

A Re-enactment of the Conquest of Famagusta? Dialogic Decodings of the Ottoman Imperial Circumcision Feast of 1582

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Prince Mehmed's (the later Sultan Mehmed III) 1582 *sur-i hümayun*, or imperial circumcision festival, was arguably the most magnificent public event Istanbul ever saw during its Ottoman history. The festivities were organized to celebrate the rite of passage of Sultan Murad III's son, and lasted for over fifty days, each day being occupied by processions, allegorical performances, fireworks, and mock battles. One of these events, which is almost exclusively referred to in scholarship as a re-enactment of the 1571 Ottoman occupation of Cyprus and, even more specifically, as the siege of the city of Famagusta, is thought to have demonstrated to the western, but particularly to the Venetian guests Ottoman military superiority over Christendom. However, on the strength of western and Ottoman contemporary sources it is evident that this mock battle was never performed at the *sur-i hümayun*, and that it was another performance which was ill-decoded as the re-enactment of the Ottomans' victory in Famagusta by some of the western audience.

In my paper I will discuss the possible reasons for some of the European spectators mistaking a non-belligerent allegorical performance for the siege of Famagusta. I will also demonstrate that the actual performance was in fact one of the most frequently deployed spectacles at early modern western European festivals, and that the Christian guests' familiarity with the sight is likely to have played an important role in its misinterpretation. I will also attempt to reconstruct the political circumstances in which the performance gains significance, and the cultural environment in which this early modern transfer of spectacles took place between Christendom and the Ottoman Empire.