed Çavuş*" TSCR, 1832, 67b, evasıt-ı muharrem 1062, or "*Mustafa Çelebi bin elmerhum uzun Hacı Ali*" TSCR, 1834, 38b, evail-i safer 1065, "*yarma Halil*" TSCR, 1835, 18a,

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for example, Ali Beşe was called smelling like ambergris (*amber-buy*), a substance used for incense and perfume.[63] Complexion was also targeted. Community response to locally uncommon physical appearances could perhaps be offered as an answer to the question as to why İbrahim Beşe was called black (*siyahi*).[64] Hair, or the lack of it, could sometimes receive special attention, as in the example of Ali Beşe bin Mustafa who was possibly nicknamed forest (*orman*)[65] because of excessive body hair. Conversely, lack of bodily hair on the face could result in epithets such as beardless (*köse*).[66]

Another category of nicknames related to the body involved diseases. Whether they were observed in epidemic or endemic form, diseases were common phenomena in early modern society, more so than in industrial societies. Epithets such as pock-marked (*çiçekli*), smallpoxed (*cederi*), or simply diseased (*illetli*) suggest that the impact of diseases on social memory also found echoes in the form of nicknames.[67]

Physical features equally provided the basis for deciding that a person looked like an animal or bird. Animal resemblances such as that of a bird (*kuş*)[68] can be observed. A variant of this nicknaming practice combines animal resemblances with qualities associated with physical abilities, such as strength. The reason why Hamza Beşe bin Osman was called desert camel (*çöl devesi*)[69] and Mustafa nicknamed red ox (*kızıl öküz*)[70] probably arose from their ability to endure physical hardship or from their physical strength. Moreover, in the case of Mustafa, personal appearance also found an echo in the public opinion, since his reddish hair was integrated into his nickname.[71]

Nicknames as communal voice

Nicknaming individuals through resemblance with animals played a double-edged role in local community life. In two distinct examples, a

gurre-i muharrem 1066 (October 31, 1655), "*İnsafe bint div Ali*" TSCR, 1832, 63b, evasıt-ı zilhicce 1061, "*Mustafa Çelebi eşşehr küçük*" TSCR, 1832, 60a, evail-i ramazan 1061.

63 "*Amber-buy Ali Beşe*" TSCR, 1836, 18b, evasıt-ı receb 1067, and TSCR, 1833, 37a, evail-i cemaziyülevvel 1063, or "*amberi Hasan Efendi*" TSCR, 1834, 32a, evahir-i şevval 1064.

64 "*...siyahi dimekle maruf İbrahim Beşe nam racil...*" TSCR, 1832, 91a, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1062.

65 TSCR, 1835, 52a, evail-i şevval 1066.

66 "*Köse şeyh esseyyid Mehmed bin Musli*" TSCR, 1832, 33b, evail-i ramazan 1061.

67 "*Çiçekli Mustafa Beşe*" TSCR, 1836, 34b, evasıt-ı safer 1068, "*Mustafa Çelebi cederi*" TSCR, 1836, 18b, evasıt-ı receb 1067, "*illetli dimekle maruf Hasan Beşe nam racil...*" TSCR, 1835, 44b, evasıt-ı receb 1066.

68 TSCR, 1832, 92b, evahir-i rebiyyülevvel 1062 and TSCR, 1835, 36a, evahir-i cemaziyülevvel 1066.

69 TSCR, 1832, 89a, evail-i rebiyyülevvel 1062.

70 TSCR, 1835, 31b-32a, 27 rebiyyülahir 1066 (February 23, 1656).

71 Using certain animal names as nicknames for persons may also give clues about the origins of the individuals. In Australian slang, "kiwi" is used for denoting New Zealanders. See H.L. Mencken, "Some Opprobrious Nicknames," *American Speech* 24, no. 1 (1949): 29, note 19.

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certain Mustafa was nicknamed treacherous bear (*kancık ayu*),[72] and Mustafa bin Elhac Bali was called snake's poison (*zehir-i mar*);[73] these cases attest to the imprint of fauna on local culture. In this mountainous area, human contact with bears and snakes was common and sometimes ended in conflict. Yet, as anti-social human behavior was compared to commonly observed characteristics of animals, these two cases show that the *nature* of the *danger* that these two animals posed to humans established a direct link with social memory.[74] These examples suggest an important aspect of local community life—that is, personality assessment by epithets and nicknames.

