

The yearning of Yusuf

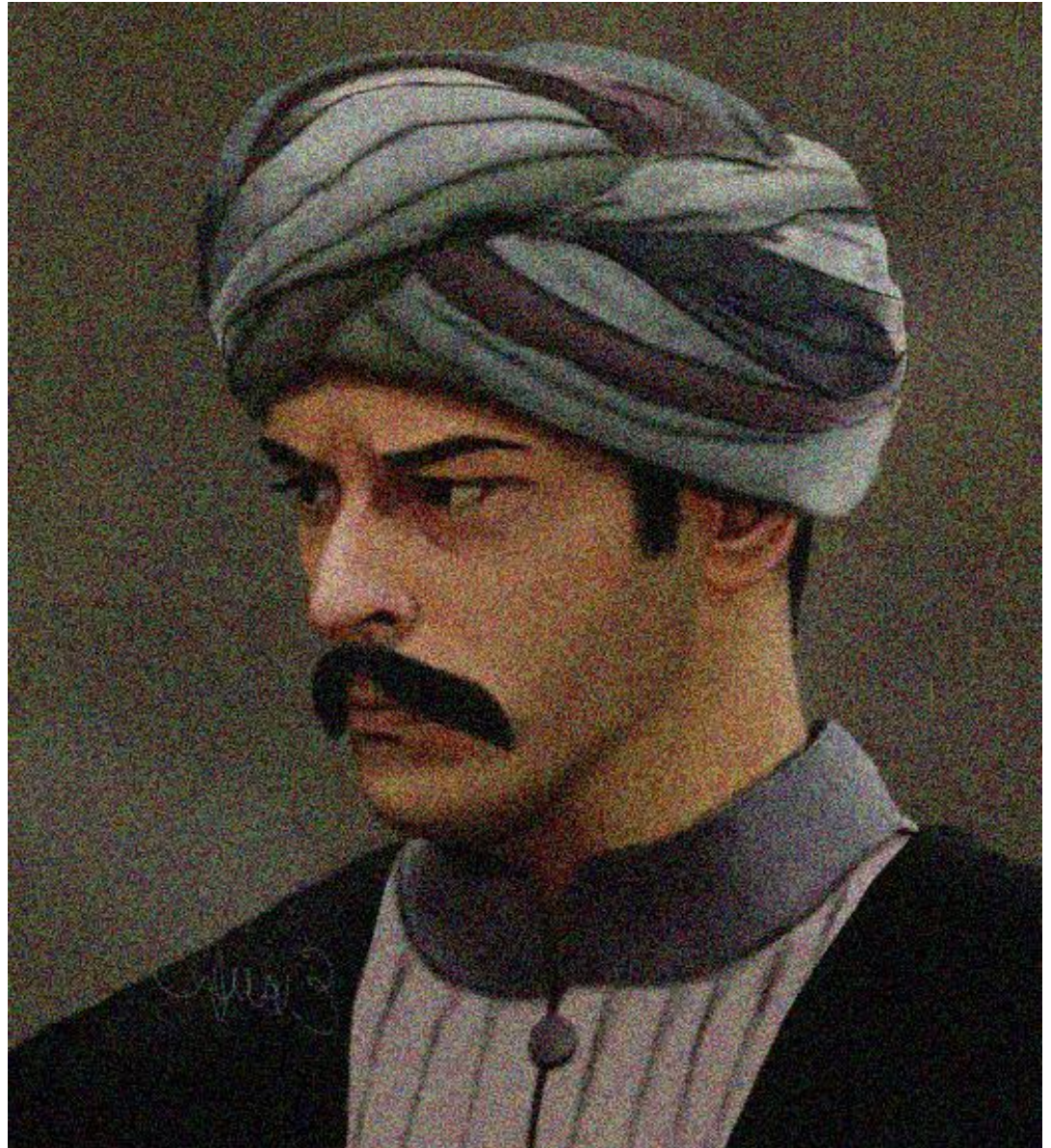
Scholarly sources:

Faroqhi, Suraiya (2000). *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and daily life in the Ottoman Empire*. London, England: I.B.Tauris Publishers.

Evliya Ceblel (1973). Turkey: Ministry of Tourism and Information.

Meet Yusuf

Yusuf was a seventeen-year-old boy living in Turkey in 1690. He lived at an eventful time in history, but his enthusiasm for adventure knew no bounds. He yearned for even more.



You see, Yusuf lived during the time of the Ottoman Empire, when Turkey and its sultans controlled a major part of the civilized world.

In 1690 the Ottoman Empire ruled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa.



The leaders of the Ottoman Empire were Muslims. Muslim beliefs were very similar to those of Christians and Jews, but they also held reverence for Muhammad as the chief and last prophet of God.

