

9 June 2008

Claire Norton (St Mary's University College)

Uniting Against the 'Lords of Lewdness': Forging Alliances and Constructing Shared Identities in the Ottoman Nagykanizsa *fethnames* [victory missives] Sent to Queen Elizabeth I

Few if any of those in the audience for this paper were individuals with any particular interest in the history of the Ottoman court. Moreover, historical topics do not come much more recondite than the close textual analysis of sixteenth-century Ottoman official documents. Yet, against these considerable odds, Claire Norton's paper fascinated all those who present to hear it. A *fethname* was a formal report issued from the Sublime Porte announcing a military victory. Recipients could include provincial governors, subject rulers or foreign monarchs. Although they were overtly propagandistic, presenting the latest military successes in the most favourable light, Norton stressed that they were much more than that. The precise wording of the texts varied depending on the identity of the person to whom they were addressed. The message was tailored to elicit the desired response from that individual. The examples Norton considered in detail were those sent to Elizabeth I to inform her of the Ottoman victories in Hungary at Eger in 1596 and Nagykanizsa in 1601. In the latter case, two slightly different versions were sent to London, one from the Sultan himself and the other from the Grand Vizier. The Grand Vizier, unlike the Sultan, was able to allude to the practical diplomatic considerations behind these overtures. All these texts were also carefully adjusted to reflect English Protestant sensibilities. The Ottomans' European campaigns were presented in them not as a fight against the infidel but as a war against their common Habsburg enemies. Ottoman officials were sufficiently well-informed about English policy to fine-tune their message accordingly. But how – or if – Elizabeth responded to these messages from the other end of Europe is not known. **AB**