On certain occasions, nicknames provided an opportunity to express communal opinion about individuals, ensuring that positive and negative communal views could settle the status of an individual in local society. They were useful tools for revealing verdicts without direct and personal confrontation. While some personal character traits could have positive implications, others did not. Persons with nicknames such as lucky (*uğurlu*),[75] quiet (*mazlum*),[76] or reliable (*mutemed*)[77] reflected a certain positive public image. Persons nicknamed dull (*perdahsız*),[78] sly (*yerebakan*),[79] babbler (*cırcır*),[80] black-mouthed (*ağzıkara*, someone who enjoys giving bad news),[81] devil (*şeytan*),[82] or terrible (*korkunc*)[83] indicate that the opposite was also possible. Sometimes the communal message is not clear. Is it an affirmative or covertly stinging negative message that is hidden in the nicknames of Mustafa Çelebi, called Vagabond Heart (*deli gönül*)[84] and Süleyman Beşe the Womanizer (*kız kapan*)?[85] Were these epithets considered communal warnings that this man had

72 TSCR, 1834, 42a, evasıt-ı rebiyyülevvel 1065.

73 TSCR, 1832, 18b-19a, evahir-i rebiyyülahir 1061.

74 This observation may fill the gap left by Goitein when he mentioned that it is not possible to determine which of the various characteristics of an animal or plant was mentioned when an individual was nicknamed. See Goitein, "Nicknames as Family Names," 523.

75 "*Üstad uğurlu Mehmed*" TSCR, 1832, 32a, evail-i şaban 1061.

76 "*Mazlum Hasan Çelebi bin Musli Çelebi*" TSCR, 1832, 46b, gurre-i zilhicce 1061 (November 15, 1651), or "*mazlum Hasan Çelebi bin Musli elkatib*" TSCR, 1835, 53a, evahir-i şevval 1066.

77 "*Mahmud bin mutemed Ömer*" TSCR, 1832, 51b-52a, evahir-i zilhicce 1061.

78 "*...perdahsız dimekle meşhur Mustafa Beşe...*" TSCR, 1834, 7a, evasıt-ı safer 1064, or TSCR, 1833, 27b, evahir-i safer 1063.

79 "*elhac Ahmed yerebakan*" TSCR, 1834, 21b, 1 receb 1064 (18 May 1654).

80 "*cırcır Mehmed*" TSCR, 1833, 23a, evasıt-ı muharrem 1063.

81 TSCR, 1833, 51b, evail-i zilhicce 1063.

82 "*Ahmed Beşe şeytan*" TSCR, 1835, 55b, evail-i zilhicce 1066.

83 "*Ali bin korkunc*" TSCR; 1836, 20b, gurre-i şaban 1067 (May 15, 1657), "*korkunç oğlu*" TSCR, 1835, 54b, evahir-i zilkaade 1066.

84 "*Deligönül Mustafa Çelebi*" TSCR, 1834, 30b, evail-i şevval 1064.

85 "*Süleyman Beşe kız kapan*" TSCR, 1836, 18b, evasıt-ı receb 1067, or again simply "*Süleyman kız kapan*" TSCR, 1834, 39b, evasıt-ı safer 1065.

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deviated from the sexual norms of early modern Ottoman society, or signs of a back-slapping macho culture among the male members of the local community?

In these last two cases, it could be misleading to comment further on the exact meaning of the nicknames without more data from the documents. In other cases, however, the exact meaning of the nicknames can be grasped with the help of a closer reading of the sources. An example would be a certain Mustafa bin Haydar, nicknamed "ox-natured" (*karinler öküz*). On September 27, 1655, he was summoned to the local court. He was accused of wounding the servant of Mehmed Ağa bin Hüseyin Çavuş with a dagger. The neighbors declared: "He is a rebel and a bastard. He had many convictions, and he is not a good man."[86] In this example, the nickname of Mustafa was actually reflecting communal viewpoints; locals clearly announced a more detailed public view that was much harsher than the one expressed through his nickname. The reference to the term rebel (*şaki*) suggests that offensive public remarks could take political overtones. This was also the case with Ali Beşe the brigand (*celali*)[87] and Ali Ağa the rebel (*abazalı*).[88] Both individuals could have been part of the Ottoman military system, since Ali Beşe was called a foot soldier (*racil*) according to the sources, and since Ali Ağa probably in some way was related to the military profession, as we can surmise from the honorific title attached to his name. In this context, nicknaming off-duty or active military personnel with epithets like "brigand" or "rebel"—which could affect a soldier's future promotions or result in expulsion from the military—surely signaled a certain negative perspective adopted by the local community.