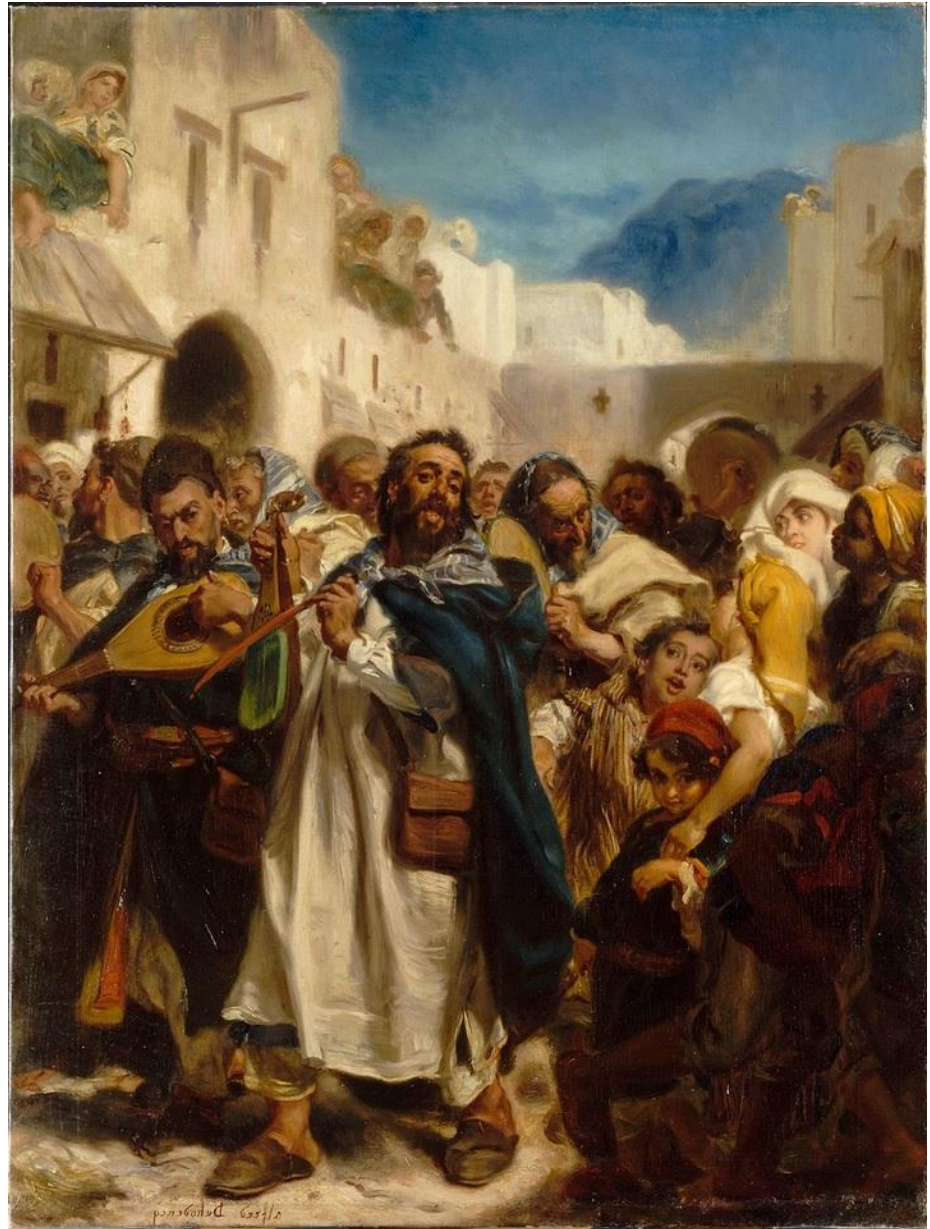
Among other practices, Muslims prayed five times a day in the direction of their holy city of Mecca (the birthplace of Muhammad), and went on pilgrimages to Mecca.

But the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire were *not at all like* other leaders of empires during that time.



They were not like the leaders of the Roman or Holy Roman empires that persecuted and murdered people who had different beliefs.

Under the Ottoman Muslim leadership, Jews and Christians had rights, their own legal courts, and were not necessarily bound by Islamic laws.



But keeping the Ottoman Empire together often involved a lot of war. The Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire were always in battle over something.

Yusuf's father had fought in the Battle of Vienna where the Ottoman Empire lost the city of Vienna to the Holy Roman Empire



Because of all the wars, the Ottoman leaders often had to pay people from farming and nomadic families to become temporary soldiers, called mercenaries. But many of these mercenaries later became robbers to support themselves.

And so the Empire faced some problems from the outside and some from the inside in 1690.



But fortunately for Yusuf, not many of these problems affected his life. He lived in a Muslim quarter of the city of Bursa—the center of the Ottoman Empire.

In Bursa, there were endless commercial and enrichment activities for Yusuf to enjoy. The city of only 70,000 people had 75 coffee houses where men gathered to learn and share information with others. People from all over the world came to the coffee houses to teach the locals about other cultures.

