

# Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World

*A Volume of Essays in Honor of  
Norman Itzkowitz*

Edited by

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## BAPHEUS AND PELEKANON

"Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"  
"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."  
"The dog did nothing in the night-time."  
"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.  
-- *Silver Blaze*

It was Joel Shinder, my *snıfdaş* in İstanbul, who introduced me to Norman Itzkowitz; Norman has since described me as the kid who threw the stone through Paul Wittek's picture window. I hope that the onset of maturity has rendered me less disruptive of the field. I bring forth the following meditation as a peace offering.

I invite the reader to consider two interesting questions about early Ottoman history.<sup>1</sup> The first question concerns the extent to which matters that excited Byzantine chroniclers also became interesting to their Ottoman counterparts. Most scholars have assumed that the battles at places the Byzantines called Bapheus and Pelekanon would find a place not only in the Byzantine tradition but, even if under a different place name, also in the Ottoman sources. This assumption deserves examination. There is a second question that the stories of these encounters suggest. It appears that the earliest Ottoman military force relied to some extent upon nomadic forces and tactics. When and why did Ottoman military practice settle? The battles at Bapheus and Pelekanon will help frame an initial answer.

To begin, what was a nomad? For the purpose of the following paragraphs, in which the focus is on steppe practice, a nomad may well be one who is largely dependent upon the herding of sheep and goats for a livelihood. There were, however, nomads, and powerful ones, whose livelihood rested not so much on herding but on the threat and exercise of military force. These nomads in medieval Anatolia and the Inner Asian steppe possessed strings of horses, which gave them speed, range, and mobility, and when gathered together in numbers, nomads on horseback could rely as much on predation (or, putting it another way, taxation) as on pasture for a profitable life. Here we distinguish between pastoralists and

<sup>1</sup> I presented a preliminary version of this essay to the Eleventh Annual Byzantine Studies Conference in Toronto on October 26, 1985. I thank Professor Peter Schreiner for his comments on MS Barberini Gr. 204 while we were both at the Vatican Library in 1993, and I recall with pleasure the late Msgr. Leonard Boyle's generosity. I thank as well Major Dennis Bloodnok for his advice on matters military.