Public defamation through nicknames was an important aspect of social life, since nicknames could be viewed as an offensive tool of the local community. Nicknames serve as symbolic signs to mark whether certain members of the community are conforming to the standards of acceptable behavior that is defined and imposed by that very community. This is exactly what happened to Salih Mehmed when he was appointed *muhzirbaşı* of Trabzon.[89] On March 12, 1652, an imperial decree (*berat-ı şerif*) confirming his appointment arrived at the Trabzon court.[90] From

86 *"...mezbur Mustafa hüsn-ü hal üzere olmayub şaki ve haramzade olup nice defa sabıkası zahir olup elhasıl-ı kelam eyü adam değildir..."* TSCR, 1835, 13a, evahir-i zilkaade 1065.

87 TSCR, 1833, 21a, gurre-i muharrem 1063 (December 2, 1652).

88 TSCR, 1834, 4a, evasıt-ı muharrem 1064.

89 In Ottoman local courts, the enforcement officers under the direct command of the judge were the *muhzirs*. They were charged with summoning people to court; their appointment was made by the *kadı*.

90 TSCR, 1832, 95b.

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the document, one can gain the impression that Salih Mehmed was *already* the head of his colleagues and that both the nomination and the appointment seemed a mere formality. The first aspect that strikes the eye here is a presumed seniority principle that conceals the actual status of the nominee. Even though in his appointment papers the *kadı*'s proposal gives the impression that he was the only contender eligible for the post, this was not the case. In fact, prior to the proposal, a personal selection was made by the *kadı* between the candidates. Thus, we receive information about this selection when another *muhzir*, Kenan, was called the head of *muhzirs* (*sermuhziran*) by his colleagues.[91] What is more revealing was that, ten to twenty days *after* Salih Mehmed's official appointment from the Porte had arrived in Trabzon, Kenan was still called the head of enforcement officers by his colleagues.[92]

Before the appointment, Salih Mehmed had been nicknamed "hell" (*cehennem*).[93] The exact reasons for this nickname are difficult to assess, but it was converted into a new form, "black hell" (*kara cehennem*), only two days after his appointment papers arrived at the Trabzon court.[94] This perhaps hints at the "politics of reputation" according to which individuals of higher status, while being relatively immune to material restraints, cannot escape symbolic ones. Character assassination through slander and gossip and nicknaming practices are "weapons of the weak," with deference expressed in public, power-laden situations being negated in the comparative safety of off-stage privacy.[95]

Conversion and community

Historically speaking, the city and province of Trabzon had a significant population of non-Muslims. The *hane* figures for the province (*sancak*) of Trabzon show that non-Muslims constituted 62.11 percent of the total *sancak* population in the sixteenth century.[96] Relatively few cases of conversion are observed in this religiously heterogeneous population. There were only ten recorded cases of conversion in one century, between the years 1486 and 1583.[97] This figure may be misleading since Kenan İnan, in his study of the *sicils* of Trabzon, found nine cases involv-

91 TSCR, 1832, 67b, evasıt-ı muharrem 1062.

92 TSCR, 1832, 98b, evasıt-ı rebiyyülahir 1062.

93 TSCR, 1832, 40a, evahir-i şevval 1061, and TSCR, 1832, 48a, evail-i zilhicce 1061.

94 TSCR, 1832, 93a, 3 rebiyyülahir 1062 (March 14, 1652). His appointment documents arrived in Trabzon on 1 rebiyyülahir 1062 (March 12, 1652).

95 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), 25.

96 Bostan, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Trabzon*, 254.

97 Ibid., 320.

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ing apostates for the period between 1648 and 1656.[98] Perhaps certain historical periods were more dynamic than others with respect to matters of belief. In this sub-section, I will focus on the impact of conversion on local communal life, rather than analyzing the motives that could lead individuals to adopt new belief systems.[99]

We have three cases of interest at our disposal. The first case involved Ömer Beşe bin Abdullah, called in the community "son of Makris" (*Makri oğlu dimekle maruf Ömer Beşe bin Abdullah*).[100] In the second case, a certain Fatma was known as "daughter of Grigorios" (*Gorgor kızı dimekle maruf Fatma*).[101] The third case involves a Mehmed Ağa who was locally known as "son of Lagod" (*Lagod oğlu dimekle maruf Mehmed Ağa*).[102]