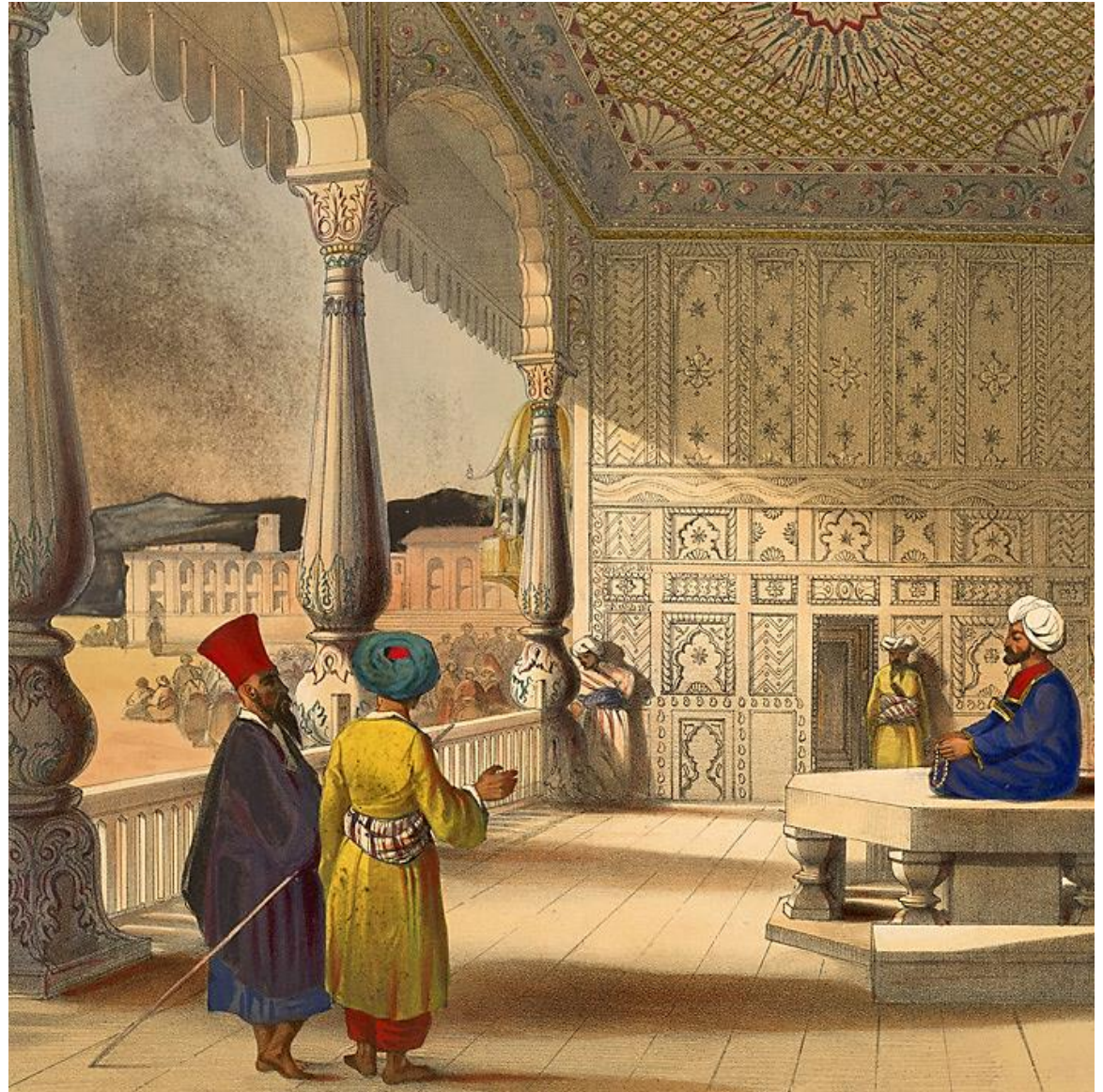


Yusuf's family was very wealthy. His father was a successful carpet dealer, and carpets were big business in the Ottoman Empire. He also had a reputation for great kindness.

Yusuf and his siblings had everything they wanted.



Yusuf had a very large and beautiful home in Bursa.



Here his mother entertained other women every day. She also had slave women who had been captured in battles with the Holy Roman Empire.



Yusuf's father was happy that he'd earned enough money to give his family everything they wanted. But Yusuf's father was also aware that while he had wealth, the family didn't have much status. To achieve high status in the Ottoman Empire, someone from your family had to be in a powerful position in the Muslim courts or schools of religion.

But he had a plan.



His oldest son Yusuf would become a *kadi*.

Kadis were teachers at Muslim religious schools or lawyers and judges who served the Empire. Often *Kadis* had direct audiences with the Sultans.