In the first instance, the examples presented above do not seem to offer new perspectives. After all, new converts to Islam naturally had non-Muslim parents, and it could be expected that apostates were recorded with their non-Muslim fathers' names in the registers. In fact, various studies point to this practice. Hanefi Bostan, in his study on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Trabzon, commented that new converts occasionally had non-Muslim paternal names attached to their names. He also noted that the practice was not specific to Trabzon. His study provides parallel examples from fifteenth-century Albania, Bosnia, the town of Ordu on the Black Sea coast, and seventeenth-century Bursa.[103] Further study on primary documents suggests that these could also be the reflections of mixed family networks in which Muslims and non-Muslims in fact were relatives. Close scrutiny of the family network of Ömer Beşe bin Abdullah known as "Makri oğlu" or "Makrizade" indicates that he represented a converted branch in his family tree. Ömer Beşe—or as he was otherwise called, Ömer Çelebi bin Abdullah the "son of Makri"—was a member of the local militia forces (*racil*).[104] Although he converted to Islam and entered the military profession, his brother

98 Kenan İnan, "Trabzon'da İhtida Olayları (1648-1656)," in *Trabzon Tarihi Sempozyumu* (Trabzon: Trabzon Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2000). Apostasy was very seldom indeed. For the sole Orthodox Christian example in the seventeenth century, see Nomikos Michael Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437-1860* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 117.

99 Even unpaid gambling debts could be a motive for conversion. For other possible reasons, see Selim Deringil, "There is No Compulsion in Religion: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1839-1856," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (2000).

100 TSCR, 1835, 29a, evasıt-i rebiyyülahir 1066.

101 TSCR, 1835, 3a, evasıt-ı receb 1065.

102 TSCR, 1833, 19a, evail-i zilhicce 1062.

103 Bostan, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Trabzon*, 319-323.

104 "*Ömer Çelebi Makri oğlu*" TSCR, 1836, 36a, gurre-i rebiyyülevvel 1068 (December 7, 1657).

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Kirako, as documented in the Trabzon court records, was a non-Muslim. Kirako's wife was recorded as Gona, another non-Muslim name. The names of their children were recorded as Semeryane, Ariz, Tasule, and Tumaniye, all non-Muslim names.[105] Similar perspectives could also be observed for Mehmed Ağa known as "son of Lagod." His familial connections indicate that Mehmed Ağa had a son named Ahmed. His wife was Nevbahar bint Abdullah, Nevbahar literally meaning "spring season." Referring to flowers blossoming in the spring, her name metaphorically relates spring season with conversion. Mehmed Ağa's mother, Emine Hatun, was a Muslim as well.[106]

Here, I would like to draw attention to two details which permit further conclusions about the issue of conversion. The first point is related to Mehmed's mother. If Mehmed's father was a non-Muslim and his mother a Muslim, as their names suggest, then something legally unacceptable had happened. Islamic law prohibits marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. A Muslim may marry a woman belonging to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*)—that is, those belonging to the Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian creed. However, the opposite is not permissible.[107] The distinction between the case of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman is drawn because, if a Muslim woman were allowed to marry a Christian or a Jew, there would be the likelihood of her being converted to the faith of her husband.[108] Considering these prohibitions, it is quite possible that Mehmed's father was an apostate. In this case, he should have had a newly acquired Muslim name complementing the conversion process.[109] Apparently, either the scribes of the local court or the members of the local community opted for his former non-Muslim name, rather than for the name he must have adopted after conversion. The second point relates to Ömer Beşe bin Abdullah known as "son of Makris." Here, his father's name, Makris, was effectively converted to a personal name. In the documents, this individual was sometimes directly called "son of Makris" (*Makrioğlu* or *Makrizade*) and registered in official documents without his Muslim name.[110]

In the light of the material presented above, some comments are in order. I would argue that conversion and communal reception were not automatically connected events. Shelomo Dov Goitein, a Judaic scholar,

105 TSCR, 1835, 29a, evasıt-ı rebiyyülahir 1066.

106 TSCR, 1835, 50a, evasıt-ı ramazan 1066.

107 Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), 132.

108 Ahmed Shukri, *Muhammedan Law of Marriage and Divorce* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 30.

109 Ronald Jennings, "Zimmis (Non-Muslims) in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 21, no. 3 (1978): 241.