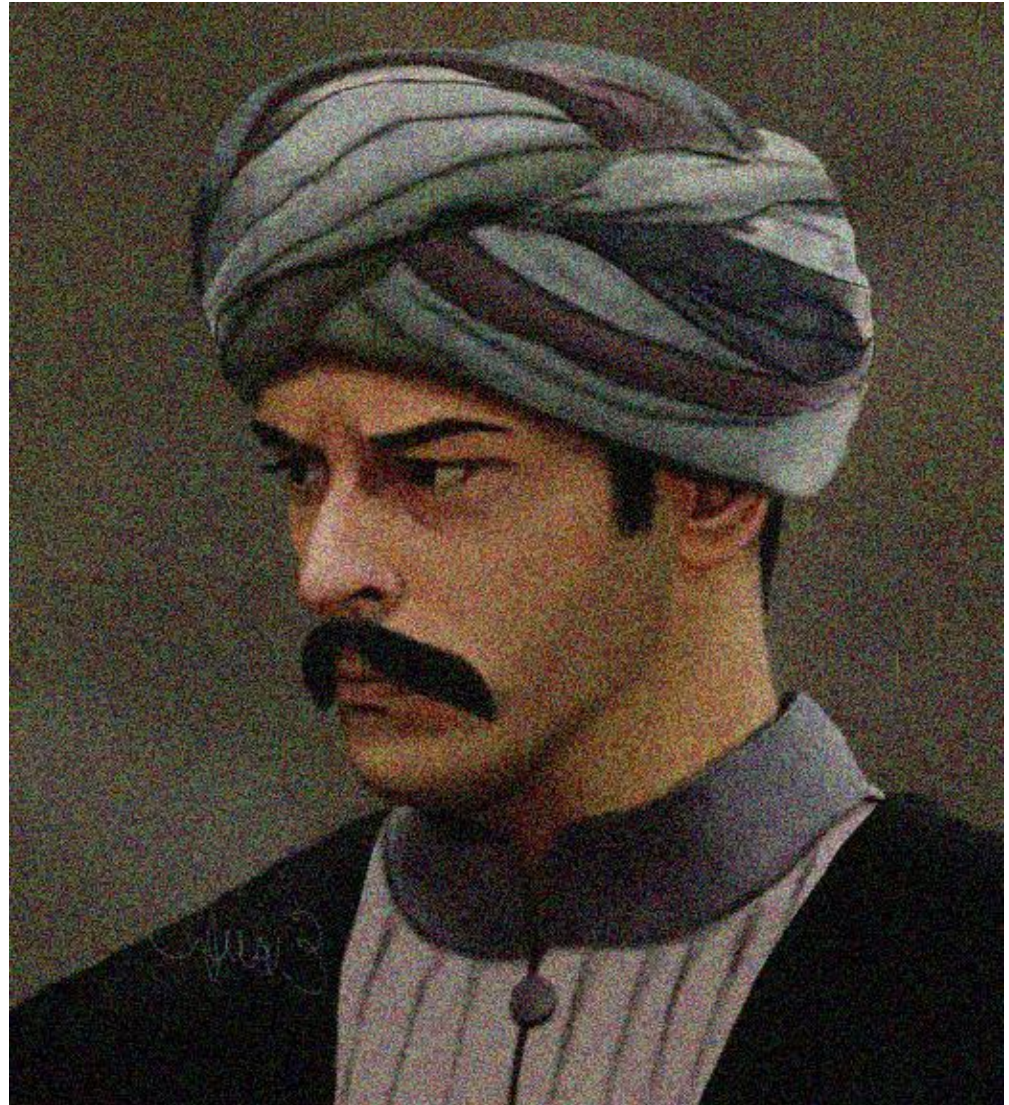
To become a *kadi*, a young man had to study Arabic grammar, parts of the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book), and Muslim law with a wide range of teachers. He would also have to learn the laws of the Ottoman Empire—laws based on the Sultans' decrees.



Yusuf's yearning

But none of this was quite what Yusuf wanted. At least not yet.

See, while Yusuf was a very pious Muslim and had been a good student in both elementary school and religious school, he wasn't quite ready to settle down with a high profile career.



While in religious school—called a *Medrese*—Yusuf had met Nadeem, another young man who was a devout Muslim. While both the young men performed their religious duties admirably, they also loved the enrichment activities they had in Bursa.



They loved the coffee houses.

Here they could listen to poetry readings of the famous Muslim poet Baki or play board games.



They could hear the latest folk music.



Or they could watch the dances of the whirling dervishes, who prayed while they whirled.



But most of all, Yusuf and Nadeem loved the stories of the travelers.

They'd heard about magnificent Jerusalem from a Jew who'd just returned from Palestine.



They heard about a huge
Muslim bazaar in Athens from a
man who just returned from
Greece.



They heard about
the ancient ruins of
Egypt.



They heard about town life in Syria.



And of course they heard from many travelers who'd just returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca.



But what really captivated Yusuf and Nadeem were the readings from the manuscripts of Evliya Celebi—a world traveler in their fathers' generation. Celebi had traveled all across the current Ottoman Empire and beyond and described the major festivals, the courts of kings, and Muslim holy places.



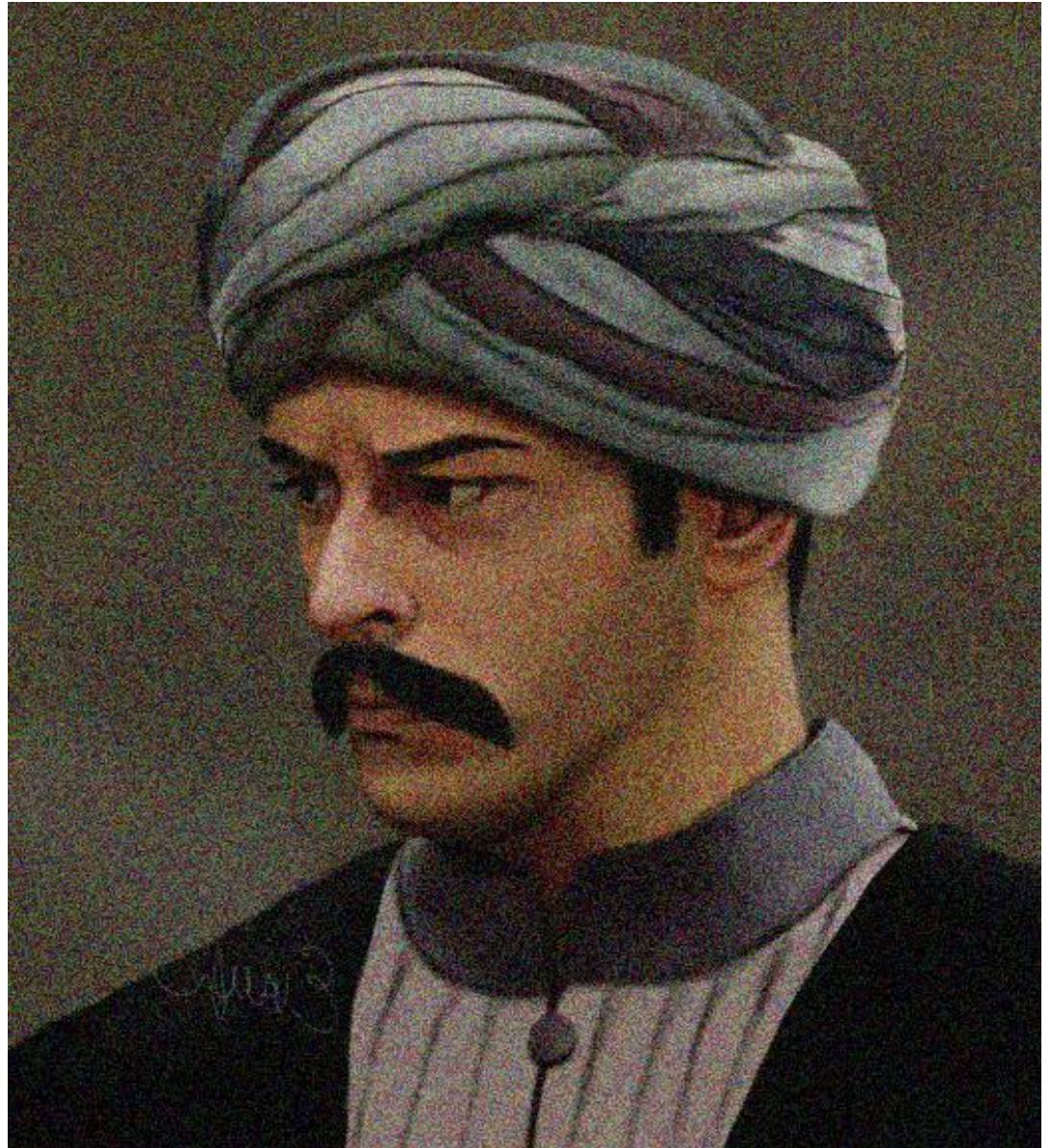
But alas, as much as the young men dreamed about traveling themselves, Yusuf knew that his father had other plans for him.



This saddened Yusuf.

"But can you at least talk to him?"
urged Nadeem.

Yusuf just stared ahead, feeling
sure he knew what his father's
response would be.



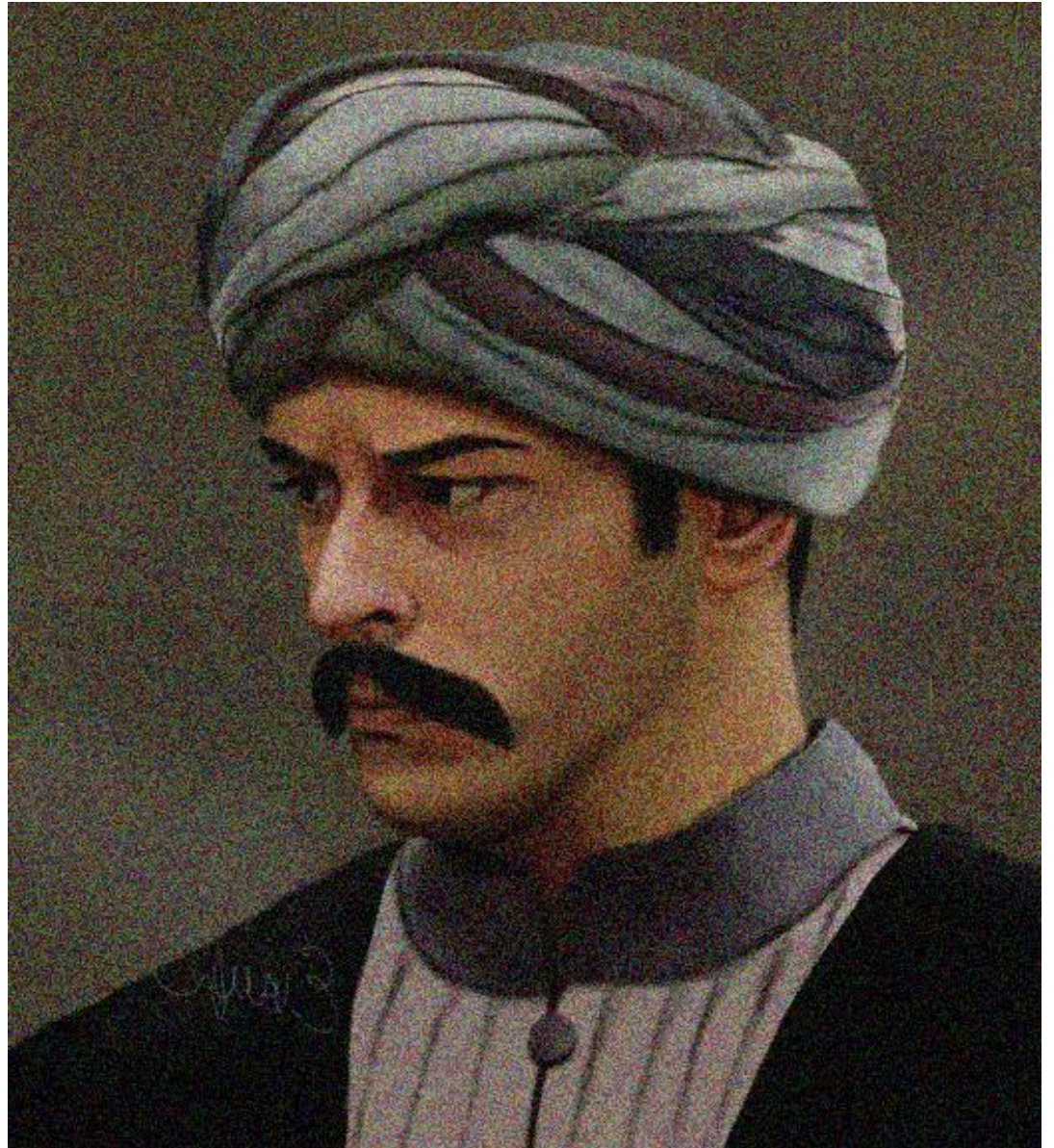
But he'd try.