110 TSCR, 1832, 55b, evasıt-i muharrem 1062, or TSCR, 1835, 45a, evahir-i receb 1066.

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has noted that names of ancestors were part of an individual's identity. He remarks, for example, that when Muslims wish to anger a Jewish convert to Islam, they will call him "you son of a Jewess."[111] Communal acceptance by their fellow believers was needed to confirm the new identities of converted individuals, and nicknames can be considered signs of this process. Mehmed Ağa son of Lagod was a second-generation Muslim and probably a member of the Ottoman military-administrative elite, as his title suggests. Although he was not a new convert, his father's name still appeared in the registers as in pre-conversion form. This shows that bringing certain individual background elements to the fore or remaining silent about personal history is a community decision after all. The case of Mehmed Ağa son of Lagod shows us that communal reception could take a while, maybe more than two generations. The duration of the process could have been region-specific, since a study conducted on Istanbul suggests an alternative view. In his study on early modern Istanbul, Marc Baer has asserted that the convert's offspring would not usually be distinguishable from other Muslims because of the cosmopolitanism resulting from the wider circles of social networks in a large city.[112] Communal life in a small provincial town like Trabzon differed greatly from urban centers like Istanbul, and the boundaries of the social norms tended to be much stricter. The social, political, and religious circumstances of Istanbul, in the view of Baer, enabled a greater openness of boundaries and compelled authorities to crack down on illegitimate crossings. His observations need further study since another scholar has indicated otherwise. Nejdet Ertuğ,[113] in his study on the boaters of Istanbul in the eighteenth century, noted that some of the Muslim boatmen registered in the archival documents had nicknames such as French (*firenk*) or Harac-payer (*haraci*).[114]

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show that the study of nicknames can offer insightful clues on issues such as lineage, mobility, communal views on religious conversion, and descriptions of the "other." These are only some of the issues for which detailed research will surely deepen our understanding of the social relations in Ottoman local microcosms. As

111 S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12.

112 Marc Baer, "Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul," *Gender and History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 435.

113 Nejdet Ertuğ, *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Deniz Ulaşımı ve Kayıkçılar* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001), 91.

114 *Harac* was a tax liable to the non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.

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nicknames may be viewed as agents of social control—they enforced compliance with norms of physical appearance and behavior, and they penalized deviations from proper and acceptable behavior—they offer important clues to certain aspects of Ottoman society and daily life, such as local community dynamics, an issue on which only limited micro-level research has been done.[115]

Within the realm of the discipline of history, the study of nicknames can also establish a connection between scholarly work on European and Middle Eastern social history. Here, special attention must be given to S.D. Goitein's presidential address delivered to the American Oriental Society in 1970. His topic was the nicknames that he had encountered when studying documents of the famous Cairo Geniza collection. This is a collection of 280,000 manuscript fragments from the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, Egypt. The collection covers documents about issues on Jewish life in the Eastern Mediterranean from 870 AD to as late as 1880. In his address, Goitein tried to prove the idea that even trivial subjects could offer various avenues of research for the modern student of Middle Eastern History.[116] I must emphasize that his ideas run in close parallel with current historical methodology. Edward Muir, in his introduction to the book *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, has noted how "trifles" may lead to a deeper understanding of past societies. Basing his ideas on the microhistory methodology and works of eminent historians like Carlo Ginzburg and Nathalie Zemon Davis, Muir tried to explain how small clues might form parts of bigger puzzles and why historians, acting like detectives, should combine these not-easy-to-observe historical signs.[117] This was exactly what Goitein implied when he explained why he chose an unusual topic for his speech.

In conclusion, nicknaming is a subject of study that proves to be a fertile common ground for cross-cultural comparative studies. It is a social practice observed in divergent social systems—such as the tenth-century Eastern Mediterranean, the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, and present-day societies. Moreover, nicknames and the process of nicknaming is an issue that necessitates a multi-disciplinary perspective. As can be seen from the secondary literature used in the introduction above, an analysis of this issue involves the academic disciplines of social

115 Although examples of studies on Anatolian cities are quite few, there are still notable examples of this kind. For the city of Ayntab, see the complementary works of Hülya Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town: Ayntab in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales, Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003).

116 Goitein, "Nicknames as Family Names."

117 Edward Muir, "Introduction: Observing Trifles," in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), vii-xxviii.

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psychology, ethnology, anthropology, history, and education studies. In this sense, the study of nicknames can initiate further cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary studies.

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