The next day he took his case to his father. He told him that he had every intention of working to become a *kadi*, but needed just three years to travel with his friend Nadeem. He promised to remain a devout Muslim and go to all the holy sites along his journey.

His father simply listened and never asked a question. Eventually he told Yusuf he would sleep on the issue and give him his answer in the morning.



Yusuf sat up all night. He had no idea what his father's decision would be.



In the morning, Yusuf's father summoned him.

"I feel that you will keep your promises, my son," he began. "I am confident that you will keep your faith and do intend to return to us at the end of your travels. I even believe that you intend to study to become a *kadi*."



Yusuf's father handed him a booklet.

"Do you know what this is about?"

Yusuf nodded. He knew.

"This is the great poets, like Baki. His writings helped him become a *kadi*. It is possible that if you kept writings of your travels that this could help you upon your return."

Yusuf's eyes opened wide. Was there hope?

"But my fear is that you will want to return, but will not return."

Yusuf's head then dropped as he prepared for the worst.



His father continued. "As you know, our empire is overrun with thieves—men who will not only rob you but kill you for a few coins.

"My fear, my son, is that you and your companion do not know what you are up against. You could lose your lives to these criminals."

Yusuf was going to argue, but instead remained silent.

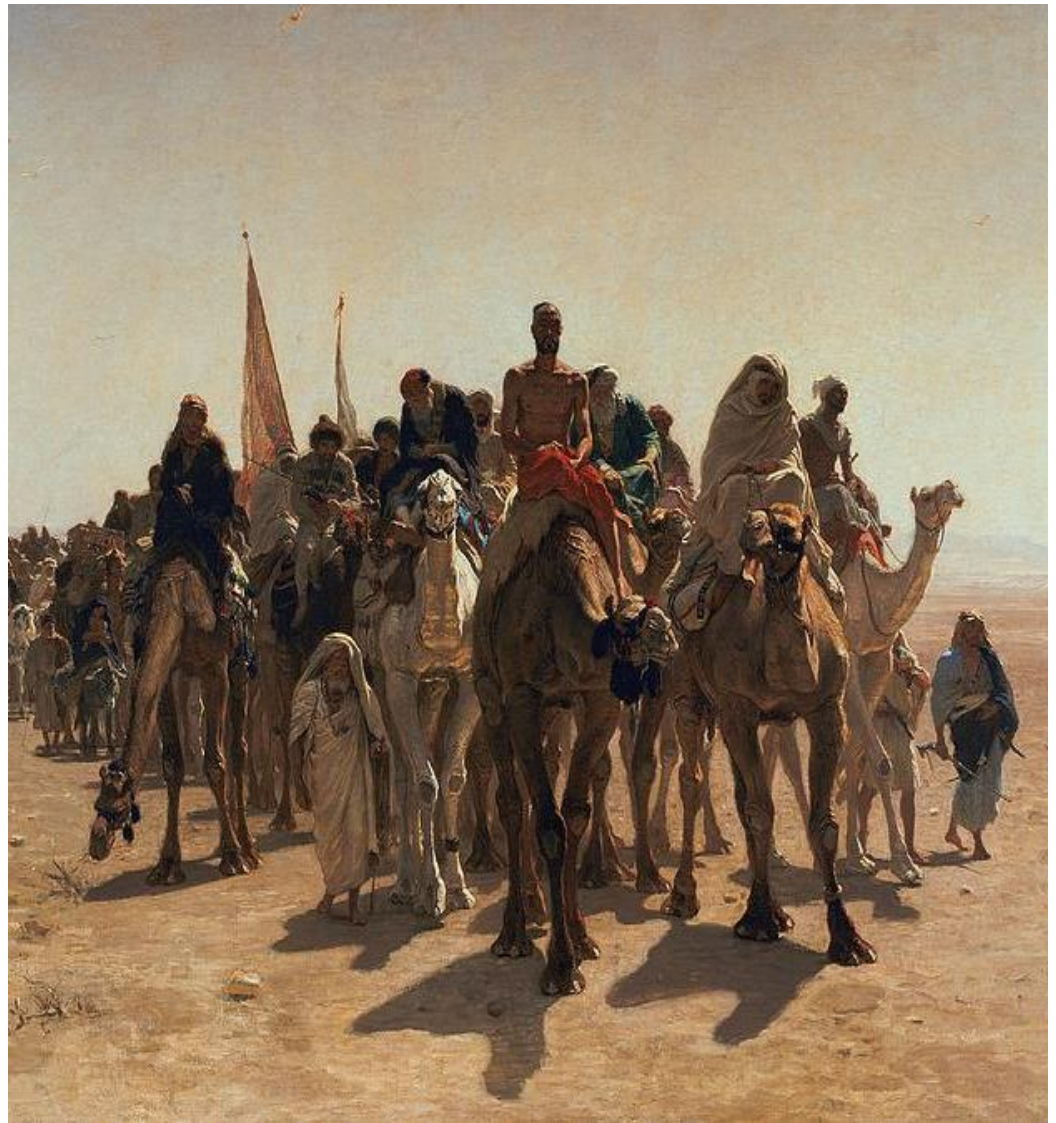
His father continued.



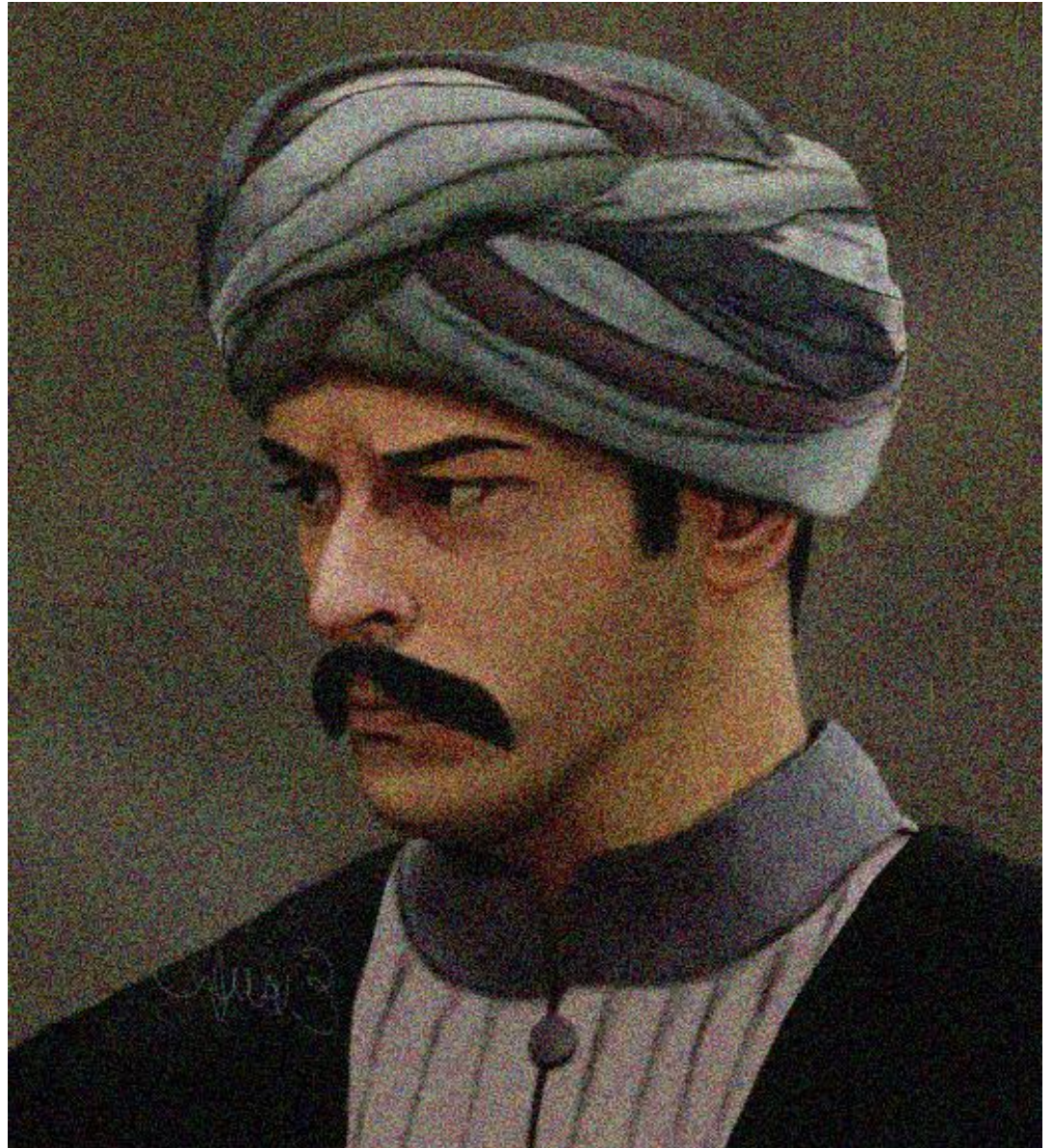
"Therefore, this is what I propose. You and your companion may take the time you need to satisfy your yearnings for travel.

"You will bring all that is necessary with you to keep a written record of everything you see.

"But, my son, you will travel with a caravan at my expense. This caravan will include many armed men to keep you and your companion safe so you will return to me and your mother in time."

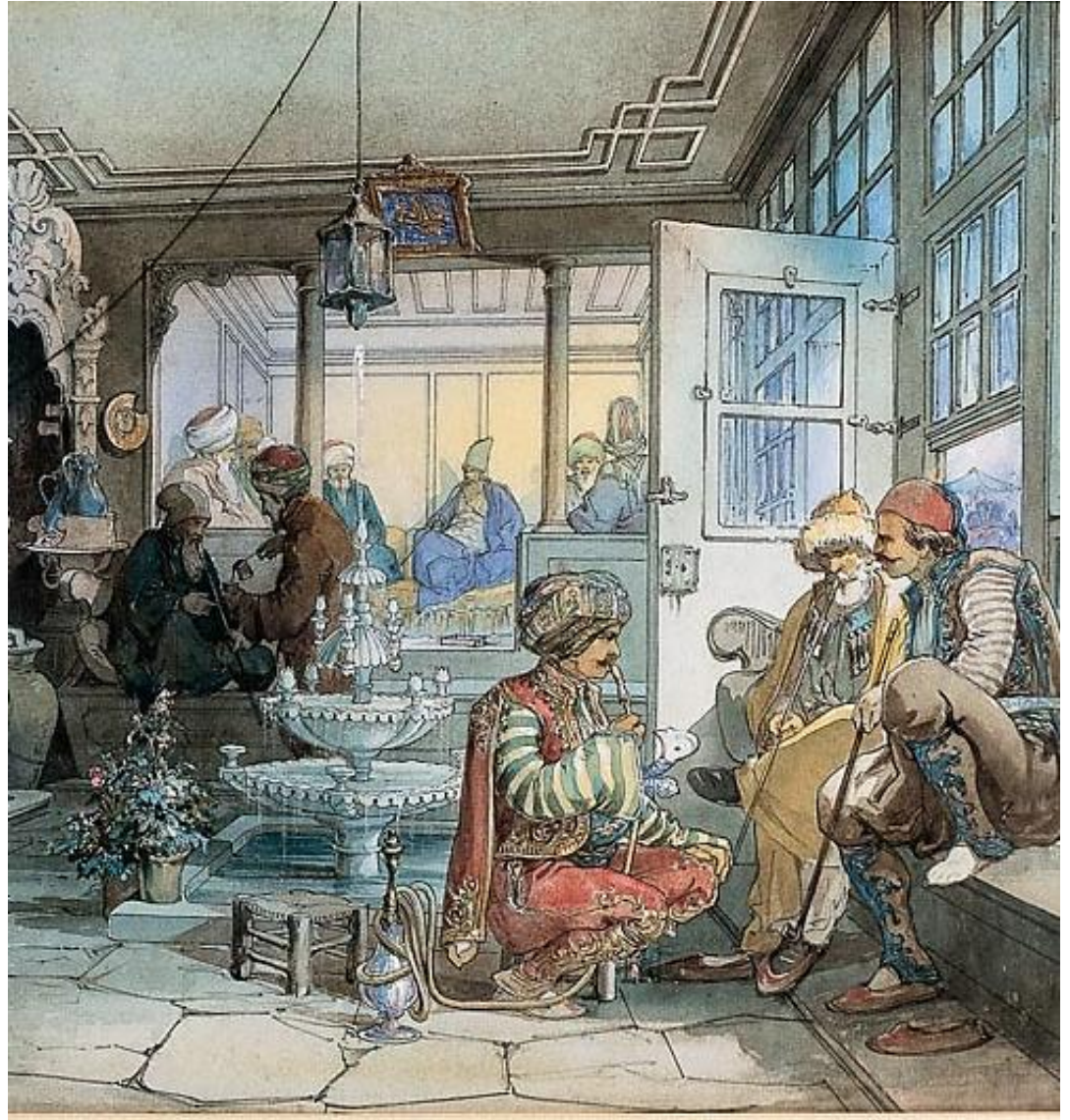


Yusuf tried to keep from crying as he listened to the offer his father had made. What a wonderful and kind man his father was!



And so Yusuf and Nadeem set out on a journey of a lifetime. On the way, Yusuf wrote account after account of his travels before returning home to become a *kadi*.

And for years to come, the travelogues of Yusuf and Nadeem were read aloud at coffee shops all over the Ottoman Empire.



The end

Let's talk!!!